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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

BELONGING IN THE BORDERLANDS: QUESTIONING CATHOLIC ETHICS

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN THEOLOGY

BY

MOLLY GREENING

CHICAGO, IL

MAY 2023

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It seems to me that my acknowledgements page is intimately connected with my dissertation project, since social connections have made this project possible. One of the big images that I look to in my dissertation for creating more dynamic forms of belonging is Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of *el árbol de la vida*, the tree of life: we have to know our histories, with all of their shadowy complexity. Then, we can graft different branches to our root stock, by building connections with people (and animals, and land, I might add) by sharing our stories, a process that transforms our own sense of who we are, and who we are responsible to, particularly as we find connection across experiences of wounding. These branches reach toward the sky, creating a multiplicity of spiritual worldviews that are rooted in transforming structures of oppression. Many listed here have transformed me with your own stories and life experiences; I would not be me without you all. While I will surely forget some, I will try and honor the connections that have brought me to where I am today.

This project would not have been possible without the immense institutional support I have received at Loyola University Chicago. Receiving scholarships, travel funds, and the Crown Fellowship gave me the financial opportunities to expand the scope of my research, and for this I am grateful to the Theology Department and the Graduate School. Joanne Brandstrader's care and attention to detail saved me more times than I can count, and her humor, presence, check-ins, and delicious treats buoyed me through the most difficult times in this process. Librarian Jane Currie's thoroughness was only matched by her kindness.

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This dissertation project was written in Skokie, Illinois, which is located on the ancestral homelands of the Council of the Three Fires: the Ojibwe, Potawatomi, and Odawa. Relationships with community members organizing with the Indigenous Peoples' Day Coalition taught me about the long legacy of Indigenous-led initiatives in the Chicagoland area working toward decolonization. Thanks to Les Begay, Aaron Golding, Jan Berkson, and Sarah Dennis. Relationships with the land, particularly the trees and the wildflowers close to where I live, continued to ground me throughout this process, with reminders to stand tall, tend to networks of care in visible and invisible ways, and follow the flow of cyclical change.

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## PREFACE

### LOCALIZING COLONIALITY

We need you to own the fact that you looked upon us as less than human, that you stole our lands, our personhood, our self-respect. We need you to make public restitution: to say that, to compensate for your own sense of defectiveness, you strive for power over us, you erase our history and our experience because it makes you feel guilty—you'd rather forget your brutish acts. To say you've split yourself from minority groups, that you disown us, that your dual consciousness splits off parts of yourself, transferring the "negative" parts onto us. (where there is persecution of minorities, there is shadow projection. Where there is violence and war, there is repression of shadow.) To say that you are afraid of us, that to put distance between us, you wear the mask of contempt. Admit that Mexico is your double, that she exists in the shadow of this country, that we are irrevocably tied to her. Gringo, accept the doppelganger in your psyche. By taking back your collective shadow the intra-cultural split will heal. –Gloria Anzaldúa<sup>1</sup>

Fear is called for by crossing, because there is an impending sense of loss: loss of competence and loss of a clear sense of oneself and one's relations to others. A playful attitude is a good companion to fear; it keeps one focused on the crossing, on the process of metamorphosis. –María Lugones<sup>2</sup>

This dissertation is just one of many attempts to take up Anzaldúa's call to confront the doppelganger in my own psyche, to grapple with the shadows of racism, religion, and gender, of attempting to heal a split where I am at times the perpetrator, at times survivor, at times bystander of colonial violence. For me, it has meant embracing disorientation, giving up on a sense of expertise during an academic exercise built on the concept of mastery. When Raoul Peck narrated the first part of his documentary about colonialism, *Exterminate All the Brutes*, he

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<sup>1</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 4th edition (San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 2012), 107–8.

<sup>2</sup> María Lugones, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition Against Multiple Oppressions* (Lanham, Md, 2003), 27.

reflected on the ways that he could not be neutral like he usually tried to be with his other films. “You learn to avoid becoming the subject of your film. It's not about you. Unless the story is bigger than you. In that case, you go for broke. Neutrality is not an option.”<sup>3</sup> Narrating my own family history by layering the lenses of race, sex, gender, nation, and Christian religion is anything but neutral. I inherited many beautiful things from my ancestors; their strength, resiliency, humor, and practicality shine through me in ways big and small. But there is also a shadow side to this history less frequently discussed.

I, like you, am living amidst the coloniality of power. My life has been forged in its teeth; my bones, grown from its free trade agreements and migration policies. My lineage, shaped by its wars; defined by an entire system of organization of national borders, family, sexuality, self. My Hungarian and Irish ancestors took on the mantle of whiteness, let go of their languages, their foods, their families. The men received subsidized housing, education, flags, a sense of belonging. The women were continuously let down by men, kept in their “rightful” place below men, even when the men were absent from their God-given right to rule. None of it was natural, inevitable. None of it was easy. They risked their lives, worked to the point of destroying their bodies, coping with crippling addiction, mental health catastrophes just around the corner. But this parallel life, lived on stolen land, built on the backs of enslaved people, congealed in the American “melting pot”; my ancestors have given me the task of seeing what they bleached out of their own consciousness.

Why did they “blank out”? Some of them did it to justify the destruction of current day Michigan—the chopping of trees, the mining of coal, the profits of land exploitation. Some of

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<sup>3</sup> Raoul Peck, “The Disturbing Confidence of Ignorance,” *Exterminate All the Brutes* (HBO Documentary Films, 2021), 34:16.

them were too close to the edges of poverty, barely making ends meet with the railroad job, the milk delivery, the hardware store. Some of them learned to keep their head down, especially when gender roles of the nuclear family were transgressed: shot gun wedding, married to an alcoholic, sudden death—now a single mother. They probably were told it was God’s will. “He never gives us more than we can handle.” And yet the history in this country, not the dates and the numbers and the battlegrounds from the textbooks, but the living impacts on all our bodies; somewhere, the conditions that created white consciousness made the implications of this reality too much to address.

Nelson Maldonado-Torres called colonialism an ‘anti-ethical system.’<sup>4</sup> This was due to the ways that it structured people hierarchically based on the fiction of race into social structures of violence and exploitation. How, then, can we ethically address these impacts? And what kind of ethical obligations do we have, especially those of us forged within the colonial matrix of power, i.e every single one of us, to confront this unjust system of power? Foucault claims that “a nexus of knowledge-power has to be described so that we can grasp what constitutes the acceptability of a system.”<sup>5</sup> How did coloniality come to be acceptable for my ancestors? What did it take to stomach such a system?

I will never forget when I came home to the wealthy segregated suburbs of Chicago from living in Costa Rica when I was 18; how I perceived, for the first time, a white world unflinching in its self-proclaimed superiority. It was my childhood house; it was the erasure of Spanish-speaking people, a devouring sense of non-existence, or of ignorance, or of outright hatred. How

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<sup>4</sup> Nelson Madlonado-Torres. *Against War: Views from the Underside of Modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 100, <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/69922>.

<sup>5</sup> Michel Foucault and Sylvère Lotringer, *The Politics of Truth* (Semiotext(e), 1997), 52–53.

did I not perceive it before? How did I not see the people who *could* see it, who always knew? How did my loved ones not understand? I screamed across the kitchen table at a friend, studying political science in a liberal arts university, who nonchalantly defended the necessity of US brutality to maintain a high consumption lifestyle. How can someone perceive it, *and* justify it? It's a question that continues to haunt me while I live within its mechanics.

I am trying to weave together my life experiences with theory, reframe what was fed to me as globalization and modernity within the lens of racism, religion, and gender norms, put my own "history through a sieve," as Anzaldúa would say. In many ways, this dissertation is original, in that, as my friend Neela Saxena said during one of our phone conversations, it brings me back to my *origin*. But the way that we determine what our origin is comes with a negotiation of history, spirituality, and how we define ourselves, our communities, our species, our non-human animal counterparts, and our planet.

I bring these experiences into conversation with all the different ways I have tried to be Catholic but felt as if this box overflowed with so much more. The Catholic educator, the Catholic anarchist, the Catholic Tantric, the Catholic queer: if that sounds like an identity crisis, it has been. However, the fruits of such an initially self-centered question revealed the stronghold of certain ideas and frameworks. My ancestors fought to be included within the purview of the current-day structures, and the mechanisms of control, both externally and internally, that maintain definitions of properness, of property.

Gloria Anzaldúa says that the best way to show deep engagement with a text is to have a conversation *with* it, not about it. When I first read Anzaldúa's work as a master's student in the dual degree program of Women's Studies/Gender Studies and theology, I felt as if I could suddenly see a way of someone speaking themselves beyond the clean-cut categories, naming the

razor of wounding that came along with these enforced straight lines. She integrated land, body, and spirit, speaking a new language. I wanted to speak a new language; but when I would open my mouth, it seemed like all I had was my guilt, my insecurity. Would I have even be able to hear a more complex story, a story that my grandmothers were whispering in my ear? I am still listening, looking for a fuller picture of what has been, of what can possibly be.

Grafting through stories means digging deep into the raíces, the roots, and knowing our histories that do not align with the dominant narrative of “white right” rationality. It means taking the time to know each other’s stories, to develop connections through our wounds, sliced by many different blades, or even inflicted through the same encounter. It means opening ourselves to the subhuman and superhuman aspects of life, striving for adaptability and the ability to shift across different planes of consciousness, moving away from the transcendental escapism that denies body, denies life, denies our responsibility to each other. I regraft to my own roots, recover a deep connection with ground and body while sifting through the shadows that accompany both.

Moving away from thinking of ethics as just a theory of action, narrative ethics can bring the ways that we tell stories about ourselves and to each other into analysis of how certain patterns place some lives above others. Narrative ethics can provide another lens for understanding how writing and storytelling shape our current reality. Ultimately, questioning these stories must lead to another mode of interaction amongst what have been neatly categorized into boxes of differing religious traditions. Alternate modes of belonging are needed as we shift the mechanisms that have produced such fragmented senses of identity.

I write at a Catholic University, one that prides itself on its social justice values and care for the whole person. Remembering the role that Catholic academic institutions have played in



simultaneously challenging *and* justifying constellations of power in favor of Eurocentrism and capital should not be taken lightly. If colonialism is a structure, not an event, then the Christian academic institution has a role to account for the current structures of racism, gender discrimination, and Christian supremacy.

Bettina Love quoted an African proverb at Loyola University Chicago's 2022 graduation: the hands that make mistakes belong to the ones who work. No doubt, there is much that I still do not understand. I will continue to shift and grow; for now, I find integrity in a commitment to work toward transformation of these structures. If I can help create more spaces for the possibility of healing, even in the smallest ways, then the struggles of doing this work will have been worthwhile.

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## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Ednamar de Oliveira Viana leading the tree planting ceremony in the Vatican Gardens while Pope Francis and Catholic Cardinals sit behind her. Three statues can be seen, all similarly depicting a pregnant Indigenous woman though differing in size and position.

Figure 2. From the 1611 Arenas dictionary, a hieroglyphic for the Náhuatl term "nepantla," comprised of the syllables for a female doll (pictured below, syllable ne), flag (pictured middle, syllable pan), and teeth (pictured above, syllable tla).

## ABSTRACT

If colonialism is a *structure*, not an event, then special attention must be paid to the past as well as the legacies of colonial domination that continue into the present. While Pope Francis has recently called for “overcoming colonizing mentalities” through the lens of what he calls “integral ecology,” crucial aspects of the colonial paradigm remain neglected or underexamined in this approach: sexuality, gender, and the negotiation of religious difference. After reviewing the theological-ethical negotiations that occurred at the beginning of colonization of the Americas, this dissertation proposes a narrative ethical model of reflection that brings Catholic ethics into conversation with the work of queer Chicana feminist author Gloria Anzaldúa. Known for her writings about the physical, sexual, psychological, and spiritual borderlands and the “nepantleras,” or border-crossers, who shift amongst these multiple social (and even metaphysical) planes, Anzaldúa offers decolonizing narratives of personal and collective identity formation that tend to the wounds of continued colonial structures. With particular focus given to the current controversies that arose through the Amazonian Synod in 2019, the role 16<sup>th</sup> century Catholic theologian Francisco de Vitoria played in negotiating the ethics of emergent political, economic, and theological structures, and Anzaldúa’s most potent theoretical contributions, the dissertation concludes with a narrative ethical reflection on alternate ways of conceptualizing belonging within the context of coloniality.

## INTRODUCTION

What is belonging? Its etymology shows that the term comes from Old English: *gelang*, which means at hand, together with, gives us a tangible inroad to a form of embodied relating. But the word belonging can be used in many ways. It can be used to define spatial location. This belongs right here. It can be used to connote correct classification or identification. This one belongs with the others that are just like it. It can be used to talk about fitting in, whether that be with a certain environment or certain social grouping. Belonging can hold the connotation of being a member of a community, an organization, a family, a country, a political movement. I belong with them. It can hold the implication of ownership as well, of being someone's property, of possession of something. This belongs to me.

Belonging hits on many different questions that I find relevant for understanding the context of coloniality: what is your spatial location? What is your connection with your environment? How are we classifying people, identifying each other, and how do we classify and identify ourselves? What kind of personal, social, and political imagination are we using when we make such distinctions about ourselves and others? How do you envision your community? What factors have shaped your notions of property, ownership, and responsibility? These questions can all be answered under the heading of belonging.

If the politics of belonging is the “dirty work of boundary maintenance,” then I am trying to trace the ways that Catholic theology participated in the carving up of differences between certain people. I am also searching for spiritual transformation of these colonial wounds,

alternative models of relating to ourselves, each other, non-human animals, and the land. The following chapters are a combination of historical accounting, critical reflection, and constructive reimagination with concepts of belonging forged within the context of coloniality: notions of sex, gender, religion, and race will get special attention throughout this dissertation. However, this project pays particular note to complexities that challenge easy identity distinctions. Where do the defining categories of sex, gender, race, and religion become blurred, and how does that site of in-betweenness offer insights into decolonization? Challenging the neat distinctions of either/or binaries reveal the ways that these social constructions become naturalized.

In her unfinished dissertation, Anzaldúa not only defines the spiritual *as* a sense of belonging, but also confronts the taboo nature of talking about religion and spirituality in feminist spaces. She calls for solidarity across religious traditions towards concrete action for global justice:

[T]he spiritual is a deep sense of belonging and participation in life...made to feel embarrassed for using a spiritual vocabulary, we bear the negative connotations it carries. Academics disqualify spirituality except as anthropological studies done by outsiders, and spirituality is a turn-off for those exposed to so-called New Agers' use of flaky language and Pollyanna-like sentiments disconnected from the grounded realities of people's lives and struggles. And no wonder. Most contemporary spiritual practitioners in this country ignore the political implications and do not concern themselves with our biggest problem and challenge: racism and other racial abuses. They're not concerned with violence against children and women, with poverty and attacks on nature. I describe the activist stance that explores spirituality's social implications as 'spiritual activism'—an activism that is engaged by a diverse group of people with different spiritual practices, or spiritual *mestizaje*.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark = Luz En Lo Oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality*, ed. AnaLouise Keating, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).

My project aims to facilitate conversations across boundary lines that separate academic disciplines from each other, separates political action from the work of the academy, separates activists with similar goals but different approaches, and separates human beings from this deep spiritual yearning for belonging.

This dissertation outlines multiple different ethical frameworks for approaching coloniality, multiplicity, and belonging. How can we gather insights for transforming the wounds of colonial violence through different understandings of belonging? What tools do we have for challenging ways of knowing that uphold the structures of coloniality? And which methods of doing ethics and theology can aid in these necessary transformations? Chapter One specifically looks to queer decolonial feminists and their theoretical interventions on the concept of belonging for confronting the wounds of colonization that's impacts still can be seen up till today. Thinking along with these theorists, I ask how belonging shifts the focus away from identity categories toward the social systems that constitute identities, often in hierarchical and oppositional ways that leave questions of inside/outside inescapable.

Chapter Two looks at the case study of the Amazon Synod for the institutional Roman Catholic Church's attempt at decolonization through solidarity, enculturation, and dialogue. However, reading these frameworks alongside queer decolonial feminist thinkers shows how the Roman Catholic Church is lacking in its intersectional analysis while still leaving the impacts of colonization on sex, gender, race, and sexuality undertheorized. Chapter Three returns to the 1500's with a close reading of Vitoria's proto-cosmopolitan ethical framework undergirded by natural law. This chapter tells a more complex and particularized story of Church resistance to *and* maintenance of colonial power without losing sight of the fundamental ways that Christian theology was used to undergird and justify the pillars of coloniality—what our decolonial



theorists have coined as the conditions of coloniality that uphold structures that define current structures of modernity— private property, state sovereignty, endless war, and capitalist patterns of production. Though natural law theories have been lauded for their flexibility and openness to many different modes of human flourishing, ultimately, this scholastic, early modern natural law framework proved to be incapable of handling a multiplicity of cosmovisions.

Chapter Four shifts the focus toward alternate modes of relating, subjecthood, and negotiating multiplicity through Gloria Anzaldúa’s theorizing of the borderlands. By transmuting the pain of oppression into sensitivity for cultivating new forms of knowing, Anzaldúa’s writing re-narrates colonial histories, forges creative connections across multiple sites of difference, and holds space for shifting amongst multiple realities and worldviews without losing sight of the ethical obligation to not repeat the colonial patterns of extraction, genocide, violence. Chapter Five goes deeper into practical considerations for doing ethics in the spaces in between that Anzaldúa describes as *nepantla*, with attention to holding the paradox of belonging and alienation together while starting ethical reflection from the wound.

In looking at the ways that Black religious experiences of multiple religious belonging are not sufficiently considered when talking about US-based religious pluralism, Monica Coleman mentioned Anzaldúa’s work as an example of popular writing that engages multiple religious traditions with the main focus being on migration and gender. Though Coleman claimed that Anzaldúa made “no attempt to theorize about religious truth claims,”<sup>2</sup> I think she

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<sup>2</sup> Monica A. Coleman, “Teaching African American Religious Pluralism,” in *Critical Perspectives on Interreligious Education: Experiments in Empathy*, ed. Najeeba Syeed and Heidi Hadsell, Currents of Encounter (Brill, 2020), 13–32.

did make important theoretical contributions for the exact moments when truth claims come into contact with each other.

I recognize that my focus on just Vitoria and Pope Francis skims over the breadth of the Roman Catholic theological ethical tradition. Critiques of neo-scholastic uses of the natural law are not new, and feminist and queer theologians have revised the natural law tradition and critiqued deductive approaches. For example, Cristina Traina points toward the flexibility of the natural law method for inductive reasoning. Taking history and experience into account, she also highlights the need for cultivating sensitivity and responsiveness for moral reasoning and the more affirming stances of Aquinas for embodiment.<sup>3</sup> Craig Ford has claimed that no one has sole control over natural law theory, and that it can be read in affirming ways for queer desire and racial justice. These contributions are important, but my project is specifically concerned with attending to the wounds of monological belonging created by the institutional Catholic Church through the *deployment* of natural law frameworks within contexts of coloniality.

Though Anzaldúa critiqued Christian views of women and the body, she also repurposed and reinterpreted many Christian symbols in her writings. Anzaldúa's work has also been very influential for Latina feminist theologies. Maria Pilar Aquino said that every theologian must follow these five "preconditions" greatly influenced by Anzaldúan methods: "entering *Nepantla*, fostering *la facultad*, *honesty* with the real, *empapamiento* of hope, and an *evolving* truth."<sup>4</sup> Robyn Henderson-Espinoza claimed that "Anzaldúa's work is a new form of feminist

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<sup>3</sup> Cristina L. H. Traina, *Feminist Ethics and Natural Law: The End of the Anathemas* (Washington, D.C, 1999).

<sup>4</sup> María Pilar Aquino, Daisy L. Machado, and Jeanette Rodríguez, *A Reader in Latina Feminist Theology: Religion and Justice* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 149.

theologising that stems from a radical commitment to interconnectedness and relationality.”<sup>5</sup>

Henderson-Espinoza called upon feminist theologians to take up the ways that Anzaldúa centered bodily materiality, how material relationships shaped the ways we know, and foregrounded a call to action that began with the self but continuously moved toward others.

Teresa Delgado used Anzaldúa’s borderlands theory while constructing a specifically Puerto Rican decolonial theology.<sup>6</sup> My interest in Anzaldúa’s work is in the ways that her methodology is feminist, queer, political, and spiritual, blurring the boundaries constructed amongst different religious traditions.

I write for people who have been formed and shaped in some way by Catholic religious beliefs and traditions but are struggling with the ways that the Catholic Church has been antithetical to the flourishing of women, people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, transgender, intersex, Two Spirit, people who are survivors of sexual violence, and people who have experienced colonization as inextricably linked with Catholicism. My work wants to honor those who have embraced the Catholic tradition, as well as those who have rejected Catholicism in the name of their own healing. But I especially want to create space for critical thinking and exploration for those of us who may find ourselves in a space of neither full rejection nor full acceptance of what we have inherited within this one stream of Christian practice. How can we honor those influences and experiences that have shaped who we are, while also sifting through our mixed inheritance of spiritual gifts and spiritual baggage?

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<sup>5</sup> Robyn Henderson-Espinoza, “Gloria Anzaldúa’s El Mundo Zurdo: Exploring a Relational Feminist Theology of Interconnectedness,” *Journal for the Study of Religion* 26, no. 2 (2013): 107.

<sup>6</sup> Teresa Delgado, *A Puerto Rican Decolonial Theology: Prophecy Freedom, New Approaches to Religion and Power* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 172.

There have been many critiques of this process of picking and choosing, both within the Catholic tradition, as well as toward the people who call themselves “spiritual but not religious.” Some have feared that this shift away from institutionalized religion will lead to a surface level, consumerist new-Age hodge podge of superficial picking and choosing. Even the term “cafeteria Catholic” comes to mind with these questions, an insult I heard frequently growing up that implied that someone who picks aspects but does not follow every single teaching of the Magisterium is not *really* able to identify as a true Roman Catholic. Singularity and purity, in commitment and in adherence to one particular tradition, are often structuring the popular conception of being “religious.” My hope is that Anzaldúa’s theories will contribute to reconceiving of an ethics of belonging that can attend to the radicality of spaces of in-betweenness; the borderlands where alienation and belonging touch.

## CHAPTER ONE

### CONTEXTS AND CONCEPTS OF BELONGING

#### **Vignette: JeeYeun Lee, Colonized Colonizer**

In October of 2019, JeeYeun Lee stood at the mouth of the Chicago River in the rain. Wearing a traditional Korean dress made of denim, Lee walked over 100 miles in Chicago. She traced her footsteps along paths that were first established for trade and travel by Indigenous people, witnessing to the landmarks and historical fault lines of race and class segregation throughout the greater Chicago area. A fiber artist and ethnic studies academic by training, Lee wears this outfit to symbolize her social location as Korean, American, immigrant, woman, and settler. While her family left Korea to escape colonization, now Lee reflects on the ways that she is a part of the colonizing project of the United States: as a colonized colonizer, Lee looks to materialize decolonization, moving it from a metaphor to an embodied practice.<sup>1</sup>

Lee's walk makes concrete the sites and negotiations that began over a century ago that separate people based on class, skin color, and citizenship within the settler formation of the United States, and specifically in the state of Illinois in 1818. After Lee's countless hours of archival research, this walking remembrance traced the paths of forced removal of Potawatomi due to coercive land treaties in 1833. The ghosts of confederate soldiers from the Civil War wander amongst apartment complexes in all-Black neighborhoods near Oak Woods cemetery in Hyde Park. Redlining, restrictive covenants, access (or lack thereof) to transportation, housing,

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<sup>1</sup> JeeYeun Lee, "100 Miles in Chicagoland," JeeYeun Lee, 2019, <https://www.jeeyeunlee.com/100-miles>.

and development continue to make Chicago one of the most racially segregated cities in the United States. According to Lee, “all the mechanisms possible have been used here in Chicago to confine movement, deny dignity, limit possibilities.”<sup>2</sup> With each step, Lee calls for a remembering of histories that mingle with tourist sites, shopping centers, highways, and high rises. She draws attention to the forgotten (or at least ignored) landmarks that mark places where the land holds overlapping memories from multiple generations.

Far from telling only histories of oppression, Lee also narrates historical moments of resistance, even reenacting aspects of previous struggles. In October of 2021, Native artists, academics, and activists collaborated with non-Native allies under the name Whose Lakefront. They used red sand to draw a thick line demarcating the original shoreline of Lake Michigan, almost coinciding with current day Michigan Avenue. After the Chicago Fire of 1871, the massive amounts of debris and rubble dumped into the lake created landfill, extending the shoreline and creating shopping districts, parks, and the sites of current Chicago landmarks like Lakeshore Drive, Navy Pier, and Soldier Field. The historic site of the Chicago World’s Fair, and now the site of many museums and parks, is also located on this stretch of landfill as well. In 1914, the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi sued the city of Chicago, saying that, though they ceded land to the lakeshore, the landfill that was created and currently being used for such economic profit was never ceded and should be returned or at least economically recompensated.<sup>3</sup> Over 100 years later, a multiracial and multigenerational coalition paraded along this line made of sand, remembering while embodying a history of resistance.

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<sup>2</sup> Lee, “100 Miles.”

<sup>3</sup> JeeYeun Lee, “Home,” Whose Lakefront, 2021, <https://www.whoselakefront.com>.

This dissertation is particularly interested in how Catholic theological ethics would shift if understandings of belonging changed. I locate this ethical reflection on belonging within the context of colonization. JeeYeun Lee gives us an example of the legacies of continuous material fragmentation in the city of Chicago. She shows how concrete policies impacting immigration, citizenship, housing, and property ownership have constructed communities of belonging in damaging ways. If ethics is the critical reflection on values, practices, and norms that guide moral decision-making for individuals and institutional structures, then it is crucial for locally situated ethical reflection to account for the violence of colonial domination, the hoarding of material wealth, and the strategic erasure of histories that challenge the inevitability of current conditions. This is especially the case if such practices stem from the individual, social, and political categorizations of insider/outsider, us/them, or the dichotomies of inclusion and exclusion: in short, negotiations of belonging.

Lee shows the possibility of re-narrating site-specific histories of colonization and building diverse activist coalitions as a response. I frequently draw examples from coalitional activists to reimagine these forms of belonging. I do this because coalitional activism mobilize people who are very different to act together. I also do this to challenge the distinction between theorists and activists, or the caricature of two separate camps where there are those who think and those who act. Centering movement-based approaches show how activists already participate in critical reflection and must continue to do so. It also encourages theorists to acknowledge how they are already acting in the political sphere, even if they claim an apolitical stance. Inaction is political, as well.

I am inspired by a broad group of theorists/activists who describe themselves under a variety of headings, including US Third World Women of Color feminisms, transnational

feminisms, Native feminisms, Black feminisms, decolonial feminisms, and queer decolonial feminisms, among others. I have learned from these scholars ways to speak critically about structures of violence such as racism, militarism, and capitalism while still existing within them. Through listening to their histories, they also gave me an invitation to understand my own. By naming the violence of exclusion and assimilation in their own lives, they led me to interrogate how my own sense of belonging was forged upon the lives of many others, forcing me to wake up from my own numbed sensitivities. It is especially relevant for this project that some of them framed this process of unlearning and transformation—for those who perceive themselves as colonized, colonizer, or both—in spiritual terms.

Theological ethics can give space for questioning the spiritual dimensions of belonging; however, the question of *who* can participate in theological ethical reflection brings us back to complex questions of belonging. These themes will continue to weave throughout the following chapters. What follows is an initial overview of the contexts and concepts of belonging, with particular attention given to feminist theories that engage colonialism's legacy from the past that plays out in the present. Lee's art and *Whose Lakefront* demonstrate one way of historicizing the material divisions that have been naturalized, normalized, and buried in my own context. M. Jacqui Alexander brings a spiritual dimension into questions of colonization, belonging, and coalition building.

### **Fragmentation, Colonization, and the Yearning to Belong**

Since 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, a yearning that is both material and existential, both psychic and physical, and which, when satisfied, can subvert and ultimately displace the pain of dismemberment...Indeed, we would not have come to the various political movements in which we have been engaged, with the intense passion we have, had it not been for this yearning. With the help of Bernice Johnson Reagon, we



recognized this yearning as a desire to reproduce home in “coalitions.” As a consequence, our political movements were being made to bear too much—too much of a longing for sameness as home. . . . But we need to wrestle with that desire for home a bit longer, so as to examine a bit more closely the source of that yearning that we wanted to embed in the very metaphysics of political struggle, the very metaphysics of life.<sup>4</sup>

In the passage above, Alexander questions if we have taken enough time to reflect and honor the spiritual aspects of political struggle. Within Alexander’s description of belonging, there is a deep *longing*, a desire for wholeness, a yearning to mend what colonization has fragmented in our bodies, minds, and spirits. In Alexander’s experience, political coalitions that are forged across multiple different groups and stakeholders cannot hold the weight of this desire for wholeness that is at once personal, political, and spiritual.<sup>5</sup> When a desire for belonging becomes expressed as a desire for *sameness*, coalitional politics cannot sustain the very spark that drew people toward political struggles in the first place. If we stay with the spiritual aspect of coalition building, what she identifies as this yearning for belonging, Alexander wonders what may change about approaches to political organizing.

How would Catholic ethics and theology shift if understandings of belonging changed from a focus on sameness toward a continually unfolding relationality that longs for, yet never finally arrives at, wholeness? How can an exploration of the concept of belonging aid in transforming the historical and continuing power structures that physically, sexually, psychologically, and spiritually fracture? Alexander’s work urges feminist and queer studies to engage transnational frameworks that highlight the impacts of colonialism, racial formation, and

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<sup>4</sup> M. Jacqui. Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred*, Perverse Modernities (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 281.

<sup>5</sup> For more creative explorations of the implications of Alexander’s work, see Alexis Pauline Gumbs, *M Archive: After the End of the World* (Duke University Press, 2018).

political economies. According to Alexander, without critiquing the impacts of colonialism, racism, and political-economic influences, feminists and queer theorists' critiques would fall short: they would miss the mutual influences of coloniality that also impact sexism, binary gender norms, male dominance, or the combination of these, "heteropatriarchy," especially in the legal frameworks of the United States. My work asks Catholic ethics to engage these transnational frameworks through a queer feminist lens, particularly focusing on how notions of belonging have been impacted by colonialism, racial formation, political economies, and heteropatriarchy.

But Alexander is not only a Black queer transnational feminist scholar; she is also a priestess of the Orisha/Ifá tradition. The personal, political, and spiritual, in Alexander's view, are inextricably interconnected. She names the painful legacies of colonization as material, but she adds that the pain of colonization is also psychic, and even metaphysical. Alexander uses the very visceral and embodied word dismemberment, language that I will explore further in chapter four with Gloria Anzaldúa's description of transforming colonial trauma. Important to both of Alexander's and Anzaldúa's uses of the term is how people carry this multi-faceted dismemberment in their bodies, and how it leaves one yearning for some sense of 'home' in our personal, political, and spiritual lives.

Making sense of this yearning for a sense of belonging amid the material, psychological, and spiritual effects of fragmentation is a crucial aim motivating this dissertation. In this chapter, I highlight some theoretical concepts of belonging and contextualize the overlap of militarism, racism, and heteropatriarchy for policing simplistic notions of belonging in a globalized world. I then show how the concept of belonging offers avenues for challenging simplistic forms of belonging by reviewing formative feminist, queer, and decolonial thinkers for this project. I then

engage prominent queer, Catholic, feminist authors who have redefined belonging in the face of clerical, racial, gendered, and sexual exclusion, ending with a review of trends in religious affiliation that point toward the need for more complex understandings of belonging.

### **Concepts of Belonging**

Whenever we talk about boundaries or borders that determine some people as insiders and others as outsiders, we enter a conversation about belonging. Belonging is contested, negotiated, and established across personal, social, and political levels. As with any analytical framework that conceptually distinguishes, these levels frequently cannot be neatly separated: individuals make up communities and communities act politically. Institutions are made up of individuals situated within social groups. Often, even *within* established groupings of belonging, there is tension, contradiction, and continuous negotiation. Though the categorizations of this analysis overlap, clarity can come from examining each facet, followed by analysis of the ways that the categories influence each other. Belonging especially is caught in the interplay amongst individuals, communities, and institutions.

Nira Yuval-Davis claims that it is helpful to distinguish different facets of belonging because the term can hold many different meanings, even within the three levels of the personal, communal, and political. For example, belonging can be about *how people identify* and how their *feelings establish emotional attachments*, whether those attachments be to other individuals, communities, the land, or ideals (to only name a few possible sites).<sup>6</sup> Belonging can be personal and affective. These feelings can be narrated and shared by someone as defining their identity.

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<sup>6</sup> Nira Yuval-Davis, "Belonging and the Politics of Belonging," *Patterns of Prejudice* 40, no. 3 (2006): 197–214. 202-203.

Attachments to myriad people, places, ideas, and things impact one's personal sense of self and their emotional connections.

Belonging can also be based on one's *social location*. Yuval-Davis makes the point that even though social location can impact how someone identifies themselves, social location and identity cannot be assumed to be the same.<sup>7</sup> The factors of social location are always multiple; identities are negotiated personally and communally amongst these factors. Identity can be both personally chosen and communally bestowed. These factors can be cultural, financial, ethnic, gendered, sexual, racial, political, religious, among many other things. Some of these categories can be more fluid than others, but all of them are subject to shifts—in personal perception as well as communal perception.

Finally, belonging is connected to *political systems and values* that determine how individuals, communities, and institutions *judge who is perceived as within a particular group, and who is perceived as an outsider*.<sup>8</sup> Yuval-Davis has focused much of her work on this third aspect of belonging regarding the political, emphasizing how war, gender, class, race, and sexuality influence the ways that nation-building constructs its citizens.

Kimberlé Crenshaw's work on intersectionality is connected to belonging on this political level. Her example of Black women facing racialized gender discrimination at work highlights how legal definitions that determine group belonging oversimplify the separateness of differing aspects of identity. People with multiple oppressed identities become particularly vulnerable

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<sup>7</sup> Yuval-Davis, "Belonging and the Politics of Belonging," 199-202.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 203-205.

within the legal system: laws against racist discrimination could not account for gendered racial harm; laws against gender discrimination could not account for racialized sexism.

Crenshaw is adamant that intersectionality is a theory that necessarily emphasizes how oppression is often compounded for people with multiple oppressed identities. Yuval-Davis thinks the term can address *any* multiple modes of identity, even if they include identities that hold more power. I follow Crenshaw's use of the term over Yuval-Davis's, though I think that the concept of belonging can honor Crenshaw's focus on multiple oppression while accounting for other forms of multiplicity as well.

Crenshaw would not need to invent a term to name the place where race and gender "intersect" if legal concepts of identity did not already assume singular modes of group belonging. For example, while the US Constitution claims equality for all citizens explicitly, certain cases show the implicit racism, sexism, and classism within such definitions. Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality thus shows the ways that identities with more institutional power go unnamed. To extend Crenshaw's example further, white men at the same workplace as the Black women mentioned above *also* hold racialized and gendered identities. Though their social locations can also be multiple, being white and being men do not compound their oppressions; these identities *consolidate* their social power. Other factors, such as the men's immigration status, ability, class, or age, for example, may complicate that status. However, at least some of the particularities of their experiences have been legislated as universally standard, since historically much of US law has been structured for the benefit of people who are also white men. They are less susceptible to being scrutinized as "outside" of a political community of belonging because of these identities.

I think the strength of the concept of belonging is that it can challenge static conceptions of identity and interrogate the mechanisms that conceptualize identity categories as straight lines, whether they be parallel *or* intersecting. Belonging can name the fluidity of these processes while still accounting for the oppression that comes from simplistic identity reductions, as we shall explore later. Yuval-Davis's work rightly underscores the fact that *all* forms of belonging are constantly in flux. Relationships with others, emotions, someone's social location, and political structures and values are situational and continuously changing; when someone claims otherwise, it can be an attempt to naturalize current dynamics that maintain structures of power.<sup>9</sup> This is important to keep in mind, especially regarding definitions of belonging that would claim to be unchanging or uninfluenced by historical circumstance.

Following Benedict Anderson, Yuval-Davis also highlights how belonging (though enacting very real material consequences) is a work of *imagination*. With large categories like national citizenship or global religious institutions, it is quite impossible to know all the people subsumed under an identity that one is claiming. There is an element of creating an *idea* of social cohesion across a broad spectrum of known (and unknown) differing factors. Thus, some degree of imagined in-group status must function for the politics of belonging to even exist, even if that negotiation can be plural and messy.<sup>10</sup> Belonging, therefore, relies to some extent on a negotiation of constructed mental categories that then shape the physical and social world on multiple levels.<sup>11</sup> Anderson claims that this sense of belonging is usually based on shared

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 199.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 204.

<sup>11</sup> For more examples of the ways that politics construct belonging and identity, see Bruce Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society: Comparative Studies of Myth, Ritual, and Classification* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

writings or shared historical memories. Both, interestingly, are forms of narrative. In this sense, narration plays an important role in the construction of belonging.

### **Ethical Implications of the Personal, Communal, and Political Levels of Belonging**

Theoretically, belonging touches on important ethical categories that particularly impact the individual, social, and political notions of belonging. I am influenced by Hille Haker's four spheres of ethical reflection. The conceptual strength of a term like belonging can attend to the interplay of affect, identity, social location, political consideration, history, and narrative, while acknowledging that these factors change over time and within different places.

For Haker, the first sphere reflects on what constitutes an individual's moral identity: what values are guiding their life and informing their individual actions? This sphere is concerned with individually held virtues and how those inform the ways that an individual pursues and defines a good life. The second sphere reflects on the ways that individuals are formed and impacted by communally held norms and values. Whereas the first sphere looks to the individual, the second sphere places an individual within a socially mediated context. The third sphere shifts toward a deontological approach. This approach to deontology focuses on the ways that individuals define norms and values that define *right* action and responsibility as a moral agent, unlike the first sphere that focuses on what is good for the individual agent. The fourth sphere reflects on the responsibilities and actions of institutions that create laws and regulations for communities and individuals. Thus, the impacts of this fourth sphere can either constrict or promote individuals' political participation within such institutions.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Hille Haker, *Towards a Critical Political Ethics: Catholic Ethics and Social Challenges* (Basel: Schwabe Verlagsgruppe AG, 2020), 290.

There are significant ways that identity does matter when addressing ethical questions. Alison Jaggar claims that identity matters for feminist ethics because someone must be a subject *before* they can be considered an agent.<sup>13</sup> Belonging influences the ways that individuals perceive themselves. It impacts how communities shape individuals through communally held norms and practices of care. Belonging can create a social home for individuals to continue to develop within communities of shared value. One can grow a sense of social worth within communal belonging. This could lead to a deeper sense of worth for such communities that can nurture ideals. The influence of this community of belonging doesn't automatically determine one's worldview; however, it can enable individuals to use their agency to navigate these formative social norms critically. If the subject formation of individuals happens within communities, then some may claim that without an initial sense of belonging within a community it would be very difficult for a person to create a personal identity. While an oppositional identity of non-belonging, or even a notion of non-identity is a possibility, this is still established in *reaction* to the bonds of relationship with a particular grouping.

But belonging is not just a question of identity; it is also an important function of *acting*. Belonging is relevant for ethics because it is intimately connected to the ways that we come together as communities capable of acting together. Coalitions of people, working towards shared goals of enacting change, are essential to well-functioning societies. Belonging, in this sense, can sometimes provide the glue for cooperation and practice of individuals coming together to address the needs of the larger community.

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<sup>13</sup> A growing body of scholarship explores the ways that materiality beyond humanity also enacts, and thus is agential. See Stacy Alaimo, Susan Hekman, and Michael Hames-Garcia, eds., *Material Feminisms*, Illustrated edition (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008).



Belonging influences how groups of people perceive themselves and how this perception leads to political action. Institutions create legally binding structures that are impacted by one's membership within a particular group; whether you are considered to belong or not could determine your level of access to opportunities facilitated by such institutions. It also greatly determines your ability to participate in shaping institutional structures. Belonging is important to political institutions because those who belong within a society are either taken into consideration when institutional rules are made or are the ones making the policies.

### Challenges and Opportunities of Non-Belonging

There is significant ethical relevance of this term "belonging" when addressing many different forms of boundary-making practices. A lack of belonging could raise multiple issues for moral agents. Non-belonging, on an individual level, could lead to a denigrated sense of self value and worth. Without communal belonging, an individual may lack a safe place to grow as an ethical agent. This can become difficult for people who belong to multiple communities that have different value structures. Multiple belongings (or multiple non-belongings) complicate the language of a singular community of belonging creating a social home. Being alienated from a community of shared values not only makes self-perception and moral formation difficult: it also may lead to a distrust of others that could make acting together difficult. An outsider status regarding regulations and laws means either being the target of legislation or being erased from consideration. Especially for democratic societies, this also means a lack of participation in defining institutional norms. A lack of belonging can be experienced as exclusion, discrimination, and non-participation; in its most extreme cases, non-belonging can be used by those who do belong to justify genocide, exploitation, slavery, sexual violence, or many other

forms of dehumanization. Oppressive identity projections that devalue one's sense of worth through negative perceptions of belonging must be attended to.

However, non-belonging can come with its own benefits as well. Agency and autonomy can be positive outcomes of non-belonging for an individual. Non-belonging requires criticism of the norms of inclusion. These skills may be developed through consciously choosing to leave or to disidentify with a certain group or developed out of necessity when exclusion is not chosen. While non-belonging can be painful, it is occasionally accompanied with greater freedom from social expectations and obligations to culturally defined norms.

I am not saying that boundaries are inherently bad; creating the boundary lines of belonging can be important for *establishing* individual, communal, or institutional identities. Forming boundaries can be especially important for communities that have experienced marginalization; as Yuval-Davis says above, it is the times when belonging is challenged that it becomes most prominent. Boundaries of belonging can also establish the duties and limits of responsibility for acting. However, boundaries do become dangerous when they rigidify and become absolute.

### Boundaries and Borders

Political belonging depends on the constructions of state borders through force, accompanied by paper documents, legal fees, and rights, but discourses that are emotionally impactful also accompany these concrete mechanisms. According to Bruce Lincoln, instruments of social construction are dependent on force, but also on discourse. Particularly, he weighs the potential of discourse to shift societies based on two criteria: ideological persuasion and

sentiment evocation.<sup>14</sup> Instead of looking toward climate change or economic inequalities, populist movements use discourses to exploit these insecurities by blaming those who get framed as outsiders. Singular notions of belonging are emotionally and ideologically potent. Cultural belonging often hinges on homogeneity, coming from a shared site of communal formation. Western Christian constructions of religious belonging often depend on a notion of singular, unified belief.

While it is common to assert that the 21<sup>st</sup> century is an era of increasing connectivity, it is also an era of destabilization: extreme economic inequalities, forced and voluntary migration, wars, climate change, and intensified demands of a globalized capitalist market. Media sources have described the population in the United States as being amidst a crisis of belonging as political debates rage on about immigration, militarization, racism, sex, and gender. But what would it mean to narrate stories of belonging with attention toward the ways that immigration policy, militarization, racism, and gender influence each other? Important to these debates are the ways that history is told and how we imagine our own communities of belonging. A closer look at what some are calling a crisis of belonging can open new avenues for reimagining it.

Consider, for example, the 2021 surge in U.S. legislation that prohibits teaching about racism, gender diversity, or non-heterosexual sexual orientations in public schools.<sup>15</sup> Many years of scholarship and activism have brought concepts of Critical Race Theory, feminist, LGBTQ2IA+, anticolonial, and antiracist organizing into mainstream media discussions. But foregrounding memories of genocide, exploitation, and violence threatens an ideology of

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<sup>14</sup> Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society*, 8–11.

<sup>15</sup> For more information about the legislation that has been proposed in 17 states in the US as of May 20, 2021, see “#TruthBeTold Campaign,” African American Policy Forum, May 20, 2021, <https://www.aapf.org/truthbetold>.

American exceptionalism. The pushback through this proliferation of legislation shows that current power structures are being challenged, even if the backlash attempts to reentrench what is shifting. After decades of organizing that erupted in an uprising of protests in 2020 against anti-Blackness enforced by police brutality, structural racism continues to be the norm. The year of 2021 also had the highest reported number of homicides of trans people, as well as the most anti-trans legislation proposed.<sup>16</sup> Histories are being told in ways that disrupt the continuity of a narrative of American exceptionalism. As we will see later, though, a view of coloniality from a queer feminist perspective tells another story: a legacy of structural racism and legislation against people who did not conform with a particular set of gender expectations.

If the politics of belonging are, as Adrian Favell says, “the dirty work of boundary maintenance,”<sup>17</sup> then we can observe some mechanisms of boundary maintenance happening in the United States on international, national, and local levels. Chapter four will address how Gloria Anzaldúa theoretically expands national borders into other modes of theorizing sexual psychological, and spiritual boundary negotiation. For now, we can look at the mechanisms of physical bordering as an example of how the politics of belonging intersect with racism, sexism, gender, and economics. Wendy Brown’s work shows how a time of increasing permeability due to global free trade economic structures has precipitated a frenzy of wall building by nation states. Though intended to be a show of national strength, these walls have the opposite effect, proving the weakening of State sovereignty through an almost entirely symbolic architectural

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<sup>16</sup> The rise in numbers of reporting of trans deaths is also partially due to decades of misgendering trans victims—thus, some of the increase in numbers comes with correct gendering and reporting. Orion Rummier and Kate Sosin, “2021 Is Now the Deadliest Year on Record for Transgender People,” PBS NewsHour, November 18, 2021, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/2021-is-now-the-deadliest-year-on-record-for-transgender-people>.

<sup>17</sup> Yuval-Davis, “Belonging and the Politics of Belonging,” 204.

gesture.<sup>18</sup> Hardt and Negri argue that within the conditions of neoliberal capitalism, the global flows of goods and the demands for labor have both broken down boundaries for some while reinforcing boundaries for others.<sup>19</sup>

At the international level, the mechanisms of bordering are reinforced through military occupation and the militarization of national borders. As of 2018, the United States had 138,000 soldiers located internationally at over 800 military bases in 80 countries.<sup>20</sup> In the United States, the 2022 budget for Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) under Joe Biden's administration is 8.4 billion dollars.<sup>21</sup> This 21 million dollar increase from 2021 shows the increasing concerns of monitoring the border. But these numbers align with Lisa Moore and Karma R. Chávez's claim that both Democrats and Republicans have failed to deal with the root causes of migration to the United States: racial capitalism, climate change, and US imperialism.<sup>22</sup> Chávez's coedited book *Queer and Trans Migrants and Migrations* draws attention to the ways that gender and sexuality influence every aspect of migration.<sup>23</sup> This insight highlights not only the almost 112 million migrants and 9.8 million refugees that are women;<sup>24</sup> it also draws

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<sup>18</sup> Wendy Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* (New York: Cambridge, MA: Zone Books, 2010).

<sup>19</sup> Aimee Carrillo Rowe, "Be Longing: Toward a Feminist Politics of Relation," *NWSA Journal* 17, no. 2 (2005): 30.

<sup>20</sup> Alice Slater, "The US Has Military Bases in 80 Countries. All of Them Must Close.," *The Nation*, January 24, 2018, <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/the-us-has-military-bases-in-172-countries-all-of-them-must-close/>.

<sup>21</sup> Department of Homeland Security and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, "Budget Overview," 2022, 7, [https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/u.s.\\_immigration\\_and\\_customs\\_enforcement.pdf](https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/u.s._immigration_and_customs_enforcement.pdf).

<sup>22</sup> Lisa Moore and Karma R. Chávez, "Queer and Trans Migrants and Migrations," *QT Voices*, July 20, 2021, <https://sites.utexas.edu/queerandtransvoices/2021/07/queer-and-trans-migrants-and-migrations/>.

<sup>23</sup> For more, see Eithne Luibhéid and Karma R. Chávez, *Queer and Trans Migrations: Dynamics of Illegalization, Detention, and Deportation* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2020), <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/78616>.

<sup>24</sup> "Women Refugees and Migrants," UN Women, 2016, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/women-refugees-and-migrants>.

attention to the ways gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans, and intersex people are particularly vulnerable to persecution and displacement.<sup>25</sup>

In the book *Border Imperialism*, Harsha Walia claims that “the reinforcement of physical and psychological borders against racialized bodies is a key instrument through which to maintain the sanctity and myth of superiority of Western civilization.”<sup>26</sup> Walia coins the term “border imperialism,” which she says is “characterized by the entrenchment and re-entrenchment of controls against migrants, who are displaced as a result of the violence of capitalism and empire, and subsequently forced into precarious labor as a result of state illegalization and systemic social hierarchies.”<sup>27</sup> These policies impact differing constellations that establish cultural cohesion connected to imaginary lines maintained through physical boundaries or political force.

At a local level, boundary maintenance often mirrors national and international strategies of containment. One concrete example is 1033, the Department of Defense program that aided in transferring over 7 billion dollars of used military gear to local police forces in 2020. Literally using the technologies of international warfare locally, boundaries are established within cities through a militarized local police force. In many ways, the gated community mimics a national border wall, drawing lines of separation that determine access.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, “2021 Global Roundtable on Protection and Solutions for LGBTIQ+ People in Forced Displacement – Summary Conclusions,” UNHCR, accessed February 7, 2022, <https://www.unhcr.org/publications/brochures/611e48144/2021-global-roundtable-protection-solutions-lgbtqi-people-forced-displacement.html>.

<sup>26</sup> Harsha Walia, *Undoing Border Imperialism* (AK Press, 2014), 40.

<sup>27</sup> Walia, *Undoing Border Imperialism*, 38.

<sup>28</sup> I am in debt to M. Jacqui Alexander’s *Pedagogies of Crossing* for drawing the connections between international military intervention, border police, and localized segregation. For more on the pushback against the militarization

The construction of these boundaries betrays a multiplicity within all different groupings of insiders and outsiders in a way that can never fully hold the abundance and diversity of life. An ethical assessment of belonging must be attentive to the mechanics of identity crisis and the mechanics of this social order of inequality without reinforcing these very frames of reference. What if this was not seen as a crisis of belonging, but a crisis of monological belonging?

### Monological Belonging

Alfred Arteaga coined the term monologism to connote the ways that thinking gets structured toward one singular system, cosmovision, logic, and set of standards that reinforced the superiority of one group over another. María Lugones claims that "violent employment of a monologic discourse" is "common to all conquest and domination of one people by another."<sup>29</sup> The violence of monological thought often extends to material conditions of violence as well.

Gloria Anzaldúa, reflecting on the interlocking systems of oppression maintained by the U.S./Mexico border, called it "una herida abierta," an open wound still bleeding. But Anzaldúa also argues that embodied experiences complicate the strict dichotomies established by such forms of monological national belonging: US and Mexico, us and them, oppressor and oppressed; in the borderlands, "antithetical elements mix, neither to obliterate each other nor to be subsumed by a larger whole, but rather to combine in unique and unexpected ways."<sup>30</sup> These spaces of meeting show the cracks in hegemonic narratives: the borderlands challenge static

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of the police, see Roxana Tiron, "Defense Bills Targeted to Cut Off Military Gear to Police," June 3, 2020, <https://news.bloomberglaw.com/federal-contracting/defense-bills-targeted-to-cut-off-military-gear-to-police-forces>.

<sup>29</sup> María Lugones, "On Complex Communication," *Hypatia* 21, no. 3 (2006): 81.

<sup>30</sup> Norma E. Cantú and Aída Hurtado, "Breaking Borders/Constructing Bridges: Twenty-Five Years of Borderlands/La Frontera," in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 4th edition, 2012, 6.

categories across one person's identity, lifetime, family lineage, political affiliation, citizenship status, ability, sexual orientation, or religious affiliation. We will return to this in Chapter Four.

For now, we can see how the tension of increasingly strained material conditions, social yearnings for stability amidst cultural shifts, and the need for continuous growth can converge in ever complicated ways. But this tension may be an important sign of the need to shift our ways of being with each other. One implication involves reorienting one's concept of belonging by actively tending to the wounds of dismemberment that are still openly bleeding. This dissertation turns to a power analysis of the conditions of globalization and questioning understandings of belonging that began to be instituted in the earliest days of colonialism. Who deems some people subjects eligible for monological belonging and some people as belongings, commodities to be exploited? It requires attention to how we narrate history and how we can forge connections across identity categories, motivated by love and survival.

### **From Crisis to Critique: Decolonial, Queer, and Feminist Insights**

What if this so-called crisis of belonging could be seen as a possibility instead of a problem? In his book *Circling the Elephant: A Comparative Theology of Religious Diversity*, John Thatamanil takes this approach regarding "the problem" of religious pluralism: seeking to reframe theological engagement with difference as a promise for deeper learning and formation rather than an issue of singular soteriology. Could the same be said for the crisis of belonging? As Nira Yuval-Davis points out, rarely does one even need to think about belonging unless it is challenged or threatened in some way.<sup>31</sup> While I find Yuval-Davis's above analysis helpful for naming the many ways that the concept of belonging functions, I find that queer, feminist, and

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<sup>31</sup> Yuval-Davis, "Belonging and the Politics of Belonging." 197.



decolonial critiques give important insights for thinking through belonging as a tool for challenging assumptions of monological belonging.

Gloria Anzaldúa names the conditions of the 21<sup>st</sup> century as ones where *all* humans, *all* living species, and even the planet itself are "caught between cultures and bleed-throughs among different worlds—each with its own version of reality."<sup>32</sup> According to Anzaldúa, this is experienced as “a personal, global, identity crisis in a disintegrating social order that possesses little heart and...justif[ies] a sliding scale of human worth used to keep humankind divided.”<sup>33</sup> But what if this identity “crisis” could be a turning point, exposing the mechanisms of violence that have kept monological forms of belonging intact?

Current trends in globalization are forcing more people to rethink the notion of belonging, but people already existing in between conflicting monological forms of belonging have already theorized these dilemmas. In contradistinction to Edward Hall’s claim that psychosis is the only outcome for a child growing up amidst a disrupted sense of singular belonging, Anzaldúa claims that disorientation in space “is the ‘normal’ way of being for us mestizos living the borderlands. It’s the sane way of coping with this complex, interdependent, and multicultural planet.”<sup>34</sup> Disorientation in space, or what Anzaldúa defines as *nepantla*, thus becomes a strength for negotiating multiplicity and interdependence. This is a skill that *all* people need for navigating a multicultural planet, but people need to embrace this disorientation as a necessary aspect of shifting one’s consciousness. This means letting go of the illusion of

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<sup>32</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz En Lo Oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality*, ed. AnaLouise Keating, Latin America Otherwise (Duke University Press, 2015), 118.

<sup>33</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz En Lo Oscuro*, 118.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

stable monological forms of belonging and getting comfortable with openness to transformation. Grace Hong states that women of color feminisms have always challenged singular modes of belonging based on “homogeneity, equivalence, and identification” by centering “difference, coalitional politics, and a careful examination of the intersecting processes of race, gender, sexuality, and class, which make singular identifications impossible....”<sup>35</sup>

Reading decolonial thought is especially fruitful for reflecting on crumbling modes of monological belonging. Decolonial thinkers like Anibal Quijano, Walter Dignolo, Enrique Dussel, and Nelson Maldonado-Torres argue that the power relations established through the colonial encounter in the Americas continue to organize the structures of globalization today. According to Quijano, the conditions of labor, sex, authority, and intersubjectivity that structure current day iterations of modernity were institutionalized through colonization. Globalization isn't new; it is the continuation of the coloniality of power, a structure that is justified by inventing the biological fiction of race to naturalize a system of domination.

Though the criteria that determine belonging have changed over time, Ramón Grosfoguel identifies an underlying otherness when he traces the legacies of colonialism that led to globalization in this way:

The imposition of Christianity in order to convert the so-called savages and barbarians in the 16th century, followed by the imposition of 'white man's burden' and 'civilizing mission' in the 18th and 19th century, the imposition of the 'developmentalist project' in the 20th century and, more recently, the imperial project of military interventions under the rhetoric of 'democracy' and 'human rights' in the 21st century, have all been imposed by militarism and violence under the rhetoric of modernity, of saving the other from its own barbarianism.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Grace Kyungwon Hong, *The Ruptures of American Capital Women of Color, Feminism and the Culture of Immigrant Labor* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), xvi.

<sup>36</sup> Ramón Grosfoguel, “Decolonizing Post-Colonial Studies and Paradigms of Political-Economy: Transmodernity, Decolonial Thinking, and Global Coloniality,” *TRANSMODERNITY: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World* 1, no. 1 (2011): 25, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/21k6t3fq>.

In Grosfoguel's description, the narratives of us/them distinctions of belonging may change throughout different historical time periods, but they intersect with capitalism, racism, and war. Françoise Vergès defines decolonial feminisms as theory derived from grassroots social justice movements that denounce capitalism, racism, and war:<sup>37</sup> practices rife with monological ideologies. But decolonial feminisms also challenge the power dynamics of sex, sexuality and gender in their analysis.

### Race, Gender, and Coloniality

Maile Arvin, Eve Tuck, and Angie Morrill argue that colonialism is not just a historical event, but a structure of power relations that continues today in settler societies like the United States, Canada, New Zealand, Australia.<sup>38</sup> They also argue that a critique of structures set in place by settler colonialism is incomplete without a critique of the ways that the nation state is gendered and sexed through heteropatriarchal norms.<sup>39</sup> We will explore the ways that private property ownership, religion, and gender were crucial for establishing subjectivity in the theological-political imagination of 16<sup>th</sup> century theologians in Chapter Three. For now, we can consider the ways that making some people into objects of property created the conditions for a sense of subjectivity for others. This has serious implications for a theoretical concept of belonging rooted within the context of coloniality.

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<sup>37</sup> Françoise Vergès, *Decolonial Feminisms: An Interview with Françoise Vergès*, interview by Will Forrester, April 30, 2021, <https://pentransmissions.com/2021/04/30/decolonial-feminisms-an-interview-with-francoise-verges/>.

<sup>38</sup> Maile Arvin, Eve Tuck, and Angie Morrill, "Decolonizing Feminism: Challenging Connections between Settler Colonialism and Heteropatriarchy," *Feminist Formations* 25, no. 1 (2013): 12, <https://doi.org/10.1353/ff.2013.0006>.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

Who gets to be a *subject* eligible for belonging, and who is perceived to be a *belonging*, or an object to be exploited for economic gain? I derive these questions from María Lugones's work on the light side and dark side of the modern/colonial gender system. In 2007, Lugones took up Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano's analysis of the power structures established in the earliest days of colonialism. She shows how the ideals of femininity and family assumed wealth and whiteness, since colonized women somehow fell outside of these categories. Lugones focuses on how gender is racialized in the schema of coloniality. She contrasts the bourgeois ideal of family unity against the norm of family separation. Lugones highlights this especially for Black women who were enslaved, but we can think of other examples, such as the separation of Indigenous children from their families through boarding schools sponsored by settler governments and religious institutions like the Roman Catholic Church in Canada and the US. The connection between parent and child was not seen as important when both people were exploited and treated as property or animals. The frailty and chastity of bourgeois white women did not apply to colonized women who were expected to work in brutal conditions and were raped by the same colonizing men that claimed to be the protectors of femininity (i.e. of white women from the sexual advances of racialized men). According to Lugones, seeking inclusion in the light side of these relations meant that the structural inequalities of this model were left unchecked.<sup>40</sup> Lugones's work will receive significant reflection in the following chapters. The above insights highlight the mechanisms that produce citizen subjects, mechanisms that are often forged through structural violence committed against some for the securities of citizenship for others.

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<sup>40</sup> María Lugones, "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System," *Hypatia* 22, no. 1 (2007): 203–205.

If the conditions of coloniality are what established the conditions of globalization, then no one is functioning outside of the power structure of coloniality. Grosfoguel states that “Nobody escapes the class, sexual, gender, spiritual, linguistic, geographical, and racial hierarchies of the ‘modern/colonial capitalist/patriarchal world-system.’”<sup>41</sup> However, people are situated differently within this system. Many people know all too well that one person’s sense of belonging may be secured at the expense of someone else’s ability to live. Reflecting on belonging, Scott Lauria Morgensen warns that “Non-Natives must consider their colonial inheritance when occupying Native land or investing in belonging to a settler society, where feeling at home is inseparable from the displacement of Native peoples.”<sup>42</sup> Queer Indigenous scholars have problematized seeking inclusion within the settler state, challenging the legitimacy of states as inevitable, natural, and neutrally securing the needs of all citizens.<sup>43</sup> Queer theorists have also often challenged the concept of inclusion into a nation state built towards privileging heterosexuality.<sup>44</sup> But critique of the ways that belonging in the nation state are gendered and sexed through heteropatriarchal norms is incomplete without being grounded in a structural analysis of the founding of the settler state.

Morgensen claims that a “groundless critique” is the best positionality for queer settlers. This mode disavows both national belonging built on violence and desires for “re-

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<sup>41</sup> Ramón Grosfoguel, “Decolonizing Post-Colonial Studies and Paradigms of Political-Economy: Transmodernity, Decolonial Thinking, and Global Coloniality,” *Transmodernity: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World* 1, no. 1 (May 13, 2011): 3.

<sup>42</sup> Qwo-Li Driskill et al., eds., *Queer Indigenous Studies: Critical Interventions in Theory, Politics, and Literature*, 1st edition (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2011), 143.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> See Elizabeth Freeman, “Queer Belongings: Kinship Theory and Queer Theory,” in *A Companion to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Studies*, eds. George Haggerty and Molly McGarry (Wiley Online Library: 2007), 293–314.

Indigenization” that can quickly erase actual Indigenous people in service of new narratives of desire. According to Morgensen,

by rejecting belonging to the settler state and desire for indigeneity in its place, non-Native queers can remain in the groundless space of critiquing settlement as their condition of existence. Staying with the tension of that space can inspire radical critiques of sexuality, gender, and settler colonialism at once.<sup>45</sup>

Rather than moving toward a quick resolution, Morgensen suggest a deeper acceptance of the reality of inheriting settler colonialism. Morgensen claims that this opens up new possibilities of critique, especially regarding the ways that gender, sex, and colonialism are inextricably intertwined. I agree with Morgensen’s insistence on interrogating the ways that Natives and settlers have been mutually formed by this intersection of sexuality, gender, and settler colonialism, but I will later look to alternate modes of re-narrating history to confront this “groundlessness” for people, Native and non-Native, who have experienced the erasures of particularity through assimilation.

#### Challenging Objectification through Relationality

Belonging is such an important lens because it makes visible and significant the ways that human interaction constitutes subjectivity, knowledge, and our sense of shared reality. Nelson Maldonado-Torres claims that what he calls the paradigm of violence and war "is characterized by making invisible or insignificant the constitutive force of interhuman contact for the formation of subjectivity, of knowledge, and of human reality in general. The relation with objects, whether practical or theoretical, takes primacy over the relation between human

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<sup>45</sup> Driskill et al., *Queer Indigenous Studies*, 2011, 146–47.

beings."<sup>46</sup> As a response to this paradigm, I think an analysis of belonging can foreground processes of relationality and challenges the impetus to objectify, to make subjects into static identity objects that can more easily be ranked, classified, and categorized than the dynamics of open webs of relationships.

For example, Kim Tallbear talks about the ways that the English language is prone to objectification. Tallbear looks at the Yoeme term *moreakamem*, often used by this Indigenous community living on both sides of the U.S./Mexico border to refer to community healers, visionaries, and people who “engage in nonmonogamous and/or non-heterosexual relationships”.<sup>47</sup> However, when Tallbear reflects on the role of such people within communities, they were seen as relationship-builders and caretakers who were most skilled at cultivating connections and relations across the community. This community-oriented figure is one that is known for spirituality and sexuality; however, spirituality and sexuality are not things or objects, but modes of relationality. Perhaps spirituality, sexuality, and nature are “not things at all, but...sets of relations in which power (and sometimes material sustenance?) circulates.”<sup>48</sup> Shifting the focus from identity toward modes of relating can also help us get out of the framework of objectification and categorization that accompanies any attempt to systematize people into social categories.

Aimee Carrillo Rowe hopes that, because the view of the atomistic individual subject is so central to colonial modernity, shifting the focus toward belonging can be constitutive for the

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<sup>46</sup> Nelson Maldonado-Torres, *Against War: Views from the Underside of Modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 237.

<sup>47</sup> Kim Tallbear, “Making Love and Relations Beyond Settler Sex and Family,” in *Making Kin Not Population: Reconceiving Generations*, ed. Adele Clarke and Donna Haraway (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2018), 159.

<sup>48</sup> Tallbear, 159.

work of imagining decolonial futures.<sup>49</sup> Aimee Carrillo Rowe's work on belonging focuses on the difference between social location and identity by shifting the focus to relationship. For her, the concept of belonging can show the ways that identities are created and maintained. Rather than focusing on a politics of location, which obscures the power dynamics that require people to act and respond in specific ways to perform particular modes of belonging, Carrillo Rowe shifts her emphasis toward a politics of relation.<sup>50</sup> We can choose to act and respond in ways that break the continuity of hegemonic power.

With a play on words, Carrillo Rowe encourages readers to "*be* longing"—who you long to be with determines who you are accountable to. By pushing back against the ways that social location can be individualistic and erase the realizations that come through relationships (especially with people who do not "belong" in the same ways that you do), Carrillo Rowe frames belonging as a potent tool for interrogating hegemonic modes of belonging like white supremacy and heterosexuality.<sup>51</sup>

#### Coalition and Belonging

Lugones, like Carrillo Rowe, focuses on dynamics of coalition building, defining coalition as "a loving connection toward liberation."<sup>52</sup> Lugones' definition of coalition also complements another famous theoretical contribution of hers: world travelling. We can travel to each other's worlds and experience each other on different terms, but this is done for different

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<sup>49</sup> Rowe, "Be Longing," 16.

<sup>50</sup> Rowe, 30.

<sup>51</sup> Rowe, 35.

<sup>52</sup> Lugones, "On Complex Communication," 79.



reasons: survival or love.<sup>53</sup> Lugones's definition of coalition building links both aspects: love and striving for conditions of survival via liberation. I will use this later to argue that at the center of the yearning to belong is exactly this yearning for both survival and for love. Forms of monological belonging can distort these qualities: if survival becomes dependent on singular adherence to a community of belonging, then the yearning for survival and love can be diminished to obedience.<sup>54</sup> Lugones's definition of coalition centers love and survival for building broader networks of belonging. Love is expressed through working together to ensure broader networks of survival.

If we return to Lugones's world travelling, we can see that such travel is forced for people negotiating monological systems of belonging: adapting to dominant norms, like white supremacy or heteropatriarchy, is sometimes done for *survival*. Sometimes, the exhaustion from being excluded from a form of monological belonging makes people yearn for relief from this system of oppression. For example, according to bell hooks, Black women created "homeplace" as a site of resistance and restoration. These were domestic spaces of safety and affirmation where they could be subjects, not objects, restoring "the dignity denied us on the outside in the public world."<sup>55</sup> These spaces are necessary for healing.

However, M. Jacqui Alexander's reminder from Bernice Johnson Reagon goes deeper into the interplay of survival, sameness, home, and coalition. In her speech in 1981, Johnson

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<sup>53</sup> María Lugones, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition Against Multiple Oppressions* (Lanham, Md, 2003), 77–102.

<sup>54</sup> I am indebted to my colleagues Dannis Matteson and LaShaunda Reese for their dissertation projects that respectively focus on creative disobedience in the face of white Christian nationalism and a Womanist narrative ethics of survival.

<sup>55</sup> bell hooks, "'Homeplace (a Site of Resistance)' (1990)," in *Available Means: An Anthology of Women's Rhetoric(s)* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2001), 384.

Reagon warns that it is “very important not to confuse them—home and coalition.”<sup>56</sup> Speaking at a women’s music festival that seemed to be confronting racism and transphobia in the contested definitions of who could identify as a “woman,” Johnson Reagon talks about finding places where there is an assumption of sameness, which she calls home. The desire for a home is especially important for people who are, in Johnson Reagon’s words, “X’s or Y’s or Z’s.” As Johnson Reagon shows, this urge for home comes from struggling to live in a society that is hostile, in this case, to women’s survival. Though this space is sought as respite and aids survival in oppressive conditions, according to Johnson Reagon, one cannot stay within this place of isolation and live. Paradoxically, the need for coalition and the need for home both come from a striving for survival. “You don’t go into coalition because you just like it. The only reason you would consider trying to team up with somebody who could possibly kill you, is because that’s the only way you can figure you can stay alive.”<sup>57</sup>

But Johnson Reagon, perhaps echoing Anzaldúa’s assessment of a global identity crisis, warns that the days of finding sameness, even within home spaces, are finished. “There is no hiding place. There is nowhere you can go and only be with people who are like you. It’s over. Give it up.”<sup>58</sup> Context matters for this statement, since Johnson Reagon is specifically advocating for coalition building, but her warning rings clear especially for those who have experienced monological oppression. Thinking that communities of belonging require homogeneity and

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<sup>56</sup> Bernice Johnson Reagon, “Coalition Politics: Turning the Century,” in *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* (New York: Kitchen Table Women of Color Press, 1983), 347.

<sup>57</sup> Johnson Reagon, “Coalition Politics,” 333–34.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

sameness may reproduce the same mechanisms of oppression such home spaces were meant to counteract.

Lugones also speaks about a non-forced form of world travelling, one that is chosen out of *love*. Aimee Carrillo Rowe's concept of belonging resonates with this chosen world-travelling. She claims that belonging highlights multiple important ethical aspects of coalition building across differences. According to Carrillo Rowe, belonging as a social concept as opposed to a location offers much more space for agency to choose one's political affiliations beyond one's identity, making coalition-building possible beyond the limits of identity politics. Belonging as a social concept also focuses on accountability through relationships across differences. Longing to be in relational ties with people, especially people with differing amounts of privilege and oppression, makes the operation of those power dynamics *concrete* and, thus, more easily pinpointed in order to be transformed.<sup>59</sup>

Conversations about belonging could easily reinforce dualistic us/them categories; the above examples like home versus traveling and similarity versus difference could be understood as falling into this oppositional discourse. However, I find the lens of belonging powerful because it can attend to dualistic definitions while showing the complexity that exceeds them. This happens through tracing the creation and maintenance of a binary construction, showing how these lines came to be, as the next section will demonstrate. This lens can also attend to the blurriness of these oppositions, the ways that opposites touch, or how change over time can make, for example, going home feel like traveling to another world. The paradoxical affirmation

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<sup>59</sup> Rowe, "Be Longing," 32.

and negation of touching inherent in the etymology of the term “integral” will further name this tension in later chapters when I discuss my concept of an integral ethics of belonging.

### Re-Narrating History

How, then, do theorists acknowledge the concrete dynamics of oppression and liberation? How do they account for their connection to historical particularities as well as its continuing legacies? If “decolonial thought rejects the idea that there are distinct silos, be they communities or nations, with radically separate histories and cultures...”<sup>60</sup> then decolonial feminisms animate these webs of connections through re-narrating histories. Françoise Vergès claims that “[d]ecolonial feminism is about making visible the colonial genealogy of entanglements of oppression.”<sup>61</sup> This means denaturalizing current structures of power through a re-telling and remembering of histories. I am particularly inspired by Alexander’s and Aurora Levins Morales’s methods of re-narrating history.

M. Jacqui Alexander’s theory of palimpsestic time helpfully pinpoints the structures of coloniality by viewing different moments of time simultaneously, without claiming that historical context and difference is irrelevant. Alexander’s method looks at history like a palimpsest, or a parchment that has been inscribed, erased, and reinscribed with new discourses. In this theory that collapses linear time, the traces from the past are still visible in the present; the impression of the inscription has left its mark, even if the governing structures/narratives of dominance have shifted. Alexander seeks to make the similarities of ideological traffic clearer by scrambling time.

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<sup>60</sup> Robin Dunford, “Toward a Decolonial Global Ethics,” *Journal of Global Ethics* 13, no. 3 (September 2, 2017): 4.

<sup>61</sup> Vergès, “Decolonial Feminisms.”

This method challenges the distancing that often comes with both historical *and* cross-cultural reflection, a tendency of “collapsing distance into difference” through the supposedly immutable categories of “tradition” versus “modernity” and “developing” versus “developed”, that obscures the possibility of basic human relationality.<sup>62</sup> As Alexander says, palimpsestic time “rescrambles the ‘here and now’ and the ‘then and there’ to a ‘here and there’ and a ‘then and now.’”<sup>63</sup> It offers another way of approaching the legacies of colonialism that are still functioning today, though the scripts have changed significantly since the beginnings of colonization in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and the 21<sup>st</sup>. By layering different examples from disparate historical periods on top of each other like a palimpsest, Alexander tries to show how discourses both repeat themselves and shift across time and space to uphold systems of domination.<sup>64</sup>

Aurora Levins Morales proposes the re-narration of histories for the explicit purpose of healing and highlighting interconnections.

History is the story we tell ourselves about how the past explains our present, and how the ways in which we tell it are shaped by contemporary needs...Storytelling is not neutral. Curandera historians make this explicit, openly naming our partisanship, our intent to influence how people think.<sup>65</sup>

Levins Morales looks to “the power of history to provide those healing stories that can restore the humanity of the traumatized.”<sup>66</sup> She encourages people to make these histories personally relevant by witnessing to the complexity of our own historical identities and how they

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<sup>62</sup> M. Jacqui Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, 189.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> Aurora Levins Morales, *Medicine Stories: History, Culture, and the Politics of Integrity* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1998), 24–25.

<sup>66</sup> Levins Morales, *Medicine Stories*, 25.

interact with each other. While Alexander looks to name the ideological traffic that has caused historical harm, Levins Morales tries to restore what such ideologies have obscured: our multiple complexities and our mutual influences with each other.

Oppression buries the actual lives of real and contradictory people in the crude generalizations of bigotry and punishes us for not matching the caricature, refusing all evidence of who we actually are in defiance of its tidy categories. It is a blunt instrument, used for bashing, not only our dangerous complexities, but also the ancient and permanent fact of our involvement with each other.<sup>67</sup>

For Levins Morales, this retelling of history is both spiritual and political, restoring what domination has fractured: our inter-relatedness.

The crisis of monological belonging provides avenues for reflecting on how such modes of distinction are maintained; historically, decolonial thinkers encourage us to see how current modes of national, racial, and religious belonging are connected to the power differentials of coloniality. Decolonial feminists sharpen the decolonial analysis by challenging the criteria of eligibility for monological belonging with the lens of racialized gender: though some becomes *subjects* of belonging, this status is built off others diminished to exploitable objects, or *belongings*. Assimilation and conversion will be further explored amidst this dynamic. But others emphasize the possibilities for challenging hegemonic forms of belonging through highlighting the agency and accountability that comes from yearning for relationships across categories of difference. We can tell different stories, narrate history in ways that show the cracks of monological ideologies, empathize with the commonly held needs for love and survival, and work towards realizing it on a material and spiritual level. The ethical implications of these insights will be analyzed in depth throughout the remainder of this study.

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 75.

## Belonging, Ethics, and Theology

The ethical dimensions of belonging impact theological subjects as well. A sense of belonging on an individual level can be important for one's personal connection with their faith. Belonging is theologically relevant when it determines a person's social standing within a community. Questions of belonging matter for theological ethics because the current conditions of living on this planet require a reassessment of how we live together. Theological commitments often influence the ways that people view their world, judge what is morally sound, define their community, and act. This is also why it is also important for decolonial and queer thinkers to engage the theological. Susan Abraham has made this critique toward postcolonial theorists like Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha, and Ashis Nandy. Abraham claims that these thinkers "do not take into account or are unaware of the manner in which logics of inclusion, democratization, tolerance, and empathy are created in public discourse through religious, theological, and spiritual commitments."<sup>68</sup> Deeper engagement with the complexities of religious commitments have shown both positive and negative impacts for negotiating belonging. Belonging can create a community of actors oriented toward a common vision or purpose, or determine which sets of institutional policies may impact communities and individuals alike.

Womanist and feminist theologians and scholars of religious studies have taken up this call to examine the impacts of colonialism, racial formation, and political economy as well. They have added the lens of religion as a possible framework for both naturalizing oppression as well

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<sup>68</sup> Susan Abraham, *Identity, Ethics, and Nonviolence in Postcolonial Theory: A Rahnerian Theological Assessment* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2007), 3, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/luc/detail.action?docID=307875>.

as challenging it. These stances require critique *and* constructive reimagining of new practices as central to the transformation of unjust systems, actions, and values. As Ruha Benjamin reminds people who are working for social change, we must “[r]emember to imagine and craft the worlds you cannot live without, just as you dismantle the ones you cannot live within.”<sup>69</sup>

While the next two chapters will discuss negotiations of belonging from within the ecclesial structure of the Catholic Church, there are many who have claimed their own theological voice within the academy and in society. Womanist and feminist theologians writing about queerness, racism, and political formations are situating themselves within the Catholic tradition in important ways. M. Shawn Copeland’s book *Enfleshing Freedom* takes up the call to look at these larger structures of coloniality and global trade and to reclaim the sacredness of Black women’s bodies through a theological anthropology and first-person accounts.<sup>70</sup> Copeland reflects on the connection between belonging and being. Her work challenges both white supremacy and heterosexuality by showing the ways that standard categories of theology like incarnation, eschatology, and freedom are deepened and renewed for *all* people when Black queer women are treated as theological subjects. In her chapter “Method in Emerging Black Catholic Theology,” Copeland challenges the concept of belonging with her very being: “In conformity with our baptismal vocation, we are naming ourselves as church—not something to which we belong, but who we are.”<sup>71</sup> Claiming the sacredness of Black women’s *being* sidesteps

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<sup>69</sup> Ruha Benjamin, “Note to Selves: Remember to Imagine and Craft the Worlds You Cannot Live without, Just as You Dismantle the Ones You Cannot Live Within,” Tweet, @ruha9 (blog), November 2, 2017, <https://twitter.com/ruha9/status/926180439827591168>.

<sup>70</sup> See M. Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being* (Fortress Press, 2010).

<sup>71</sup> M. Shawn Copeland, “Method in Emerging Black Catholic Theology,” in *Taking Down Our Harps: Black Catholics in the United States*, ed. Cyprian Davis and Diana L. Hayes (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 122.



the regulatory practices that come from trying to belong to an institution like the Catholic Church through methods of assimilation. If we reverse Carrillo Rowe's insistence to "be longing," then Copeland tends to a "longing to be" through self-proclamation.

Marcella Althaus-Reid's work also draws attention to the ways that sexual theological subjects are not granted belonging, even when what she calls capital T-theology has established an obsession with sex through its own imagery, doctrine, and surveillance of Christian sexual subjects. However, Althaus-Reid takes this position as one that has the power not only of critique, but also transformation. Althaus-Reid describes the queer theologian as a "theologian in diaspora" who "explores at the crossroads of Christianity issues of self-identity and the identity of her community, which are related to sexuality, race, culture, and poverty."<sup>72</sup> Because of the ways that non-heterosexual love and sexuality have disrupted the traditional theological subject, Althaus-Reid proposes an alternative stance of belonging within the queer community. Queer community is a "continuum" that arises in a struggle for identity and belonging that is inherently based on "difference and processes of transformation."<sup>73</sup>

Queering belonging opens up theoretical space for group formations that are more fluid and non-binary. This is especially important for theology, since religion can be used to justify the monologism of T-theology. The term "queer" itself already rejects binaries and static identities; thus it puts categories of belonging into crisis, rejecting fixed labels and binaries. Marcella Althaus-Reid referred to the singularity of God in the Christian tradition as a starting point for

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<sup>72</sup> Marcella Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God* (Routledge, 2004), 7.

<sup>73</sup> Althaus-Reid, 8–9.

other forms of mono-thinking. Margaret Robinson summarizes Althaus-Reid's main points on how the singularity of God

baptised other mono-traditions: the deity in an exclusive relationship with his chosen people; the priest as representative of Christ to the laity; the Pope as head of the Church; and the husband as lord over his submissive wife. This mono-thinking has resulted in a general tendency toward authoritarianism that has often been expressed or reinforced by military violence.<sup>74</sup>

Highlighting the ways that hegemonic modes of belonging, through the specific examples of heteropatriarchy and racism, can be helpful for examining the mechanics of how lines of religious difference are negotiated as well. Clericalism, patriarchy, and militarization benefit from this form of monologism.

### Challenging Singular Religious Belonging

Though the umbrella term of “theology” holds many different methodologies, one sense of theology is that the person writing is a subject who is positioned *within* a (usually Western Christian) tradition, speaking from the “inside.” Who is seen as eligible to be a theologian may depend on their perceived insider status by those in positions of power. Singular religious belonging can be a litmus test of orthodoxy for a theologian who may be expected to speak from within one tradition. Religious studies scholars have defined their own method in opposition to theology's “insider” methodology, framing themselves as “outside” of the tradition they are studying, and, as the argument goes, therefore more objective than subjective, more descriptive than prescriptive. Religious studies scholars may be called biased if they have personal connections to the traditions they are studying. These methodological approaches are intimately connected with belonging.

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<sup>74</sup> Margaret Robinson, “Reading Althaus-Reid: As a Bi Feminist Theo/Methodological Resource,” *Journal of Bisexuality* 10, no. 1–2 (April 9, 2010): 5–6.

Most “contextual theologies” draw upon religious practices and beliefs that have been defined as outside of the Christian tradition. Both Copeland and Althaus-Reid point to Indigenous and African religious practices as sources for theological engagement beyond white supremacy and heteropatriarchy. This is oftentimes classified within the academy as an addition of “culture,” but I sense that there is something important happening here regarding power, race, gender, sex. The distinction between what counts as ‘religion’ and what counts as ‘culture’ is ultimately political. The next chapter will explore internal negotiations within the Catholic Church around inculturation versus syncretism, but the addition of culture to a particular religion is very different methodologically than when multiple religions are acknowledged as interfacing.

Engagement with multiple religions can sometimes reinforce the severity of dividing lines, even as the participants may be actively cross them. Comparative theology, particularly done by Catholic thinkers like Francis Clooney, shows how this method is very concerned with maintaining the dividing line between two religions. Interfaith collaboration and dialogue are often concerned about the collapsing of difference, maintaining a stance of individuals speaking as representative “insiders” of their traditions.

Following the possibilities of belonging outlined above, I think a relational understanding of belonging could be fruitful for developing modes of engaging amongst multiple religious traditions that are spiritually and politically motivated toward transformation and healing. The transnational impacts of colonialism, political economy, and racial formation are largely responsible for the increase of contact amongst “the world’s religions.” Hyo-Dong Lee emphasizes this when he outlines the factors that have brought multiple religions into closer proximity with each other.

The birth of new ethnically and religiously plural nation-states along the arbitrary drawn boundaries of the colonial governing units, the forces of neocolonial global economy and the increasing economic, political, and cultural subservience of the two-thirds world to the first world, the mass displacement and migration of people from the peripheries of the former colonial empires to the metropolitan centers, the explosion of mass media and information technologies – all these have conspired, since the end of World War II and the beginning of political decolonization, to bring the religions of the world as they are actually lived and practiced into the very neighborhoods and doorsteps of one another.<sup>75</sup>

It could also transform the subject of theological ethics, if such relationships enact deeper changes that displace a singular sense of belonging within one's religious tradition. This is especially important given the trajectories of data around religious affiliation.

#### Trends in Religious Affiliation: Nones, Multiple Belonging, and Being “Spiritual but not Religious”

Singular religious belonging in the United States continues to be less of a norm, and this has caused a lot of conversation within higher education institutions about teaching theology when students may identify as religious “nones,” “spiritual but not religious,” or multireligious (whether that be through interfaith partnerships, conversion, or participating in multiple religious communities, practices, and beliefs). This is also important within the US context considering current trends in religious identification and belonging.

At least in the United States, the statistics of religious affiliation share a telling story of a shift away from singular religious identification, whether that be toward no religious affiliation, multiple religious belonging, or an understanding of categories of religion as being less bounded by institutions or social norms. The most recent Pew Forum report from 2019 states that, for the

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<sup>75</sup> Hyo-Dong Lee, “Interreligious Dialogue as a Politics of Recognition: A Postcolonial Rereading of Hegel for Interreligious Solidarity,” *The Journal of Religion*, 85/4 (October 2005): 559.

first time in United States history, the number of people who identify as “none,” or religiously unaffiliated, rose to 26%.

The Christian share of the population is down and religious “nones” have grown across multiple demographic groups: white people, black people and Hispanics; men and women; in all regions of the country; and among college graduates and those with lower levels of educational attainment. Religious “nones” are growing faster among Democrats than Republicans, though their ranks are swelling in both partisan coalitions. And although the religiously unaffiliated are on the rise among younger people and most groups of older adults, their growth is most pronounced among young adults.<sup>76</sup>

This was a 12% increase that happened in just one decade, with projected numbers continuing toward what some have coined the “rise of the nones.”<sup>77</sup> Those who increasingly identify as religious “nones” reject the significance of the category of religion for their own lives. There are many reasons why someone may identify with the religious nones. In the United States, it is increasingly popular that people are raised with no connection to a religion on a personal, communal, or institutional level. However, as of 2016, 78% of those who identify as “none” were raised in religiously affiliated households, participated in communal forms of religious practice such as worship and holidays, but do not ascribed to this identity on an individual level. The reasons given were due to lack of belief (49%), being opposed to organized religion in general due to corruption and hierarchy (20%), lack of clarity about their own viewpoints regarding religion and God, or a concern that religion conflicted with scientific evidence or logic.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> John Gramlich, “19 Striking Findings from 2019,” *Pew Research Center* (blog), December 13, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/12/13/19-striking-findings-from-2019/>.

<sup>77</sup> Pew Research Center, “In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace” (Pew Research Center, October 17, 2019), <https://www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/>.

<sup>78</sup> Michael Lipka, “Why Some Americans Left Religion Behind,” *Pew Research Center* (blog), August 24, 2016, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/08/24/why-americas-nones-left-religion-behind/>.

Christian identification is still in the majority nationwide, with 65% of people in the United States identifying as Christian. However, the rapidly declining numbers of Christian affiliation are mostly coming from people leaving Catholic and mainline Protestant churches, which are known for having a more centralized institutional governance structure compared to other Christian denominations, such as Evangelical and non-denominational churches.

Another important development is the rising numbers of people who belong within multiple religious communities. Multiple religious belonging can come about in many ways. Increasing numbers of interfaith marriages mean that more and more families are negotiating multifaith or interfaith ceremonies, holidays, and practices within their lives, requiring religious leaders to gain literacy in more than just one tradition to meet the needs of their communities.

There have also been increases in people who identify themselves with multiple religious traditions, claiming belonging in more than one religious tradition. Sometimes multiple religious belonging takes the form of commitment and affiliation with multiple religious communities. Other times, it may look like a combining of certain practices from one tradition with a belief framework from another. There are many more people who have multiple religious influences who may not name such influences in a survey. People who have converted may have crossed officially drawn religious lines while retaining the knowledge and cultural influences of their first religious affiliation. Oppression of certain religious traditions could mean that someone may identify as one religion but practice or be involved with other practices or belief systems. Then there is another category that both rejects and reimagines aspects of religious identity.

Religious blending is by no means new, but the term “spiritual, but not religious” has grown in popularity in the past decades, denoting that while one may hold an openness to either some form of Ultimacy or a variety of expressions of the existential or the Divine, they do not

have an affinity or connection to one religious tradition. In 2017, Pew forum reported that 27% of adults in the United States identified as spiritual but not religious, up from 19% in 2012.<sup>79</sup> Usually coming along with this sentiment is a mistrust in the authoritarian nature of religious institutions that impose certain beliefs or practices onto individuals who “blindly” follow dogmas or institutionalized norms, replacing this with a heavier focus on trusting one’s self. Some trace the origins of the spiritual but not religious identification to 20<sup>th</sup> century civil rights agendas, highlighting the values of tolerance, mutual respect, and freedom to live how one wants to live.

The spiritual but not religious category has been received with both criticism and optimism. There have been critiques of “spiritual but not religious” stances mimicking the consumerist conditions of late capitalism, leading to irresponsible adaptations of pieces of different religious traditions removed from their cultural context and significance. Cultural appropriation, some may argue, is the inevitable result of a view that prioritizes the individual over some level of commitment to communities where values and norms have been shaped. However, others have argued that the spiritual but not religious group actually reconstructs a new vision of the sacred through a human rights discourse.<sup>80</sup> Regardless of how one thinks of the term, the numbers show that this trend toward non-identification with the religious is on the rise.

This shift poses a methodological problem for Christian theologies that assume singular religious belonging. Many people are rejecting oppositional discourses about religious

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<sup>79</sup> Michael Lipka and Claire Gecewicz, “More Americans Now Say They’re Spiritual but Not Religious,” *Pew Research Center* (blog), September 6, 2017, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/09/06/more-americans-now-say-theyre-spiritual-but-not-religious/>.

<sup>80</sup> Galen Watts, “Millennials Abandon Hope for Religion but Revere Human Rights,” *The Conversation*, February 5, 2018, <http://theconversation.com/millennials-abandon-hope-for-religion-but-revere-human-rights-90537>.

belonging, but theological methods still need much more work to account for this shift.<sup>81</sup> If we want to analyze religious boundaries, I propose that we need to investigate the histories of their construction. Later chapters will further explore how singular religious belonging is connected to the political conception of boundaries in the colonial imagination.

### **Alternate Modes of Belonging**

How can we build alternate modes of relating with each other that do not require hierarchy, exclusion, or sameness? Is it possible to form modes of belonging that do not require an outsider group, a “them” to our “us”? What are the historical inheritances of colonialism, and how do they shape the parameters of what can even be considered as alternative models of collective identity? The concept of belonging is valuable because it highlights the constructed nature of social identities. It also clarifies the painful costs of certain forms of belonging through its opposite, exclusion. Far from being a concept that only addresses positive feelings of social sentiments, the concept of belonging also must address separation, alienation, and exclusion. At the end of the dissertation, I gesture toward an ethics of belonging that centers the ambivalent space in between belonging and alienation.

This chapter aimed to clarify the concept of belonging to show how it could aid in identifying the overlapping but also differing registers where belonging (or, inversely, not belonging) is especially important. While identity is one important aspect of the theory, belonging can address multiple levels of difference, influence, and overlap at individual, communal, and political levels. This lens challenges the assumption that identity is something that can be forged or chosen apart from the influence of relationships with other people or social

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<sup>81</sup> Najeeba Syeed and Heidi Hadsell, eds., *Critical Perspectives on Interreligious Education: Experiments in Empathy*, vol. 63, Currents of Encounter (Brill, 2020), <http://brill.com/view/title/56542>.



structures. The lens of belonging points to the socially constructed nature of identity within larger socio-political systems.

Focusing on belonging illuminates *how* the lines are drawn that create certain identity formations as opposed to debating the categories that get created. Desire for relational ties plays an important role in group construction. Yearning to belong, to *be* longing, holds an important aspect that names the movement and shifting nature of affiliation, identity categories, and experiential circumstance. Yearning to belong works like an engine of connection that is never fixed in one place. This focus on yearning also safeguards against reifying relationships, since even relationality can become static and fixed.

Differing social locations within this matrix of power produce differing forms of fragmentation and dismemberment. We can acknowledge differences in social location while building relationships across these material, psychological, and spiritual dismemberments that look different but arise from the same structures of power. M. Jacqui Alexander's insistence to remember the "fragmentation and dismemberment at both the material and psychic levels" will continue throughout the following chapters.

How has religious belonging participated in the pain of dismemberment? The next chapter will look to some case studies from the 21<sup>st</sup> century where the ecclesial authority of the Catholic Church attempted to address colonial violence and non-belonging. Then, we will look to a historical example when belonging and the terms of subjectivity were being negotiated by theologians grappling with the first few decades of colonialism. The complex historic role of Catholic theorizing around nation building, sexuality, and colonialism will also be addressed in Chapter Three.

### Vignette: Parliament of World Religions

The city of Chicago hosted the World's Fair in 1893, just 22 years after the rubble of the Chicago fire was shoveled into lake Michigan to create more land on the shoreline. The World's Fair was also known as the Columbian Exposition, celebrating the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Christopher Columbus's "discovery" of the Americas. It was a site of wonder and celebration of the progress narrative of modernity and technological advancement. The elaborate buildings for the event were built on top of the discarded ruins of a burned city—a newly emergent land mass the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi would later claim as unceded.

This event in 1893 was also the first convening of the Parliament of World Religions. Swami Vivekananda's attendance established a Bengal-Chicago connection and put Hindu spirituality on a global stage. Elizabeth Cady Stanton spoke about women's rights at the women's caucus. But Black Christian leaders were not invited to participate in this historic convening of representatives from the world's religions. Indigenous people were present, but not as participants in the parliament either. Instead, they were on display, like objects in a museum or animals in a zoo. It would not be until 1978, 85 years later, that Indigenous people were granted religious liberties protections in the United States. Simon Pokagon, Catholic convert and spokesperson for the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi, wrote a treatise about this exclusion.

We have no spirit to celebrate with you the great Columbian Fair now being held in this Chicago city, the wonder of the world. No; sooner would we hold the high joy day over the graves of our departed than to celebrate our own funeral, the discovery of America. And while you who are strangers ... rejoice over the beauty and grandeur of this young republic and you say "behold the wonders wrought by our children in this foreign land," do not forget that this success has been at the sacrifice of our homes and a once happy race.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Simon Pokagon, "The Red Man's Rebuke," quoted from Andrew Herscher and Ana María León, "At the Border of Decolonization," E-Flux, May 2020, <https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/at-the-border/325762/at-the-border-of-decolonization/>.

*The Red Man's Rebuke* was written on birchbark and handed to attendees of the World's Fair.

CHAPTER TWO  
NEGOTIATING RELIGIOUS BOUNDARIES, GENDER, AND THE LEGACIES OF  
COLONIALISM

While the previous chapter spelled out the locations and relations of the continuing legacies of colonial history, the fragmentation and dismemberment of colonialism, and the possibilities for analyzing agency, relationality, and accountability through the concept of belonging, this chapter will specifically focus on the religious negotiations of belonging within the context of coloniality through the institutional Catholic Church. Pope Francis has been a leading voice for justice during his papacy, arguing for the importance of immigrant and refugee rights, addressing climate change, and building bridges for interfaith cooperation. As the first Pope from Latin America, Francis has been decidedly influenced by Latin American liberation theologies in his own Argentinian context. However, he has received criticism for being too liberal, threatening the stability of the Catholic tradition through his pastoral and mercy-focused approach. On the other hand, he has also been criticized for not being progressive enough regarding gender and sexuality, especially regarding women's ordination, LGBTQ2IA+ rights, and confronting the sex abuse scandals. I intend to illustrate some of these fault lines within the Catholic tradition on a global scale, particularly through the negotiations of religious belonging that happened at the Amazon Synod in 2019.

I do not speak as an official of the institutional Catholic Church, or an Indigenous person. I want to be careful not to repeat the power dynamics the contributors to *Queer Indigenous*

*Studies* warn about; I am not trying to position myself as an authority of Indigenous knowledge, especially considering how non-Natives use Native culture to get in touch with their own desires for self-change.<sup>1</sup> Instead, my focus is directed toward the ways that both Native *and* non-Native people have been co-constituted by the power structures of settler colonialism.

Claiming to speak for the entirety of *any* tradition would betray what I find so compelling about the lens of belonging: how it can attend to the internal contestations within supposedly unified groups; how people supposedly locked in oppositional identity categories of oversimplified us/them dynamics may find more points of connection than expected. I also do not want to fall into a common binary rehearsed within decolonial and queer feminist circles by juxtaposing decolonial struggles with Catholicism or other forms of Christianity. This would erase the important contributions of Christianity to resistance movements, whose legacy carries on in Native theologies, Latin American liberation theologies, *Mujerista*, Latina feminist theologies, and postcolonial theologies today. My ancestors' connection to Irish Catholicism was a symbol of resistance to British colonial domination, though I live as a settler today in the United States.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Qwo-Li Driskill et al., eds., *Queer Indigenous Studies: Critical Interventions in Theory, Politics, and Literature*, 1st edition (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2011), 139.

<sup>2</sup> Special thanks to my cousin, Jenny Melton, for connecting me with the depth of family history research compiled by her father and my uncle, Tom Greening. Along with my father, John Greening, we have spent hours talking, researching, exchanging emails, and of course sorting through the Greening tendency for exaggeration to get a glimpse of our own family history. There are many question marks, many blurry lines that make us/them distinctions between Irish Catholic and Protestant English lineages unclear. This is partly because of the distancing many Irish immigrants did from their roots to assimilate into White Anglo Saxon norms of national belonging: in short, whiteness. However, they remained Catholic. And so do I. My grandmother and grandfather, Nanny and Poppo, were always excited to give me, their only remaining Catholic granddaughter in the family, prayer cards, rosaries, and other decidedly gendered devotionals. My ancestors are some mixture of colonized and colonizer, and the farmland in Washtenaw County, Michigan that my early ancestors sustained themselves from was land that was taken care of by the Potawatomi, Odawa, Ojibwe, and Wyandot nations before 1807. The full details of the treaty, titled Cession 66, can be found here. United States and Charles Joseph Kappler, *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties* (Washington: Govt. Print. Off., 1975), <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/008319763>.

Now I bring this into conversation with conceptions of religious belonging in Catholicism. Addressing Pope Francis's attempt to reckon with colonialism and the Catholic Church is an important step, especially in the ways that it exposes some of the slippery usage of categories like religion, culture, sex, and gender. I focus on two global negotiations that highlight the fault lines of religious belonging. These fault lines were called idolatry and sodomy during colonial times (though these charges are also found today). In more contemporary terms, they are negotiations of the limits of Catholic religious belonging regarding syncretism/inculturation and gender theory.

In the first case study, Francis is trying to dismantle colonizing mentalities using the ecclesial Church structure; however, lay people go against the authoritative teachings for the sake of preserving the tradition itself. The divide is located as a tension between idolatry and orthodoxy, which tellingly takes place across the symbolic form of a pregnant Indigenous woman's body. The second example examines a quote from Pope Francis about gender theory being a new form of "ideological colonization." This chapter sets the scene for how Pope Francis tries to address coloniality; however, what he misses is a deeper historical analysis of the ways that sex, gender, religious, and racial categories influenced colonial structures, ones that continue up until today.

With a brief history of religious boundary making and some clarifying insights from Anibal Quijano and María Lugones, this chapter will outline some of the shifting negotiations of religious boundary-making in ecclesial structures with colonial legacies as a backdrop. These negotiations of belonging begin with institutional Catholic structures like the Synod and the encyclical, but they also go beyond ecclesial control; these negotiations happen in the tweets that contest Catholic belonging in the digital sphere; in the streets where protestors clash with

government officials about land rights, state violence, working conditions, LGBTQ2IA+ rights; at another level, they happen in the microbiome of multiple soils coming together, in the rivers and water systems that connect us all.

### **Pachamama Visits the Vatican**

On October 4, 2019, a group of people processed toward a small, perfectly symmetrical circle dug into the overly manicured lawns of the garden in the Vatican. The gaping hole would be filled with a small tree all the way from Assisi, covered with soil brought by groups of people from different parts of the world, led by two Indigenous leaders from the Amazon on the feast day of St. Francis of Assisi.

It was two days before the start of the Amazonian Synod, a mode of gathering to discuss important issues used by the Catholic Church. There have been gatherings to discuss pressing matters of Christian faith since the Apostolic Council in 50 CE. However, reviving the synodal format was proposed during Vatican II. During a time of concern about the rise of atheism and secularism and a need for the Church to engage more with the “signs of the times,” Paul VI called for this format of Bishops giving council in 1965.<sup>3</sup> Now, in 2019, a three-week council was to be hosted in Vatican City. Catholic Bishops, Indigenous leaders, itinerant preachers, and Catholic religious aimed to address the most pressing issues impacting the people, and thus the Catholic Church, in the area that spans across the countries of Brazil, Ecuador, Bolivia, Peru, Colombia, Venezuela, Guyana, Suriname, and French Guiana.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Paul VI, “Apostolica Sollicitudo,” apostolic letter, Vatican website, September 15, 1965, [https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/motu\\_proprio/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_motu-proprio\\_19650915\\_apostolica-sollicitudo.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/motu_proprio/documents/hf_p-vi_motu-proprio_19650915_apostolica-sollicitudo.html).

<sup>4</sup> “Amazonia: New Paths for the Church and for Integral Ecology,” preparatory document, Vatican website, accessed January 30, 2020, <http://www.synod.va/content/synod/it/attualita/synod-for-the-amazon--preparatory-document--amazonia--new-paths-.html>, para. 6.

The parade of people that entered the Vatican Garden followed Ednamar de Oliveira Viana, a leader of the Satere-Mawa people in Brazil. She led the ceremony honoring the land and the connections amongst all living things. The procession began with an Indigenous song; some from the group joined with slow, gentle stomping in time, shaking rhythmic instruments that made a swooshing accompaniment to Oliveira Viana's voice. There were 20 representatives present from many different Indigenous communities in the Amazon for this ceremony, as well as groups of activists, preachers, and religious from around the world. Some in the procession wore traditional clothing from their different Amazonian nations; another wore a traditional Franciscan monk's robe; many others, donning the (globally popular) traditional dress of cargo pants and t-shirts, rhythmically marched with the crowd. People in all types of dress had their faces painted with red symmetrical lines.

The groups brought handfuls of soil from their multiple different home countries including Italy, India, and Brazil. These small piles of earth symbolized how people are connected in the struggle for protecting "our common home," whether that be through advocating for people displaced by forced migration, climate change activism that challenged multinational corporations, or disrupting the social networks that facilitate sexual exploitation, human trafficking, and other modern-day forms of slavery.

Multiple items present at the tree planting ceremony were also used during the "Via Crucis" walk, a form of the stations of the cross that honored those who have died in the fight for justice in the Amazon. A photograph of Dorothy Stang, who was murdered while advocating for Indigenous rights and farmers' rights in Brazil, was among the various pictures of martyrs that



both paraded the streets and encircled the tree from Assisi.<sup>5</sup> Salvadorean martyr Oscar Romero's photo was also there, as well as a symbol commemorating *all* women who were murdered in the Amazon, sparking the memories of prophetic witness in the wake of political, environmental, and gendered violence.

A small wooden statue of a pregnant Indigenous woman kneeling was also present throughout the Synod. Purchased from a city market in Manaus, Brazil, the statue had been used by a group of itinerant preachers that ministered to Catholic Indigenous communities in remote areas for years. The statue was an important presence at the Synod and a recurring symbol of the value of Indigenous culture throughout the meeting. In video clips from the tree planting ceremony that peppered online Catholic news sources, Pope Francis held a shovel. He quickly blessed the statue of the kneeling woman when it was presented to him, a small act that would be interpreted in many ways. He left the ceremony early, skipping the final song and closing prayer.

Ednamar de Oliveira Viana released a statement describing the tree planting ceremony on October 4<sup>th</sup>:

To plant is to have hope. It is believing in a growing and fruitful life to satisfy the hunger of Mother Earth's creation. This brings us to our origin by reconnecting divine energy and teaching us the way back to the Creator Father. The Synod is to plant this tree, water and cultivate [it], so that the Amazonian peoples are heard and respected in their customs and traditions experiencing the mystery of the divinity present in the Amazonian ground. Planting in the Vatican Garden is a symbol that invites the Church to be even more committed to the forest peoples and all of humanity. But also, it is the denunciation of those who destroy our common house by greed in search of their own profit.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> For a short video of parts of the service, see this video from the *Catholic News Service*, "Pope dedicates Amazon synod to St. Francis," October 4, 2019, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qebfx3M7j\\_8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qebfx3M7j_8).

<sup>6</sup> Here is link to a Google Doc from the abovementioned Lifesite News article gives the full information, showing the ways that the report cut short and misrepresented the statement. <https://docs.google.com/document/d/91OUVKTMjh4TPA057aPU0i4FMhW4SHwD619W09OsxZOew/edit>.

The tree was plopped into the hole and sprinkled with the soil, the symbol for transnational solidarity around issues of global justice. A small circle of people kneeled on the ground, touching their foreheads to the earth as the Pope, Cardinals, and Bishops sat in chairs, watching.



Figure 1. Ednamar de Oliveira Viana leading the tree planting ceremony in the Vatican Gardens while Pope Francis and Catholic Cardinals sit behind her. Three statues can be seen, all similarly depicting a pregnant Indigenous woman though differing in size and position.<sup>7</sup>

Video clips of the tree planting ceremony spread throughout the Twitterverse; Catholics around the world witnessed this embodied attempt of so many of the main ideas being discussed in the Synod: inculturation, the unbreakable link between the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth, and the possibility of leadership beyond the clerical system. In the age of the internet, the

<sup>7</sup> Ordo Fratrum Minorum, “Pope Francis Emphasizes Solidarity with Indigenous Leaders Ahead of Amazon Synod,” (blog), October 4, 2019, <https://ofm.org/blog/pope-francis-emphasizes-solidarity-with-indigenous-leaders-ahead-of-amazon-synod/>.

global Church caught a glimpse of a “Church with an Amazonian face,” to use a popular phrase from the Synod documents. And though there have been practicing Catholic communities in the Amazon since the earliest days of colonization, paying attention and *respect* to a decidedly Amazonian Catholicism broke new ground in papal history.

While some lauded these actions, many were angry with what they saw. Shortening Ednamar de Oliveira Viana’s original statement and not even using her name, online sources reported that “[t]he female Indigenous leader who planted a tree alongside Pope Francis in the Vatican Gardens ahead of the Amazon Synod was clear from the beginning about the syncretistic and pagan meaning of the act which, she explains, was intended to ‘satisfy the hunger of Mother Earth’ and reconnect with ‘the divinity present in the Amazonian soil.’”<sup>8</sup> Outrage over “pagan” practices happening at the epicenter of the Catholic institutional power came from Tweets, blog posts, and news sources from more conservative Catholics around the globe, including the United States, Austria, Mexico, and the Philippines. A global negotiation of religious belonging was underway.

Online news sources described this two-foot wooden statue as “the single most controversial personality” of the Amazon Synod.<sup>9</sup> These media outlets began referring to the wooden image of the kneeling pregnant woman as “Pachamama,” the deific name for “mother earth” used by multiple Indigenous groups in the Amazon. More outcries ensued when the statue was also present at the Via Crucis, or Way of the Cross, which happened towards the middle of

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<sup>8</sup> Diane Montagna, “Amazonian woman who led Vatican tree planting ceremony reveals its pagan significance,” *Life Site News*, November 8, 2019, <https://www.lifesitenews.com/news/female-Indigenous-leader-reveals-pagan-significance-of-tree-planting-ceremony-in-vatican-gardens>.

<sup>9</sup> Inés San Martín, “Synod’s Most Debated Figure Was Back at Saturday’s ‘Way of the Cross,’” *Crux Now* (blog), October 19, 2019, <https://cruxnow.com/amazon-synod/2019/10/synods-most-debated-figure-was-back-at-saturdays-way-of-the-cross/>.

the Synod and honored the many “martyrs” who died while advocating for the interconnected rights of the people and protection of the land. In the procession, a little girl rode in a canoe carried by pilgrims, holding the statue. There “Pachamama” was, in a canoe processing through the streets of Vatican City, with a rainbow net radiating from her as the focal point in the procession.

This debate, though exploding on Twitter in the digital age of globalization, echoed many of the tropes of colonization that portrayed Indigenous women as crude, primitive, and satanic. Many ridiculed the Church for the possible symbolic interpretations of this small wooden statue—was she a pagan goddess, a generic symbol of life, or maybe even an inculturated Virgin Mary that combined Amazonian culture with the Mother of God? As John-Henry Westen said during his show:

We were either witnessing a pagan idol worship ceremony in the Vatican (with the seeming approval of the Pope) or else it was a scandalous portrayal of the mother of God with a crude, nude statue. Frankly, I don’t know which is worse, but either way it’s totally outrageous...<sup>10</sup>

The line between idolatry and orthodoxy, scandal and cultural sensitivity, was hotly debated. The pregnancy of the mother of God is central to the Christian tradition, and devotion to Mary is a defining fault line between Catholic and Protestant Christian traditions. Many of the same people expressing outrage over the Pachamama statue also expressed online outrage about another issue: abortion and the need to protect life. The protection of many forms of life was a central theme of the Synod.

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<sup>10</sup> John-Henry Westen, “An outrage either way: Pagan idol worship in the Vatican or a nude statue of Our Lady,” John-Henry Westen Show, *Life Site News*, October 10, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RwmTLyU-MGw>.

However, a statue of a dark-skinned naked body on the cusp of giving birth didn't only cross lines of respectability (or maybe even civility) for many Catholics; it was also a theological line, a line that proves the intersecting influences of sex, gender, and race on certain theological concepts. Why couldn't she be fully covered in multiple loosely draped cloaks and veils, like another inculturated Virgin, Our Lady of Guadalupe? A priest in Mexico contrasted La Virgen de Guadalupe with the Pachamama image before burning an effigy of the statue as reparations, uploading the video recording to YouTube.<sup>11</sup>

Just days after the Via Crucis, two young men from Austria went to the church of Santa Maria in Transpontina where the canoe, the statues, and the pictures of the martyrs were installed in an alcove to commemorate the Synod. 26-year-old Alexander Tschugguel removed the statues from the church and walked to the Ponte Sant'Angelo, the bridge of angels, tossing the first statue directly in the river. Lining up the other four, he pushed them off the banister into the Tiber River, one by one. The two men filmed what they did and posted a video clip on Twitter with the following statement:

This was done for only one reason: Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, his Blessed Mother, and everybody who follows Christ, are being attacked by members of our own Church. We do not accept this! We will no longer stay silent! We start to act NOW!<sup>12</sup>

Italian officials fished the statues from the river, and acting as the Bishop of Rome, Pope Francis issued an apology, stating that the statues were “without idolatrous intentions.” Francis

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<sup>11</sup> Pete Baklinski, “WATCH: Catholic Priest Burns ‘Satanic’ Pachamama Effigy in Reparation for Idolatry at Vatican - LifeSite,” *LifeSite* (blog), November 4, 2019, <https://www.lifesitenews.com/news/watch-catholic-priest-burns-satanic-pachamama-effigy-in-reparation-for-idolatry-at-vatican/>.

<sup>12</sup> Diane Montagna, “Controversial Amazon Synod Statues Seized and Thrown into the Tiber River (FULL VIDEO),” *LifeSite News*, accessed February 18, 2020, <https://www.lifesitenews.com/news/breaking-controversial-amazon-synod-statue-siezed-and-thrown-into-the-tiber-river-full-video>.

asked “forgiveness from people who have been offended by this gesture,”<sup>13</sup> wording that made it unclear if the Pope was apologizing for the presence of the statues or the act of throwing them into the river. There was never any clarifying statement issued about the intended symbolism of the statues at the Synod.

### Tree Planting Ceremony: Implications and Reactions

The tree planting ceremony was both a symbol *and* an enactment of some of the biggest issues that were raised during the Synod, and the reactions to aspects of the Synod highlight some of the tensions of religious belonging, colonial histories, and negotiating power dynamics within the community of faith. First, both the tree planting ceremony and the Amazon Synod were intended to amplify a public outcry against the destruction of all forms of life happening in the Amazon. The exclusionary practices of corporate greed, often supported by governments as well as members of the Catholic Church, were named and disavowed. The “cry of the earth and the cry of the poor,” a quote Pope Francis took up in his encyclical letter *Laudato Si’* from the liberation theologian Leonardo Boff, was a central phrase used in many of the documents released. The preparatory document, the final document created by the Synod, and *Querida Amazonia*, the Pope’s own Apostolic Exhortation, all emphasized speaking against the destruction of people, communities, and the land.

Concepts like integral ecology, outlined more generally in Francis’s encyclical letter *Laudato Si’*, were put into context. An integral understanding of human anthropology, according to Francis, would show the interconnections between nature and culture. An incorrect

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<sup>13</sup> Catholic News Agency, “Pope Francis Apologises That Amazon Synod ‘Pachamama’ Was Thrown into Tiber River,” *Catholic Herald*, October 25, 2019, <https://catholicherald.co.uk/news/2019/10/25/pope-francis-apologises-that-amazon-synod-pachamama-was-thrown-into-tiber-river/>.

understanding of humanity forged from modern instrumental reason was the culprit for greed and individualism. Integral ecology, according to Francis, would bring people back into right relationship with God, with each other, and with the created world. Inspired by the saint he was named after, St. Francis of Assisi, Francis named the importance of seeing the unity of all of creation in order to counter objectification.

If we approach nature and the environment without this openness to awe and wonder, if we no longer speak the language of fraternity and beauty in our relationship with the world, our attitude will be that of masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters, unable to set limits on their immediate needs. By contrast, if we feel intimately united with all that exists, then sobriety and care will well up spontaneously. The poverty and austerity of Saint Francis were no mere veneer of asceticism, but something much more radical: a refusal to turn reality into an object simply to be used and controlled.<sup>14</sup>

Though he had been criticized for speaking about topics like economics and climate science, Francis continued to be a global voice for climate action and solidarity with the people most impacted by environmental destruction. The soil brought from multiple countries by religious, lay people, and clergy from all over the world enacted one of the main principles of integral ecology: the undeniable interconnectedness of human beings and the earth. The destruction of one means the destruction of the other, and certain people and certain places are being disproportionately destroyed in the current globalized economic system.

However, instead of only focusing on the woes of modernity, *Querida Amazonia* named the destructive behavior as both a legacy and continuation of colonialism. *Querida Amazonia* highlighted concrete evidence of exemplary Catholics from the past and the present who have been on the side of the people *most* oppressed by colonial and neo-colonial exploitation. The

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<sup>14</sup> Francis, *Laudato Si'*, encyclical letter, Vatican website, 24 May 2015, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html), para. 11.

New Laws of the Indies, put forward by Bartolomé de las Casas and many others, were cited as an example of Catholic protection of vulnerable Indigenous populations facing dehumanizing destruction. “Today the Church can be no less committed,” says Francis regarding this stance of protection.<sup>15</sup> Citing missionary accounts that claimed Indigenous people begged priests not to leave, Francis paints a heroic picture of Catholic priests as those “who protected the indigenous peoples from their plunderers and abusers.”<sup>16</sup>

However, in the next paragraph, *Querida Amazonia* also vaguely acknowledged the Church’s own complicity in colonial and neo-colonial structures. Quoting his apology from the 2015 Address at the Second World Meeting of Popular Movements in Santa Cruz de la Sierra-Bolivia, Francis acknowledged Church complicity in this way:

...since we cannot deny that the wheat was mixed with the tares, and that the missionaries did not always take the side of the oppressed, I express my shame and once more “I humbly ask forgiveness, not only for the offenses of the Church herself, but for the crimes committed against the native peoples during the so-called conquest of America.”<sup>17</sup>

Francis asked for forgiveness for *all* crimes committed during colonial times, not just ones perpetuated by the Church. After acknowledging the destructiveness of colonization and claiming responsibility for perpetuating these practices, the document calls for overcoming “colonizing mentalities.”

Commenting on the reaction to truly witnessing the destructive histories and continuing practices, Pope Francis said, “even as we feel this healthy sense of indignation, we are reminded

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<sup>15</sup> Francis, ‘*Querida Amazonia*,’ Post-synodal apostolic exhortation, Vatican website, December 12, 2020, <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2020/02/12/200212c.html>, para. 19.

<sup>16</sup> Francis, ‘*Querida Amazonia*,’ para. 18.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 19.



that it is possible to overcome the various colonizing mentalities and to build networks of solidarity and development.”<sup>18</sup> This framing is different than using the term decolonization. Decolonial feminist theorists like Eve Tuck and K. Yang Wayne have made the point that decolonization is *not* a metaphor to be used for the improvement of certain aspects of society and education: it should involve the “repatriation of Indigenous land and life” to Indigenous people.<sup>19</sup> Francis does not discuss repatriating Indigenous land, such as land currently owned by the Catholic Church. He maintained a focus on the *mentalities* of colonialism that continue till today.

What will it take for Catholics to “overcome” the ways of thinking that were structured by colonialism? The main methods Francis proposed for overcoming colonizing mentalities were through active solidarity, dialogue across religious and cultural differences, and inculturation, or the process of synthesizing cultures with the universality of the gospel message. The tree planting ceremony was one attempt to honor the wisdom of Indigenous traditions that colonizers and missionaries had degraded, both in years past as well as the present.

Besides a historical remembrance of past wrongs that continue to wreak havoc on all forms of life, Pope Francis claims that the Catholic Church calls for learning from those who know how to live in balance with community and the earth. Speaking vaguely about Indigenous communities in the basin, he observed that “[t]heir relationships are steeped in the surrounding nature, which they feel and think of as a reality that integrates society and culture, and a prolongation of their bodies, personal, familial and communal.”<sup>20</sup> In *Querida Amazonia*, Francis

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 17.

<sup>19</sup> Eve Tuck and K Wayne Yang, “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1.

<sup>20</sup> Pope Francis, ‘*Querida Amazonia*’, para 20.

interprets *all* Indigenous Amazonians as modeling the ideal anthropology of integral ecology: all Indigenous nations and communities see society and culture are inseparable; all Indigenous people conceive of nature and human beings are inseparable. Whether romanticized, paternalistic, or just overly generalized, Francis *does* call for Catholics to learn from Indigenous people about living in right relationship through ways of being that blur the neat distinctions between self, one's community, and the land. However, as we will explore later, the Synod format keeps everyone who is not in a position of clerical authority within the epistemic position of being an informant, rather than an epistemic agent capable of producing knowledge on their own.

Making legitimated space for the blending of wide varieties of specific Indigenous practices in the Amazon basin with Catholic prayer and the promotion of Indigenous leadership were vital to the core goals of the conference. But what are the political negotiations of making this legitimated space? Why, after over 500 years of Christian influence, is the Church still searching for a Church with an Amazonian face? Is it an extension of the Catholic Church's zeal for evangelization, or is it a reversal of the totalizing insistence of conversion?

While the final document, composed by the attendees of the Synod, calls for the possibility of adding a 25<sup>th</sup> Amazonian Rite that would explicitly incorporate Indigenous song, dance, and myth into a Catholic liturgical setting, Pope Francis's writing simply calls for "inculturation," which he defines as a "necessary process...that rejects nothing of the goodness that already exists in Amazonian cultures, but brings it to fulfilment in the light of the Gospel."<sup>21</sup> Inculturation is a form of theological inclusivism that can incorporate cultural differences—as

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., para 66.

long as they didn't disrupt doctrinal boundaries. If there were disruptions, then Francis could shift toward dialogue, a more pluralistic term that connotes ways of engaging others in respectful ways. The move from inculturation to dialogue is a move between being perceived as on the inside versus being perceived as on the outside. Which method one uses determines a politics of belonging very quickly.

Even though so much focus was placed on learning from Indigenous people, joining together against the destruction of life, and blending Amazonian culture with Catholic practice, the power dynamics of the actual meeting were still skewed to favor clerical hierarchical authority. Indigenous leaders of all genders were given voice, but not vote; this was the same for women religious attending the conference. Due to a shortage of priests in the Amazon to administer the Eucharist in remote areas, whispers of ordination, either of women or of elderly married men in good standing within their community, gave some hope for more egalitarian leadership opportunities, allowing more *participation* rather than just promises of protection. But, to “clericalize women” would, according to Francis, “diminish the great value of what they have already accomplished, and subtly make their indispensable contribution less effective.”<sup>22</sup> Francis declared that “Women make their contribution to the Church in a way that is properly theirs, by making present the tender strength of Mary, the Mother.”<sup>23</sup>

The inextricable connection of clericalism and patriarchy became apparent in these statements. It is a strange statement to claim that acknowledging women's leadership would erase the leadership that women have already exhibited in Catholic Church history. Francis

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., para. 100.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., para. 101.

claimed that giving women clerical authority would “subtly” undermine their contributions to the Catholic Church, but he doesn’t acknowledge the ways that clerical authority has already undermined women’s contributions to Catholic life, in *non*-subtle ways. Juxtaposing clerical authority and tender strength as qualities only respectively proper for men versus women shows how binary gender roles impoverish concepts of compassionate ministry and open participation in leadership. The next section will more deeply explore Catholic views on the inherently gendered nature of the human soul, and how this becomes more complex when an analysis of racialized gender is applied. For now, we can acknowledge that the “participatory” format of the synod centered ecclesial hierarchy. Though the Bishops may have been open to input, they ultimately maintained their power to have the final say.

The tree planting ceremony demonstrated an attempt to blend religions and cultures, foster international solidarity, and (at least) listen to the people who have been excluded, whether that exclusion be from the global economy, from the protection of national governments, or from the decision-making of the Catholic Church. According to Robert Schreiter, inculturation, dialogue, and solidarity are not just practices, but “point to the deeper theological commitments that, in turn, provide the basis for a vision of a shared humanity.”<sup>24</sup> Schreiter draws connections between inculturation and the Incarnation of Christ and between dialogue and the relationality of the Trinity. For him, the concept of solidarity brings both the incarnation and the Trinity together in praxis.<sup>25</sup> “Struggles for dignity, for recognition, and for justice are constitutive of a genuine

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<sup>24</sup> Robert J. Schreiter, “Globalization and Plural Theologies: Challenges to a Shared Vision of Humanity,” *Limina* 2, no. 1 (February 1, 2019): 60.

<sup>25</sup> Schreiter, “Globalization and Plural Theologies,” 60–61.

catholicity.”<sup>26</sup> Though struggling for dignity, recognition, and justice may define the boundary lines of small c catholicity, according to Schreiter, the test of capital C Catholic belonging is different. Catholic belonging for Schreiter is dependent on following the leadership of a Bishop, celebrating the Eucharist, and “profess[ing] the fullness of the faith handed down by the apostles.”<sup>27</sup> The varied experiences of context and culture should be welcomed if those three elements are in place. But what happens when the people reject the guidance of ecclesial authority? The Pachamama controversies illustrate a contestation within the community of believers against a papal insistence to move toward an inculturated Catholic Church.

While the tree planting ceremony may have been an attempt to overcome colonizing mentalities of the Catholic Church, honor Amazonian Indigenous spiritualities, and strengthen the bonds of transnational solidarity, the reactions to the “Pachamama” statue also reveal crucial fault lines about the Catholic Church’s historical negotiation with religious difference, sexuality, and gender. In Tschugguel’s own words, the inclusion of Indigenous practices, with the encouragement and support of the Vatican, were perceived as an internal attack “by members of our own [Roman Catholic] Church.” For many, the visibility of Amazonian-Catholic inculturation in Vatican City had gone beyond the bounds of what could be justified as truly Catholic, and this young activist from Austria had heroically reasserted a religious boundary line that was unjustifiably crossed.

Idols and sexual morality have always been part of the conversation about the boundaries of Christian practice. Some of the earliest criteria for negotiating who was considered within the

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 59.

Christian fold is outlined in Acts 15: 19-21. Debates ensued during the early days after the death of Jesus about the inclusion of Gentiles and whether they were required to follow Jewish law. The negotiation of practices was brought to James, who asserted that people who wanted to be Christians only must “abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood.”

Heralded as a modern-day Jeremiah by many on Catholic Twitter feeds, Tschugguel was praised for his moral imperative to act by a global community of Catholics offended by the statue’s presence and use within the Synod. In interviews, Tschugguel stated that his personal decision was easily deduced from the First Commandment.<sup>28</sup> Was inculturation affirming equality through difference, or was that difference disrupting a holy, catholic, and apostolic church?

Pope Francis’s calls for dialogue and inculturation to address religious differences struck some deeper nerve within the conservative Catholic psyche; the clear dichotomy of Christian and pagan, a trope that Catholic missionaries specifically were responsible for maintaining and negotiating, was disrupted by the Pope. Though he vaguely named the shadows of missionary work in the Amazon while addressing the impacts of colonization, the scripts of what constitutes “heathenry” echoed throughout the virtual sphere.

It is important to look deeper into the differences between inculturation and dialogue. Francis kept both inculturation and dialogue as modes of relating, and we can see how strategic

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<sup>28</sup> “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sins of the parents to the third and fourth generations of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.” Exodus 20: 2-6 (NIV).

this is. The difference between inculturation and dialogue hinges on a boundary line between assimilation and difference. According to Schreier, this means that anything that is to be considered Catholic inculturation must not disrupt ecclesial structures 1) dictated by bishops 2) that are within apostolic succession 3) that are properly celebrating the Eucharist. Integrating any cultural aspects within the structure of a universal religion is the goal of inculturation. But when is something deemed to be religion, and when is it deemed cultural? What about when attempts at inculturation disrupt some people's perceived borders of Catholic religious belonging?

In Pope Francis's deployment, dialogue maintains Catholic borders by placing discords with doctrine outside the boundary lines of Catholic belonging. For Francis's method, dialogue maintains absolute differences; though framed as a friendly mode of relating in a respectful way, the alterity of dialogue offers a pressure release valve for modes that may disrupt the limits of Catholic belonging. We can see this is also the case with Church documents like "Male and Female He Created Them" which begins by calling for dialogue in educational institutions with people who have differing views on gender and sexuality.<sup>29</sup> The document proceeds to firmly lay the stakes Catholic belonging on adherence to official sex and gender norms. These norms will be discussed in the next section more explicitly.

Though inculturation and dialogue can be deployed in differing ways regarding belonging, solidarity opens broader avenues for collaboration and action toward justice. In *Querida Amazonia*, Pope Francis used criteria from Pope John Paul II and his understanding of a globalization without marginalization. In the address of the Holy Father to the Pontifical

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<sup>29</sup> Congregation for Catholic Education, "Male and Female He Created Them": Towards a Path of Dialogue on the Question of Gender Theory in Education" (Vatican City, 2019), [http://www.educatio.va/content/dam/cec/Documenti/19\\_0997\\_INGLESE.pdf](http://www.educatio.va/content/dam/cec/Documenti/19_0997_INGLESE.pdf).

Academy of Social Sciences in April 2001, John Paul II outlined some of the most important principles for assessing the ethics of globalization. Central to this assessment was the “inalienable value of the human person,” which included being seen as both “an end and not a means” as well as “a subject and not an object, nor a commodity of trade.” Following these criteria of human value is the “value of human cultures, which no external power has the right to downplay.” This involved respect for diversity and, specifically, John Paul II was concerned about religious freedom, saying that globalization “must not deprive the poor of what remains most precious to them, including their religious beliefs and practices.” According to John Paul II, “genuine religious convictions are the clearest manifestation of human freedom.”<sup>30</sup> But how do we compare these values of human dignity and religious freedom to the historical facts of chattel slavery, genocide, and forced conversion during colonial encounters? In particular, how does religious belonging impact these histories?

Queer decolonial feminists might qualify Pope Francis’s call for overcoming colonizing mentalities and building a globalization without marginalization in these ways: colonizing mentalities cannot be overcome *without* an analysis of the naturalization of gender, and what we call globalization is *already* a reiteration of colonial power structures built off of marginalization. Nelson Maldonado Torres argues that we need to look at the “entanglement” and transition from systems of power that defined people based on religion toward systems of power that defined people based on racial categories. Maldonado Torres argues that the category of “no religion” was central to the understanding of this transition because of the way that it determined some

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<sup>30</sup> John Paul II, “To the 4th Plenary Session of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences,” Vatican website, April 23, 1998, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1998/april/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_19980423\\_ciencias-sociais.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1998/april/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19980423_ciencias-sociais.html), para. 4.



people as lacking religion and, thus, as being less human. Maldonado-Torres looks to conquistadors and theologians classifying Indigenous people as "having no religion" as an important touchpoint between the religious identities like Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and pagan and the racial categories of white, Black, Indigenous, and mestizo. As we will explore in the next section and following chapters, gender and religion are racialized—or, rather, definitions of sex, gender, and religion are also impacted by racism.

### **Anibal Quijano, María Lugones, and the Coloniality of Power**

I find Anibal Quijano's analysis of the lingering structures of colonialism helpful for this project. Quijano traces the defining characteristics of what is today called globalization back to the colonial encounter. Specifically, Quijano claims that a new power structure emerged in the 1500's driven by capital gained through production for global markets. The "coloniality of power" is the name that he gives for the structures put in place through colonization but that continue up until today as globalization.

Quijano's Marxist analysis of labor focused on the creation of capital. Production for a global market is dependent on racism because race is what determines someone's place in the production line, a criterion that Quijano claims continues with global capitalism. Authority is connected to the notion of a sovereign nation state, which is explicitly connected to the labor structure that relies on ownership of private property to produce capital. The centrality of the nation state led to postcolonial struggles for autonomy, usually earned through a process of democratizing an entire group of people based on some notion of similarity. Intersubjectivity is also defined by Eurocentrism, a privileging of progress, rationality, and European standards as the most evolved or, even, as an end point for "development."

Quijano claims that “America” is the first emergent identity of modernity, an identity based on a newly named geographical area. The creation of this identity is shortly followed by another new geographical area, “Europe,” which will ultimately usher in a new era of what he defines as “Eurocentrism.” Eurocentrism is not the privileging of *all* ways of knowing found within this one geographical region; it is a privileging of one particular form of knowing, one that is heavily focused around the concept of rationality and the notion of progress forward through linear time.<sup>31</sup>

Overcoming colonizing mentalities would seem to engage and dismantle this way of knowing. But built into this way of knowing was a structure that justified superiority. Something new emerges that obscures the conditions that created relationships of dominance and subservience; Quijano claims that previous rulers throughout the world had won power through force as well, but what was particularly different in this situation was the use of a new concept, “race,” that attempted to make relationships of dominance and subordination seem natural and inevitable due to inherent biological differences. These biological differences were a fiction, a construction of a new system that ranked people into categories that reduced the land to “natural resources,” people labeled Black to slaves, people labeled Indian to serfs, and people labeled as white to wage earners. But this fiction justified a new world order and radically altered what Quijano claims are four central aspects of the coloniality of power: labor, sex, authority, and intersubjectivity.

Quijano’s work highlights the restructuring of the categories of labor, sex, authority, and intersubjectivity. However, decolonial feminists interrogated the ways that Quijano’s analysis of

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<sup>31</sup> Anibal Quijano, “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America,” trans. Michael Ennis, *Nepantla: Views from South* 1, no. 3 (2000): 533–80.

sex and gender may be expanded. They claimed it was important to not naturalize the discrimination and oppression that was linked to the colonial mindset that restructured living conditions. If race was a biological fiction used to naturalize oppression, gender needed to be questioned as well. The intersection of race and gender is specifically important.

In 2007, María Lugones published an article titled “Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System.” Lugones took up Quijano’s analysis of the power structures established in the earliest days of colonialism that continue to have influence today. However, she added her own reading that focused on the invention of a particular concept of gender that particularly harmed women who were colonized. “Gender itself,” Lugones said, “is a colonial introduction...used to destroy peoples, cosmologies, and communities as the building ground of the civilized West.”<sup>32</sup> Lugones claimed that we cannot understand our current global capitalist system, and the harms that come from it, without an analysis of this colonial/modern gender system.

This is important to address, especially as we look to the intersection of Christian theology, the process of colonization, and the ensuing cross-cultural encounters where sex and gender norms that differed from Christian interpretations were sometimes used to justify oppression, slavery, and genocide. I would like to explore this in greater detail, particularly because of the Catholic Church’s historical involvement in multiple forms of colonization.

For example, theologians and conquistadors worked in tandem, using charges of “sodomy” and “idolatry” to justify murder, coercion, and exploitation of people and the land. Chaplain to the Spanish Empire Juan Ginés Sepúlveda wrote in 1547 that “[w]ar against these

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<sup>32</sup> María Lugones, “Heterosexualism and the Colonial / Modern Gender System,” *Hypatia* 22, no. 1 (2007): 186.

barbarians [sic] can be justified not only on the basis of their paganism but even more so because of their abominable licentiousness....”<sup>33</sup> After killing over 600 warriors, then encountering the brother of a king of Quarequa (presently known as Panama) and about 40 other men who were wearing women’s clothes, acting “lecherously” and abusing those with “preposterous venus,” (i.e. having gay sex), Balboa fed them to the dogs. Jonathan Goldberg writes that, rather than just claiming dominance and the desire to rule, the gendered aspects of the description “infuse[d] Balboa’s acts with moral purpose. It’s as if he [wa]s righting a wrong against the prerogative of gender.”<sup>34</sup>

Lugones’ work gives insights into how naturalized concepts of gender can be ideological in their own right, used to justify capitalist extraction, domination, and the erasure of multiple worldviews and social structures. Let’s start with Lugones’ claim that one specific view of gender, namely heterosexualism, was a colonial invention. According to Lugones’ definition, heterosexualism presupposes the existence of only two biological sexes. It structures sexuality as strictly procreative and heterosexual, meaning between a closed dyad of one biological man and one biological woman. It also carries with it the patriarchal assumption that men are dominant, both within hetero relationships and within society. Lugones shows that this structure is not inevitable by highlighting a variety of nonbinary Indigenous gender and sexuality practices that existed before colonization and the scientific evidence of intersex people born with chromosomes that extend beyond the XX/XY binary. Lugones would point out that binary heterosexualism is actually erasing very significant differences. When combined with another

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<sup>33</sup> Sara McNeil and Steve Mintz, “Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda (1547),” in *Digital History*, 2018, [https://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/active\\_learning/explorations/spain/spain\\_sepulveda.cfm](https://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/active_learning/explorations/spain/spain_sepulveda.cfm).

<sup>34</sup> Jonathan Goldberg, “Sodomy in the New World: Anthropologies Old and New,” *Social Text* 29 (1991): 29.

colonial invention, racism, this gender system actually produced *many* genders, since norms for colonizers were different than those who were colonized. Combined with the dehumanization of racism, Black and Indigenous women were considered female, yet not fully human.

Lugones also reflects on solidarity, but her emphasis is on the ways that both liberationist men and white women break bonds of solidarity with women of color by failing to acknowledge the intersection of race and gender. Lugones claims that Quijano's project, while trying to name the ways that racism gets naturalized in order for the coloniality of power to function, actually ends up naturalizing gender relations as inevitably heterosexual, patriarchal, and confined to the gender binary of male and female. According to Lugones, this obscures the reality of violence against Indigenous people who did not conform to dominant Eurocentric standards. Quijano's critique doesn't address the violent obliteration of ways of being beyond male-female gender dyads that were commonly held in many Indigenous groups in the Americas. Quijano's analysis also ignores the ways that gender was racialized, since Black, Indigenous, and other women of color in the Americas were not even truly considered "women" in the same ways that white women were.

As I have mentioned in Chapter One, Lugones talks about the light and dark sides of the colonial/modern gender system. Regarding gender, the light side of the colonial/modern gender system focuses on the oppression of white bourgeois women who were expected to enact a passive, fragile femininity that justified white men's dominance. Lugones identifies the light side of this system as the main point of analysis for the white feminist movement, importantly highlighting the ways that this definition of gendered oppression was assumed to unite all women in a "sisterhood" of shared experience. The dark side of the colonial/modern gender system highlights the experiences of Black, Indigenous, and other women of color being

considered “female” without having access to “femininity.” A gender analysis must come along with a racial analysis, otherwise these painful experiences would be ignored. Finally, Lugones points to the ways that Black, Indigenous, and other men of color colluded with the heteropatriarchal definition that was not previously the norm, creating barriers to solidarity between men and women who were racialized in the same way. It is important to add that these conceptions also erase solidarity with people who exist beyond the sex and gender binary.

Lugones gives biological and cultural examples to break through what she calls “the *mythical presentation of these elements as metaphysically prior*,” something that “is an important aspect of the cognitive model of Eurocentered, global capitalism” (emphasis added).<sup>35</sup> Lugones notes the multiplicity of biological sex, highlighting that between 1 and 4 percent of the global population is intersex, or born with chromosomes that go beyond XX and XY. Lugones’ identifies heterosexualism as something that was often imposed by colonizers onto many diverse modes of living, specifically giving examples from Indigenous groups in the Americas that predated this imposition. For example, Lugones consults sociological and anthropological research to claim that 150 North American societies recognized a third gender beyond just man or woman.<sup>36</sup> What today would be called gay and lesbian relationships were documented in 88 Indigenous nations. Though this practice was looked down upon in some circles, 36 of the 88 saw it in positive terms.<sup>37</sup> Sometimes this sexual expression was connected to sacred religious practices, like ritualized sodomy in Maya, Nahua, and Andean societies.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> María Lugones, “Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System,” 190.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

She also showed how patriarchy was not an inevitable structure universal to all societies. Far from gender determining domination or subordination, Lugones notes that the Susquehanna, Huron, Iroquois, Cherokee, Pueblo, Navajo, and Coastal Algonquians were gynocratic societies, a term Paula Allen Gunn used to define matriarchal democracies.<sup>39</sup> Allen outlines four steps that were necessary for converting gynocratic societies into patriarchal ones, with the first step requiring the revision of women-centered creation stories toward singular male figureheads. The last step requires replacing the broader social connections of clans with the (patriarchal and heterosexual) nuclear family, the ultimate blow after losing political sovereignty, connection to sacred practices, and being displaced from the land.<sup>40</sup> At times, missionaries ignorantly projected their own assumptions onto gynocratic structures, disappearing these modes of social organization by assuming heterosexism. Other times, the systematic erasure of cultures was applied by missionaries with force. Regardless, Allen and Lugones both note how cosmologies and spiritual practices have a strong impact on social structures.

I don't cite these examples to prove that all Indigenous cultures were free from all elements of heterosexuality. I also don't want to erase complexities of difference amongst Indigenous nations. For example, Harlan Pruden and Se-ah-dom Edmo claim that Two Spirit is more about gender analysis than sexual orientation.<sup>41</sup> They emphasize that the term Two Spirit was invented in 1990 by LGBT Natives to replace the language of "berdache." This word also

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<sup>39</sup> Paula Gunn Allen, *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions*, 2nd ed. edition (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992).

<sup>40</sup> Allen, *The Sacred Hoop*, 41; Lugones, "Heterosexuality and the Colonial / Modern Gender System," 199.

<sup>41</sup> Harlan Pruden and Se-ah-dom Edmo, "Two-Spirit People: Sex, Gender, and Sexuality in Historic and Contemporary Native America" (PowerPoint, Northeast Two-Spirit Society, National Congress of American Indians, November 1, 2012), [https://www.ncai.org/policy-research-center/initiatives/Pruden-Edmo\\_TwoSpiritPeople.pdf](https://www.ncai.org/policy-research-center/initiatives/Pruden-Edmo_TwoSpiritPeople.pdf).

comes from colonial times and was used in Spain and France, perhaps as a borrowed term from Arabic, to refer to a boy slave who had sex with men. Looking into Pruden and Edmos' compilation of loose translations of Indigenous terms before colonization shows some Two Spirit definitions as laudatory, such as the Potawatomi word M'netokwe, loosely translated as "supernatural, extraordinary." Many seem to be quite neutral descriptors, such as the Ojibwe term Agokwa, "man-woman" or Okitcitakwe, "warrior woman." There are some that have a negative connotation as well, such as the Tlingit and Yuma terms that are loosely translated as "coward."<sup>42</sup>

I am also not arguing that heterosexualism is the only view of gender that ever existed in Europe. To give just one example, research into colonial Spanish court trials showed that people in Spain held the belief that people's bodies could shift from male genitalia to female genitalia due to changes in heat. Rebecca Mason claims that ideas of this ability to shift gender held sway in Spain up until the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>43</sup> Thomas Laqueur notes that even Aristotle, who was adamant about the existence of two sexes, claimed that "the distinguishing characteristic of maleness was immaterial."<sup>44</sup> Laqueur claims that because Aristotle was a naturalist, he "chipped away at the organic distinctions between the sexes so that what emerges is an account in which one flesh could be ranked, ordered, and distinguished as particular circumstances required."<sup>45</sup> Thus, the Eurocentrism that Lugones critiques is not a natural category for all people who are in the

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<sup>42</sup> Pruden and Edmo, "Two Spirit People."

<sup>43</sup> Rebecca M. Mason, "Medicine, Gender and Sex in Early Modern Spain: Eleno/a de Céspedes and the One-Sex Model," *EHumanista* 37 (2017): 358–59.

<sup>44</sup> Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*, Revised ed. edition (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 28.

<sup>45</sup> Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 28.



geographical area of Europe. What she offers is a denaturalization of certain formations of sex and gender that arose in the 15<sup>th</sup> century along with new concepts of private property, governance structures, and economic gain. The restructuring of land ownership, capitalism, state sovereignty, and sex and gender norms impacted the most marginalized in Europe *and* the Americas, as we will see in Chapter Three.

### **Claims of Gendered Ideological Colonization**

Investigating Lugones' claim is more interesting when compared to comments Pope Francis made about the harm that comes from the Western imposition of certain sex and gender norms on countries with long histories of colonization. Pope Francis claimed that so-called "gender theory," an ambiguous term but one that most likely refers to the body of knowledge built by feminist and queer theorists, is a form of "ideological colonization" being forced onto Catholics by "Western" secular organizations. According to Francis, "gender theory" is a prime example of "ideological colonization" because it was a totalitarian imposition being forced onto Catholics by secular development projects. However, foregrounding the abovementioned diversity of cultural, religious, and biological differences blotted out by the gender ideology of heterosexualism complicates Pope Francis's critique of gender theory as a homogenizing form of ideological colonization.

In an interview after his trip to Sri Lanka and the Philippines in 2015, he shared a story about one minister of education who was trying to build schools for low-income communities in the Philippines. However, she could only secure funding from one donor if she promised to include "gender theory" in the curriculum. Though she was a high-ranking official who had been organizing for educational access for at least 20 years, Pope Francis referred to this woman as "clever" for accepting the conditions of the funding while lamenting the forced situation.

According to Francis, many African Bishops reported similar instances during the Synod on the pastoral care of the family in 2014.

Francis went so far as to compare this form of “ideological colonization” to the propaganda of dictators from the past century. Because of the connection to children’s education, he even drew a comparison to fascist groups that targeted young people with totalitarian ideologies, like Italy’s National Balilla Organization and the Hitler Youth. Gender theory was an example of an ideology being “enforced from above” and intended to homogenize a large mass of people in a way that threatened cultural and religious diversity. “Each people has its own culture, its own history...But when conditions are imposed by colonizing empires, they seek to make these peoples lose their own identity and create uniformity.”<sup>46</sup> By calling for a form of globalization that rejects authoritarian regimes of knowledge, Pope Francis advocated for a pluralistic “polyhedron” approach so that “every people, every part, conserves its own identity without being ideologically colonized.”<sup>47</sup>

I agree that hegemonic definitions of gender that are enforced from above and blot out a multiplicity of diverse expressions should be taken seriously. Similar concerns have been voiced within queer theories, worrying that “queer” discourses disseminated from the US academy could dominate or erase a multiplicity of forms of sexuality and gender expression that have arisen from other countries and contexts. The way that the word “queer” often is not translated

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<sup>46</sup> Pope Francis, “Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Pope Francis to Sri Lanka and the Philippines,” In-Flight Press Conference of his Holiness Pope Francis from the Philippines to Rome (Vatican Website, January 19, 2015), [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/january/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150119\\_srilanka-philippine-conferenza-stampa.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/january/documents/papa-francesco_20150119_srilanka-philippine-conferenza-stampa.html).

<sup>47</sup> Alan Holdren, “Pope Francis Warns West Over ‘Ideological Colonization,’” National Catholic Register, January 20, 2015, <https://www.ncregister.com/news/pope-francis-warns-west-over-ideological-colonization>.

from English points to such concerns regarding linguistic dominance.<sup>48</sup> Indigenous scholars from North America and the Pacific have also challenged queer theorists to take up decolonial frameworks when critiquing systems of power. It is an issue of global injustice when queer histories get narrated in ways that erase the presence of a variety of non-heterosexual and non-binary practices. Multiple histories of resistance to the colonial ideology of heterosexualism existed for *centuries* before current iterations of LGBTQI+ activism.<sup>49</sup> This worry is not limited to academic discourse either. Feminist and queer agendas are met with suspicion due to a perceived proximity with neoliberal market capitalism and a seeming incompatibility with religion. LGBTQI+ activists in many countries experience pushback from people that see queer and feminist activism as inseparable from US imperialism, claiming that aligning with gender theories promotes consumerist globalization at the expense of national sovereignty.<sup>50</sup>

However, critiquing Pope Francis's understanding of ideological colonization through the work of María Lugones exposes the actual threat of death that accompanies naturalized concepts of gender. These two Argentinian thinkers are diametrically opposed in their interpretation of how gender ideologies function, even if their explicitly stated goals regarding colonial legacies, pluralism, and epistemic justice are quite similar. Both critique current global capitalist systems and the destruction it entails. Both decry the colonial imposition of certain gender norms upon

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<sup>48</sup> For more, see Pedro Paulo Gomes Pereira, "Reflecting on Decolonial Queer," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 25, no. 3 (June 1, 2019): 403–29, <https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-7551112>; Arnaldo Cruz-Malave and Martin Manalansan, *Queer Globalizations: Citizenship and the Afterlife of Colonialism* (New York: NYU Press, 2002), <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/7503>.

<sup>49</sup> This is one of the main concerns highlighted throughout the book edited by Driskill et al., *Queer Indigenous Studies*.

<sup>50</sup> While presenting a version of this research at the Simposio Internacional de Teorías y Teologías Queer in Costa Rica, Nadia Arellano spoke in the Q&A about the organizing experiences the queer feminist organization Soulforce has had with local activists in Cuba, where many people understood the term "queer" to be synonymous with capitalist overtake by the United States.

diverse cultures. They both warn of cultural destruction and systemic domination and urge for the preservation of multiple cultural viewpoints and practices. Though Lugones and Pope Francis share these concerns, they have opposite definitions about which gender norms are dominating and which gender norms are being dominated. I think that Pope Francis's secular modern starting point for this analysis of gender ideology obscures Catholic culpability in earlier processes of "ideological colonization," even as Francis openly attempts to reckon with this history of colonization.

Whereas Pope Francis frames gender ideology as a problem intensified by hegemonic globalization that threatens localized cultural values of the heterosexual family, María Lugones sees heterosexualism itself as a gender ideology that was essential to the process of colonization beginning in the 15th century conquest of the Americas. This is especially important when exploring the ways that the term "gender ideology" has been weaponized in the past 30 years by political and religious actors against people whose very existence may challenge just how natural certain gender norms claim to be.

### The Vatican Defining "Gender Ideology"

In order to look at how gender theory could be considered a form of ideological colonization, it is important to understand how the Roman Catholic Church sees gender theory and gender ideology as interchangeable. In its etymological roots, the word ideology connotes a study of the genesis of ideas. It appears that the Vatican is also highly concerned with ideas about gender and sexuality—couldn't these ideas also be considered a form of gender theory? To understand Pope Francis's use of the term, I suggest examining the distinction that the institutional Catholic Church relies upon between a natural, God-given version of gender that is universal across cultures and metaphysically prior versus modern inventions of gender

ideologies. A deeper understanding of why Francis defines gender theory as the erasure of sexual and gendered differences is helpful when he points to other differences being erased by ideological colonization.

In his commentary about gender theory and ideological colonization, Pope Francis alludes to official Roman Catholic stances upheld by the magisterium about gender while voicing concern about colonization erasing differences. Pope John Paul II and Benedict XVI especially shifted the focus of Catholic Social Teaching away from concerns of *economy* toward concerns of *anthropology* that strictly defined the human subject through binary sexual differentiation.<sup>51</sup> Combining the theology of Thomas Aquinas and a reading of Genesis 1:26-28, they emphasized that the unity of body and soul means that gender is binary *and* ontological, and thus essential to what it means to be human. In this view, men and women, though different, are created equally and reflect the image of God in these sexed differences, usually expressed as women's natural capacity for motherhood and domesticity and nurturing with men's natural capacity for leadership and protection. Sexuality is a gift from God only properly expressed through procreative sex within the bonds of marriage within this sexual dyad. In this view, those who deny this natural order participate in the hubris of modernity and neoliberal individualism.<sup>52</sup>

Pope Francis quotes himself often in Church documents, characterizing gender theory as something that “seeks to cancel out sexual difference because it no longer knows how to

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<sup>51</sup> Sara Garbagnoli, “Against the Heresy of Immanence: Vatican’s ‘Gender’ as a New Rhetorical Device Against the Denaturalization of the Sexual Order,” *Religion & Gender* 6, no. 2 (2016): 187–204.

<sup>52</sup> Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, encyclical letter, Vatican website, July 25, 1968, [https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_enc\\_25071968\\_humanae-vitae.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_25071968_humanae-vitae.html); John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, encyclical letter, Vatican website, March 25, 1995, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_25031995\\_evangelium-vitae.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae.html); Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, encyclical letter, Vatican website, June 29, 2009, [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_enc\\_20090629\\_caritas-in-veritate.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html).

confront it.”<sup>53</sup> According to their own teachings, the Roman Catholic Church’s understanding of sex and gender is just a reflection of *nature*. Only theories claiming that sex and gender norms are socially constructed are considered ideological because they denaturalize this God-given social order.

Today, the term “gender ideology” functions as a vague but highly flexible transnational discourse, especially used to politically mobilize groups that oppose same-sex marriage, transgender existence, LGBTQ2IA+ rights, and gender-inclusive curriculum in schools.<sup>54</sup> This interchangeable understanding of “gender theory” and “gender ideology” is now used by many Christian religious denominations and right-wing politicians around the world. However, if we look at the history of this term just within the past century, some trace the invention of this term “gender ideology” back to the Vatican itself. In response to the United Nations declarations in the 1990’s that focused on gender equality, sexuality, and human rights, the Roman Catholic institutional Church launched a series of campaigns that depicted heterosexual families as under attack in order to protect a metaphysical and ontological understanding of the correlation of biological sex to divinely ordained gender roles.<sup>55</sup> Some claim that this extreme focus on binary sex and gender began post-World War II, since the word complementarity isn’t found in any earlier Church documents.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Francis, “Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Pope Francis to Sri Lanka and the Philippines,” press conference, Vatican website, January 19, 2015.

<sup>54</sup> Rogério Diniz Junqueira, “A Invenção Da ‘Ideologia de Gênero’: A Emergência de Um Cenário Político-Discursivo e a Elaboração de Uma Retórica Reacionária Antigênero,” *Revista Psicologia Política* 18, no. 43 (2018); Garbagnoli, “Against the Heresy of Immanence.”

<sup>55</sup> Garbagnoli, “Against the Heresy of Immanence.”

<sup>56</sup> Mary Case, “The Role of the Popes in the Invention of Complementarity and the Vatican’s Anathematization of Gender,” *Religion and Gender* 6 (March 29, 2016): 155.

Francis's concerns about gender theory and educational curriculum dovetail with his concerns about colonization. Francis decries forms of globalization that allow economic interests to destroy traditional cultures all over the world and warns of the dangers of certain views of gender being enforced from above as a system that wipes out differences. Interestingly, María Lugones would agree that economic interests have dictated certain ideological formations of gender that have obliterated a diversity of cultural practices. She would agree that sexual difference is deeply connected to definitions of who counts as a human subject. How might an analysis of gender ideology change if the starting point is the beginnings of colonization starting in the Americas during the 15<sup>th</sup> century, a process to which the institutional Roman Catholic Church has much closer proximity?

Against the magisterial claim that "gender theory" cancels biological differences between men and women, Lugones points out that the gender ideology of heterosexualism erases *multiple* significant differences. Though heterosexual patriarchy contorted all female bodies into relationships of domination, colonized women fell outside bourgeois definitions of femininity that cast women as frail, chaste, and in need of protection. Lugones agrees that gender is constitutive of human anthropology within this system, but racialized gender ideologies legitimized violence like rape, murder, and enslavement for people deemed subhuman.<sup>57</sup>

Lugones exposes the ways that heteropatriarchy was socially constructed and systematically enforced onto a wide variety of other ways of being, ultimately erasing a variety of religious practices because of their incompatibility with the gender ideology of heterosexualism. Lugones gives these examples to break through what she calls "the mythical

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<sup>57</sup> María Lugones, "Heterosexualism and the Colonial / Modern Gender System," 203.

presentation of these elements as metaphysically prior.” Rather than biological sex dictating the existence of two genders universally across time, the interlocking inventions of racism and gender justified splitting humans into hierarchies of worth. This system of thinking of gender, in Lugones’ view, reinforces cognitive domination and an exploitative economic system. Lugones illustrates how alternative social structures of human relationships were intentionally placed under an ahistorical ideology of omnipresent heterosexualism and heteropatriarchal domination, deployed between two binary sex/gender options. Gender ideology is not a new phenomenon emerging from the logic of capitalist globalized modernity; heterosexualism itself is a gender ideology that was crucial for validating the structures of colonial domination that still undergird our current global order.

### **Conclusion**

As the first Pope from Latin America, Francis makes the point to address the history and harm of colonialism, asking forgiveness for the ways that the Catholic Church was complicit in the conquest of the Americas beginning in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. However, Francis still reinforces the myth of a particular form of heterosexualism as metaphysically prior. Though he touches on specifically gendered impacts of globalization, his own ideals would be better supported with a historicized analysis of the intersection of racism and gender.

In *Querida Amazonia*, Francis criticizes the effects of corporate greed that deny worker’s rights, destroy the land, deny Indigenous people their land rights and dignity, and specifically harm women. The exhortation focuses on the inextricable link between environmental destruction, corporate greed, and the dehumanization of Indigenous, Afro-Latino, and displaced communities. After firmly labeling the reckless behavior of national and international businesses in the Amazon Basin as injustice and crime, he turns to the violations of human rights that stem



from these practices: manipulative working conditions, drug trafficking that destroys Indigenous communities, human trafficking, and “new forms of slavery impacting women particularly.”

With a powerful end to this paragraph, Francis quotes Pope John Paul II saying “we cannot allow globalization to become “a new version of colonialism.”<sup>58</sup> He ends the paragraph with a quote from John Paul II who proposed criteria for this form of development: “The challenge, in short, is to ensure a globalization in solidarity, a globalization without marginalization.”<sup>59</sup>

However, queer decolonial feminists might qualify both of these statements: colonizing mentalities cannot be overcome *without* an analysis of the naturalization of gender, and what we call globalization is *already* a reiteration of colonial power structures built off of marginalization. Let’s revisit one example, namely Pope Francis’s concerns about “new forms of slavery impacting women particularly” in the Amazon Basin. Pope Francis has analyzed the legacies of colonialism without acknowledging the way that gender is shaped by the racial categories and the reorganization of society that created profit at the expense of the lives of Black and Indigenous human beings. He decries racism and modern-day forms of slavery like sex trafficking and human trafficking while leaving the logics of the gender binary and heterosexual relationships unquestioned. Thus, this analysis is greatly lacking and would benefit from Lugones’ intersectional lens. This magisterial view of gender erases experiences of dehumanization connected to racialized heterosexualism.

According to Pope John Paul II, an ethical globalization would require forms of solidarity that secure each person’s full humanity and a diversity of religious practices and beliefs. All

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<sup>58</sup> Francis, ‘*Querida Amazonia*’, para. 14.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 17.

human beings should be treated as subjects, and not objects to be used or sold. If we take Pope John Paul II's criteria for the ethical assessment of globalization, as Francis does, then we will see that this intersection of gender and race and the resulting violence is crucial.

But who gets to be a subject? Who gets to have a religion? Whose religious practices and beliefs are respected as the ultimate expression of freedom, and whose are deemed as an abomination against God's created order? If the Roman Catholic Church is concerned about preserving cultural diversity, and religious freedom in particular, then highlighting the ways that non-binary gender and non-heterosexual expressions were often central, and even sacred to some Indigenous communities, puts the Catholic Church's history at odds with its own criteria for an ethics of globalization.

The anthropological subject of Catholic Social Teaching would also have to change significantly if the starting point of the analysis of modernity shifted from 18<sup>th</sup> century European modernity to the beginnings of colonialism in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Melissa Pagán critiques the anthropological subject of Catholic Social Teaching through a close reading of Pope Francis's *Laudato Si'*. In Pagán's view, integral ecology correctly frames the inextricable connection between land and marginalized people. However, it doesn't question the notion of subjectivity that was built from biological dimorphism and extractivist practices.<sup>60</sup> Shifting the starting point of gender ideologies from a globalizing modernity to the beginnings of colonialism can offer important insights for any analysis that may reinforce heterosexualism as something ahistorical or universal.

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<sup>60</sup> Melissa Pagán, "Cultivating a Decolonial Feminist Integral Ecology: Extractive Zones and the Nexus of the Coloniality of Being/Coloniality of Gender," *Journal of Hispanic / Latino Theology* 22, no. 1 (June 5, 2020): 72.

These insights have implications for who is even considered human. I add that these also have implications for whose religion is recognized as a religion within the Roman Catholic ethical principles for globalization. There are significant changes depending on how and when we locate the origins of modernity and gender ideology to diagnose issues of global injustice. Shifting this starting point of when and where gender ideology begins would have serious implications for truly securing a globalization in solidarity and not marginalization. Rather than threatening human subjectivity, incorporating queer and decolonial insights might *broaden* the scope of the Church's principle that values the dignity of each human person.

The next chapter will go back in history to the 1530s to explore the roots of these systems of colonial power that still show traces today. If this is how the negotiations of religious belonging, racism, authority, labor, sex, and intersubjectivity continue to play out, then an analysis of the formulations of these structures will show us important insights concerning the enduring legacies of certain lines of thought. If Pope Francis wants to urge Catholics to overcome colonizing mentalities, then a deeper analysis of the ways that theological arguments were also used for colonizing ends becomes all the more important.

## CHAPTER THREE

### FRANCISCO DE VITORIA, NATURAL LAW, AND RATIONALITY

During the earliest days of colonization, Catholic theologians saw natural law as a viable theory for ethical reasoning across cultural and religious differences. I will look to the works of Francisco de Vitoria as an exemplary figure of a colonial political theological ethics based in natural law. Vitoria's work is instructive for this project because it was a Catholic theoretical contribution for the origins of a human rights framework as well as the earliest ethnographic research that led to fields like religious studies and comparative theology. Vitoria makes important theological and ethical contributions: he argued for the full humanity of Indigenous people and their inherent human dignity due to their God-given capacity for rationality, he challenged the Doctrine of Discovery and defended Indigenous land rights, and he denied that it was justifiable to wage war against Indigenous people based on their different religious practices and sexual norms. However, delving further into Vitoria's approach highlights the inextricable connection between epistemology and ethics and the danger of equating the principles of Christian faith with reason.

This chapter uses a close reading of Francisco de Vitoria's *De Indis* (1539) to examine the connections between epistemology and ethics during 16<sup>th</sup> century colonial encounters between European missionaries and Indigenous people in the Americas. While the previous chapter addressed current discussions about conversion, inculturation, racialized religion and the economic order that exploits the earth and people most marginalized, this chapter rewinds to a

particular context where a newly emergent global world order is being challenged and reformulated by all actors in the encounter. Unsettling in these discussions is an important epistemological question that has serious ethical implications: who counted as human? For Catholics deeply shaped by natural law theory, rationality was a central criterion that distinguished animals from humans, determining whether someone had a soul, should have rights, or was able to be converted into the Christian tradition. Vitoria provides a case study for the ways that theological ethicists engaged in political and spiritual negotiations of rationality, rights, and religious and sexual difference in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

### Between Two Laws: Nepantla and Natural Law

Figure 2. From the 1611 Arenas dictionary, a hieroglyphic for the Náhuatl term "nepantla," comprised of the syllables for a female doll (pictured below, syllable ne), flag (pictured middle, syllable pan), and teeth (pictured above, syllable tla).<sup>1</sup>



In 1579, Dominican Friar Diego Durán recounted the story of meeting a Náhua man who had spent all his money on a wedding celebration for his entire community. They encountered each other after the man spent nights and days celebrating the marriage (“malas noches y peores días,” in Durán’s description). Though Durán moved to Mexico as a small child and was known to be fluent in the Indigenous language Náhuatl, he was introduced to a new usage of a term in this interaction. After reprimanding the man for what he perceived to be very sinful behavior, Durán wrote that the man said to him, “Padre, no te espantes, pues todavía estamos nepantla (Father, do not be afraid because we are still *nepantla*).” Durán knew that the term *nepantla* was used for describing being

<sup>1</sup> “Gran Diccionario Náhuatl” (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2012), <http://www.gdn.unam.mx/contexto/11114>.

“in the middle,” but he asked for a clarification: just what was this middle space that he was claiming to inhabit? The man responded that they were in between two laws, “que ni bien acudían a la una ley, ni la otra...”. They were not yet well-rooted in the (Catholic) faith, but they still believed in the Christian God; they just *also* practiced their own rites and customs. Thus, since they had not chosen one set of laws over the other, the man argued that his actions were still ethically neutral.<sup>2</sup>

We do not know the name of this person that Diego Durán encountered, but here we have a written record of pluralistic ethical reasoning from a Náhua man perceiving himself to be caught in between two “laws”—Christian religiosity and Náhua rites and customs. Durán’s concerns about idolatry and some form of sensual excess (though the exact nature of this enjoyment was not named) were commonplace for missionaries during this time. Catholic theologians were often concerned with “idolatry” and “sodomy” as markers that set Indigenous people apart from Christian norms. The Náhua man, fluent in both Spanish and Náhua, not only felt a sense of “in between-ness” when confronted by the missionary’s disapproval of the wedding celebration. He was also attempting to explain his different set of guiding values, ones that, from his point of view, could coexist side by side, at least while they were in this space of transition.

Did Catholic theologians also perceive themselves to be in between two laws? Even though Durán was criticized by other Catholics for being overly sympathetic toward Náhua customs, the friar found the man’s reasoning about nepantla to be an “abominable excuse” for

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<sup>2</sup>“Gran Diccionario Náhuatl.”

still practicing “sus costumbres antiguas y ritos del demonio.”<sup>3</sup> Durán was a missionary who would be one of the first to compile in-depth codices about Náhua culture and rituals.

Frequently, Catholic priests were tasked with learning languages, describing customs, collecting creation narratives, and compiling texts that systematized Indigenous beliefs and practices. These codices would be read mostly by Catholic European readers who were either training as missionaries or curious to learn about the inhabitants of the so-called “New World.”

However, *conversion* was the explicit end goal of these encounters and compilations. While they may have observed non-Christian religions and engaged in inter-religious learning, the goal for missionaries was to convert people to the Catholic faith. Conversion, unlike being in *nepantla*, required a complete *crossing over* of a religious boundary line, from one side to the other. Even though someone who converts will maintain a certain level of fluency in their prior context, conversion comes with an acceptance of one law as superior over the other. In some cases, such as that of the Tlaxcalan people who formed a political alliance with Hernan Cortez’s armies to defeat the Mexica, conversion also came with additional benefits, such as protected land rights.

While they may have been in between shifting power constellations, religious customs, and cultures, many European Catholic theologians looked to the natural law, most prominently developed by Thomas Aquinas from the works of Aristotle, to understand a unifying theory that could be applicable across many different geographical locations and societal differences. A law (*lex*), as Thomas Aquinas explained, is that which binds (*ligare*) someone to act.<sup>4</sup> Interestingly,

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologiae*, trans. Fathers of English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Brothers), *New Advent*, 2017, I-II, q.90 art.1.

this is also the root of the word religion, with *religio* also originating from *ligare*. From a Catholic perspective, would it even be possible for someone to be bound by two different laws, with contradictory obligations toward different actions? Answering this question requires a much deeper look into the ways that 16<sup>th</sup> century theologians conceived of law and its relation to religion, gender, and sexuality. Vitoria's legacy is full of implications regarding colonialism, political economy, and religious differences, but a feminist and queer lens will show additional insights about the ways that gender intersects with these investigations.<sup>5</sup>

### Francisco De Vitoria

Francisco de Vitoria was a Dominican friar at the University of Salamanca a few decades after the beginnings of colonization. Born in 1485, most likely in Burgos, Spain, Vitoria's youth coincided with important historical events that would set the stage for his later career.

Christopher Columbus arrived in the Americas (1492), Pope Alexander VI granted the Castilian Crown the right to rule over all "non-Christian" lands through a papal bull called *Inter Caetera* (1493), and Queen Isabella died (1504) all before Vitoria decided to join the Dominican order in his early 20s.<sup>6</sup> Vitoria received theological training in Paris, eventually getting a position at the University of Salamanca in 1526.

While never crossing the ocean, Vitoria is known for his theological and political contributions to 16<sup>th</sup> century Catholic Spanish thought. One of his most famous works was *Relectio De Indis* (1539), where he defended the land rights of Indigenous people in the

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<sup>5</sup> From the description on the back of M. Jacqui Alexander's book *Pedagogies of Crossing*: "the need for North American feminism and queer studies to take up transnational frameworks that foreground questions of colonialism, political economy, and racial formation." See M. Jacqui Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*.

<sup>6</sup> Anthony Pagden, "Introduction," in *Vitoria: Political Writings*, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), xxx.



Americas using a combination of natural law reasoning and a revival of *ius gentium*, or the law of nations that originated in Roman law texts. Though theoretically influential, Vitoria thought of himself first and foremost as an educator. Educational reforms that Vitoria implemented for his students included replacing *Lombard's Sentences* with Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologicae*, as well as changing the lecture styles so that there was sufficient time given for students to write down what was being said. Without these two contributions, perhaps we would have never seen such a work as *De indis*. It drew heavily from Aquinas's understanding of the natural law, and what remains of Vitoria's works today are only the notes taken by his students, since he never officially published anything in his lifetime.

Vitoria's political and theological contributions were extremely influential, especially since he often trained missionaries before they set sail to current day Mexico, Guatemala, and Peru. Thus, his theoretical framework was foundational for many of the missionaries who were negotiating the blurry spaces between conversion and colonization. Vitoria's legacy established the group of thinkers known as the "School of Salamanca." This included theologians like Domingo De Soto (1494-1560), Francisco Suárez (1548-1617), and Luis de Molina (1535-1600) who became known for their creative combinations of scholasticism and humanism applied to pressing social concerns in the fields of economics, law, and ethics.<sup>7</sup> This school of thinkers left a serious political legacy while ushering in a new era of scholasticism during a time of significant political and religious upheaval.

If not in current methodology, then at least in genealogy, Vitoria's theoretical impact shaped some basic assumptions of pluralistic reasoning in theology and religious studies.

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<sup>7</sup> Pagden, xv.

Anthony Pagden claims that Vitoria's work also "provided much of the theoretical underpinning for an extensive body of ethnographical writings on the American Indians."<sup>8</sup> Some trace the academic roots of ethnographic religious research, as well as some form of proto-comparative theology, to endeavors like Durán's described in the beginning of this chapter. But Vitoria proposed his new application of natural law theory almost 40 years earlier than Durán, offering an alternative method for negotiating different ethical norms while still operating within a natural law framework. He actively argued against many scholars who would claim that idolatry or sodomy justified the use of force, dispossession of land, or even genocide for the Indigenous groups living in the Americas prior to the Spanish conquest.

### **Theologians: Justifying or Challenging Colonialism?**

A closer look at Vitoria's argumentation shows complexity in the role that Catholic theologians in positions of power played in the negotiation of this new colonial world order. At this period of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Church and State were both distinguishable from each other in Spain, though impossible to *completely* separate—no such distinction existed for the Nahuatl. In a very different way than the Nahuatl man quoted above, theologians were also negotiating a space in between shifting power constellations while looking for universal frameworks that could speak to the new realities of conquest.

Oftentimes Catholic missionaries and clerics were key actors in establishing or challenging the newly emergent material constellations of power, even if they saw their role as primarily spiritual. Theologians were confessors for the conquistadors, holding a level of moral power over those who may have been looking for absolution or guidance regarding their guilty

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., xxviii.

conscience over their methods of conquest. Missionaries trying to evangelize Indigenous communities were witnesses and accomplices to the death-dealing devastation caused by the emergent global order that led to murder, sexual violence, and forced labor of Indigenous people and people from West Africa sold into slavery. The model of the *encomienda* system restructured sex by separating Indigenous families from their broader kinship networks into nuclear family units. It also justified slave labor through a feudal logic of authority. Joseph Henrich notes that the restructuring of European kinship networks into nuclear families was facilitated over a period of 1,500 years by the Roman Catholic Church's ban on polygamy;<sup>9</sup> however, Indigenous families were expected to adapt to these changes at a far more rapid pace. In exchange for their labor, Indigenous people were offered protection and evangelization. The *encomienda* system became the site for restructuring notions of the self and morality through theological education and formation. While restructuring Indigenous life, the *encomienda* system also moved the priests together, making them more accountable to obeying their vows of celibacy, which they frequently broke while raping Indigenous women.<sup>10</sup>

Colonial practices that solidified during the first forty years of colonization were being heavily debated in Europe, especially since economic, political, and spiritual motivations were often intertwined. Theologians were in the position to document these earliest encounters, whether through firsthand experience, field work, or compilations of previously written accounts.<sup>11</sup> Some theologians, such as Vitoria and Juan Gines de Sepúlveda, speculated on the

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<sup>9</sup> Joseph Henrich, *The WEIRDest People in the World: How the West Became Psychologically Peculiar and Particularly Prosperous*, 2020, 159.

<sup>10</sup> Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven, Conn.; London: Yale University Press, 2011), 110.

<sup>11</sup> For example, the travel logs of Christopher Columbus were edited and compiled by Bartolomé de las Casas.

humanity and rationality of human beings they had never met before while sitting in their universities across the ocean. Theologians were educating soon-to-be missionaries, relying on narratives provided by other missionaries and conquistadors, such as the one Durán compiled.

There were also Catholics who condemned the brutality in the colonies. Bartolomé de Las Casas was a famous example of this. A former *encomendero* in Hispaniola who later became a Dominican monk, Las Casas spoke out against the exploitation and genocide that he witnessed against the enslaved Taíno people who forcibly worked his land. He moved beyond Hispaniola, becoming the bishop of Chiapas, and eventually also traveled to present-day Guatemala to evangelize and advocate for the Mayan people's rights. His activism within the Dominican order eventually led to the establishment of the New Laws in 1542. While these laws didn't significantly change the actual practices of colonization, Las Casas left a legacy of theologians speaking against injustices and influencing legal policies. Vitoria received much of his information about the current treatment of Indigenous peoples in the New World from his Dominican brother, las Casas.

There were also open apologists for colonizing practices, such as Juan de Quevedo, Gil Gregorio, and Bernardo de Mesa. In 1510, Scottish theologian John Mair used books I and II of Aristotle's *Politics* to claim that the people encountered in the Americas were "slaves by nature," claiming that Indigenous people were capable of following commands, but not capable of practical reasoning for themselves.<sup>12</sup> Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda would be known as one of the

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<sup>12</sup> Pagden, "Introduction," xxv. Miguel Romero claims that the category of natural slavery (*phusei doulon*) was a misinterpretation of both Aristotle and Aquinas that was provided by Scottish theologian John Mair. Romero claims that many theologians, including Bartolome de Las Casas, take this false equation of human dignity with one's ability to reason as a starting point, rather than Aquinas's claim that, regardless of one's actual capacity for reason, each human being is endowed with an inviolable sense of dignity that cannot be diminished. This argument is especially hinged on the idea that the human being is vulnerable. He also teases out Mair's conflation of Aristotle's concepts of the foreigner, the natural slave, and the civil slave. Miguel Romero, "Remembering 'Mindless' Persons:

biggest advocates of colonialism, debating against Bartolome de las Casas in the Valladolid debates of 1550. He also argued that Indigenous people were slaves by nature, using Natural Law to say that it was natural for certain people to rule over others, just as it is natural for men to have power over their wives and their children. In Sepúlveda's words,

The man rules over the woman, the adult over the child, the father over his children. That is to say, the most powerful and most perfect rule over the weakest and most imperfect. This same relationship exists among men, there being some who by nature are masters and others who by nature are slaves.<sup>13</sup>

Sepúlveda used natural law and divine law to try and justify the subordination of Indigenous peoples:

Those who surpass the rest in prudence and intelligence, although not in physical strength, are by nature the masters. On the other hand, those who are dim-witted and mentally lazy, although they may be physically strong enough to fulfill all the necessary tasks, are by nature slaves. It is just and useful that it be this way. We even see it sanctioned in divine law itself, for it is written in the Book of Proverbs: "He who is stupid will serve the wise man." And so it is with the barbarous and inhumane peoples [the Indians] who have no civil life and peaceful customs...It will always be just and in conformity with natural law that such people submit to the rule of more cultured and humane princes' and nations...Thanks to their virtues and the practical wisdom of their laws, the latter can destroy barbarism and educate these [inferior] people to a more humane and virtuous life.<sup>14</sup>

Whether Catholic theologians or missionaries were challenging or justifying particular colonial practices, they were always most concerned with converting as many people as possible. Regardless of their brutality or compassion, they were clerics, men of theological learning who saw themselves as called by God and responsible for proper educational instruction that would

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Intellectual Disability, Spanish Colonialism, and the Disappearance of a Medieval Account of Persons Who Lack the Use of Reason," in *Disability in Medieval Christian Philosophy and Theology*, ed. Scott M. Williams (New York: Routledge Press, 2020).

<sup>13</sup> Steve Mintz and Sara McNeil, "Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda (1547)."

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

save souls for the Christian faith. Both sides consulted the *same* ancient philosophers and medieval theologians, using the work of Aristotle and Aquinas to either justify or challenge aspects of the new circumstances of colonization.

### Internal Contestation and the Politics of Belonging

Leaning into the complexity of views that were held within Europe is important if we want to resist the ways that a European-centered approach can smooth over internal differences and contestations. This is important for discussing the scope of Eurocentric rationality, since focusing on Vitoria's time means that we are looking at Catholic Spain, a nation state newly formed through religious boundary policing. Though Catholic debates are foregrounded, events such as the Reformation, the peasant revolts and uprisings, the expulsion of Jews and Muslims from Spain, as well as centuries of Crusades are influential for assessing the parameters of colonization and conversion happening in both the Americas and Europe. Many were invested in narratives that would make Spain seem like the pinnacle of rationality, civilization, and Christendom. There were serious religious tensions within and outside the Catholic tradition that were challenging papal authority at Vitoria's time. Though Vitoria had ancestry from Jewish descent, this is not mentioned in his lectures.

During the colonial encounter, categories of otherness used by conquistadors and missionaries were derived from European proximity:

many of the conceptual frameworks that European colonisers applied to the Americas derived from their encounters with Muslims at home: they compared Native American religious sites to mezquitas (mosques), called the nomads of Central Mexico alarabs, and referred to the offspring of Portuguese fathers and indigenous mothers as mamelucos. The infamous Requirement (Requerimiento), a Spanish legal document offering indigenous populations the choice between conversion and conquest, was based on jihad as practised by Muslims in medieval Iberia. The tribute (tributo) the crown collected

overseas emulated the Islamic poll tax (jizya), also adapted by the Spanish from their Muslim predecessors on the peninsula.<sup>15</sup>

Violence in the name of religion was quite common in Europe during this time: between the peasant uprisings inspired by the Reformation, the legacies of the Crusades, and the expulsion of Jews and Muslims from Spain, missionaries were already coming with certain assumptions about internal contestation and religious difference. This was a time when Church authority was being questioned, not just about its scope in the Americas but also in Europe after these events.

Sodomy and idolatry were common charges against people in Europe as well, particularly Jews, Muslims, and women who were put on trial for being witches. Even cannibalism was charged toward witches and Jews alike, as both groups were accused of eating human flesh during non-Christian rituals from the devil.<sup>16</sup>

Internal contestation and the ways that concepts of belonging change over time are also important to keep in mind. Doing this avoids essentializing identities as static or projecting current definitions into the past, something very important when concepts of identity are being used to justify oppression. Hugh Nicholson focuses on the religious aspect of this plurality, noting that the innerworkings of any religious tradition are rife with disagreement and variety of perspectives.<sup>17</sup> Catholic Theology can never be considered singular, even when ecclesial exhortations and decolonial theorists may claim otherwise.

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<sup>15</sup> Helen Pfeifer, "Global Morality Play," *London Review of Books*, July 1, 2021, <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v43/n13/helen-pfeifer/global-morality-play>.

<sup>16</sup> For more on the connections between the witch hunts of Europe and colonization, see Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*, Illustrated edition (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 2004).

<sup>17</sup> Hugh Nicholson, *Comparative Theology and the Problem of Religious Rivalry* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2011).

Vitoria's writings elucidate many facets of how rationality was defined legally and theologically. Toward the end of this chapter, I will draw attention to the shifting realities of European understandings of private property, national homogeneity, and marriage that influenced the perspectives developed about people in the Americas. Putting Lugones's theory of the light and dark sides of the modern/colonial gender system into conversation with Silvia Federici's research on the witch hunts highlights the interconnectedness of those who fell outside of Catholic scholastic norms in both the Americas and Europe, particularly when seen through the lens of religious, sexual, and gendered difference.

### **Vitoria's *Relectio De Indis***

A brief overview of how theories of natural law connect to concepts of rationality will give helpful background for the following exploration of Vitoria's contributions, particularly regarding state and Church power in the Americas. In *Relectio De Indis*, Vitoria used natural law theory against many adversaries who attempted to justify colonial expansion. Vitoria rehearsed seven common justifications for claiming rights to Indigenous land, dispelling the validity of each with scholastic reasoning. He then proposed seven justified titles, some of which coincide with his revival of a law of nations framework. It is only with a final nod to a possible eighth title that Vitoria gave any room for Spanish justification of their current practices. With this treatise from 1539, Vitoria argued, first, for the full humanity of Indigenous people and, second, for their inherent human dignity due to their God-given capacity for rationality. He also challenged the legitimacy of the Doctrine of Discovery and defended Indigenous land rights. Finally, he did not regard Indigenous peoples' distinct religious practices or sexual norms as a basis for waging war. However, delving further into Vitoria's approach reveals the inextricable connection between



epistemology and ethics and the dangerous pitfalls of equating the principles of Christian faith with naturally endowed rationality.

Following the common Scholastic method of question and answer, Vitoria asked, “whether these barbarians, before the arrival of the Spaniards, had true dominion, public and private?”<sup>18</sup> Vitoria outlined that there could only be four possible grounds for declaring Indigenous people not being “true masters” of their public and private domain. Vitoria explored these four categories, asking whether Indigenous people could not be true masters by being 1) sinners, 2) unbelievers, 3) insensate or irrational, or 4) mad men (or *amantes* in Latin). Vitoria preserved the opposing viewpoints of debates that were central to Spanish theologians, politicians, and lawyers, all of whom were weighing in on the ethics of conquest. He was responding to the already existing claims for why Indigenous people may not be fully in dominion of their lands. Systematically, he documented the arguments of his opponents, refuting their claims one by one in the same scholastic style that Aquinas used.

The term dominion intersects with several important concepts with which Vitoria was negotiating in this treatise. Not only was the term *dominium* used in Roman law, but it was also central to some of the biblical theology that grounded Vitoria’s arguments about land rights, personhood, and just war. Dominion, in this context, implied both that one was a “true master” over their private and public lands and that someone had the right of ownership (*dominium rerum*).<sup>19</sup> This involved an interplay between civil ownership, which would be in the realm of human law, and natural dominion, which would fall under natural law.

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<sup>18</sup> Francisco de Vitoria, *Vitoria: Political Writings*, eds. Anthony Pagden and Jeremy Lawrance, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 239.

<sup>19</sup> Vitoria, *Vitoria*, 239.

Vitoria cited Genesis 1:26 and claimed that “man is the image of God by his inborn nature, that is by his rational powers.”<sup>20</sup> Vitoria was heavily influenced by Aquinas, who specifically fused Aristotelian logic with biblical theology from the first chapter of Genesis. *Intellectus* (reason) is a crucial lynchpin in Aquinas’s thought. Laws must be made that are rational, one’s communing with God is determined by the presence of rationality, and rationality is the defining capacity of the soul.

Aristotle also saw rationality as crucial to the soul, and Aquinas followed him in his distinction. In Book 1 chapter 7 of *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle outlined the different facets of the soul: the irrational soul, which contained both the vegetative and the perceptive soul, the rational soul, which has to do with abstract thinking, moral reasoning, and the use of language, and the appetitive soul in the middle, which participates in both the rational and the irrational soul. The rational and irrational soul both have a *telos*, which orders them to their proper end. Using reason, one gets to one’s proper end. In book 1 chapter 13, Aristotle claims that the appetitive soul listens to the rational soul like a son listens to his father. Thus, even though one’s inclinations are naturally good, it is crucial to order them in such a way that the rational soul controls the lower inclinations.

For Aquinas, human rationality not only distinguished humans from animals but also linked humans to God through rational participation in comprehending (to a certain extent) the structure of reality. This capacity for participation in the eternal law also bestowed humans with the power of dominion over the land and other animals. Rationality was crucial for making legitimate laws for political societies in the human realm, as well as comprehending revelation as

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 242.

given through scripture that leads human beings to their highest end—union with God. Aquinas synthesized Aristotle’s concept of natural law with Christian themes, systematizing a form of theological reasoning that continues to be dominant for the Catholic ethical tradition. These assumptions about the soul, rationality, and dominion are essential for unpacking Vitoria’s application of natural law theory to the context of the colonial conquest.

In its practical dimension, the *imago Dei* theology introduces the concept of *dominium*, or dominion. In Genesis 1:26, God spoke on the 6<sup>th</sup> day of creation about making human beings:

Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

The capacity to reason is inextricably connected with the *imago Dei*, the image of God. This would become central to Vitoria’s argument, since the ability to have “dominion” over the earth and all the creatures that God created was linked to being human, endowed with rational capacity. Because the image of God is a gift from God, it cannot be lost through sin or unbelief. This argument also protected against using sin or someone’s religious affiliation as justification for colonial expansion. Since “the sinner does not lose his dominion (*dominium*) over his own acts and body,”<sup>21</sup> Vitoria proved that this argumentation would completely take away a person’s agency for making moral decisions.

Vitoria referenced Aquinas’s view that “unbelief does not cancel either natural or human law, but all forms of dominion (*dominia*) derive from natural or human law.”<sup>22</sup> Rights are bestowed through God’s law, not by God’s grace. People who argued that it was by God’s grace,

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 242.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 244.

such as the peasants who were revolting after the Protestant Reformation, claimed that if a ruler were in a state of mortal sin or unbelief, then they would lose their right to rule. Vitoria used this line of thinking to defend Indigenous people's capacity for rationality, an interesting turn of an interpretation that was usually used to justify the political and spiritual powers that be in Europe.

Vitoria then addressed people who are human but might not exercise their full rational capacity. For Vitoria, "irrational creatures cannot be victims of an injustice (*iniuria*), and therefore cannot have legal rights...wild animals have no rights over their own bodies (*dominium sui*); still less, then, can they have rights over other things."<sup>23</sup> Following Aristotle, Vitoria claimed that only humans, not animals, can have rights. Thus, the insensate were not just incapable of claiming rights; they lacked rights altogether.

Vitoria claimed that those who can suffer injury have rights, giving examples of children and madmen as people who may have limited rational capacity, yet still maintain their claim to rights. In this regard, Thomas Osbourne says that Vitoria made subjective rights out of Aquinas's conception of objective rights through a double negative: if there is an obligation to uphold certain rights for others, then inversely, one cannot claim rights if those obligations are not upheld.<sup>24</sup> We will come back to the conclusions that Vitoria draws from this section later, but so far, it is clear that Vitoria argued against any claim of Indigenous people being slaves by nature, and affirms the God-given rationality of Indigenous people, witnessed through evidence of having dominion:

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 248.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas Osbourne, *Francisco de Vitoria on the Law of Nations and the Natural Partnership of Different Peoples*, transcription, St. Vincent de Paul Lecture and Concert Series (University of St. Thomas, Houston, 2017), <https://www.thomasaquinas.edu/news/lecture-text-audio-dr-thomas-osborne-francisco-de-vitoria-and-law-nations>.

[Indigenous people] are not in point of fact madmen, but have judgment like other men. This is self-evident, because they have some order (*ordo*) in their affairs: they have properly organized cities, proper marriages, magistrates and overlords (*domini*), laws, industries, and commerce, all of which require the use of reason. They likewise have a form (species) of religion, and they correctly apprehend things which are evident too other men, which indicates the use of reason.<sup>25</sup>

In the quote above, Vitoria also affirmed that the Indigenous groups of the Americas *had* religion. The presence or absence of some perception of religion was often looked toward as a litmus test for humanity, and it is telling that Vitoria recognizes religions beyond Christianity. Indigenous people were not even granted religious liberties protections in the United States until 1978, showing the legacy of actively erasing Indigenous religious traditions or ignoring them as somehow not fitting with the category of religion itself.<sup>26</sup> Christopher Columbus wrote about his first encounter with Taíno people on the island of Guanahani, saying that they “appear to have no religion”:

As I saw that they were very friendly to us, and perceived that they could be much more easily converted to our holy faith by gentle means than by force... It appears to me, that the people are ingenious, and would be good servants and I am of opinion that they would very readily become Christians, as they appear to have no religion. They very quickly learn such words as are spoken to them. If it please our Lord, I intend at my return to carry home six of them to your Highnesses, that they may learn our language.<sup>27</sup>

What is at stake in these debates is not only the humanity of certain people, but also the negotiation of logics that define differing levels of humanness. While racialized categories

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<sup>25</sup> Vitoria, *Vitoria*, 250.

<sup>26</sup> Indigenous people were not even granted religious liberties protections in the United States until 1978, showing the legacy of actively erasing Indigenous religious traditions or ignoring them as somehow not fitting with the category of religion itself. James Abourezk, “S.J.Res.102 - 95th Congress (1977-1978): Joint Resolution American Indians Religious Freedom,” webpage, August 11, 1978, 1977/1978, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/95th-congress/senate-joint-resolution/102>.

<sup>27</sup> Christopher Columbus, “Medieval Sourcebook: Christopher Columbus: Extracts from Journal,” in *Internet History Sourcebooks Project*, ed. Paul Halsal Mar, 1996, <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/columbus1.asp>.

became the main justification, particularly in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, at this time, religious identity was one of the main categories of difference that was negotiated, not only in the Americas but also within Europe itself. Nelson Maldonado Torres notes that the translation of Maimonides' *Guide for the Perplexed* was highly influential during the earliest days of colonization, particularly regarding the definitions of true religion. Maimonides outlined three categories of religion: those who were true believers, those who were idolators, and those who had no religion. Those who were true believers were connected with spirit, whereas idolators were following the faith of the flesh. Those who had no religion were outside of this body/spirit duality.<sup>28</sup>

Vitoria debunked any claim of Indigenous people being slaves by nature, and affirms the God-given rationality of Indigenous people, their land rights because of their dominion over their lands, and that the presence of governmental structures, housing, marriage customs proved rationality. But what about the negotiation between laws? Vitoria drew many interesting parallels here between relationships within *and* among European states and questioning why Indigenous people in the Americas would be subject to a different set of rules.

If Catholic theologians were negotiating multiple laws, the categories of law were defined by natural law theory. Human law, natural law, and divine law were intimately connected, but different in their domains. If Indigenous people were already “true masters,” then Vitoria had to confront the claims of the Spanish Crown and the Pope to dominion over these lands. His treatise asked whether the Spanish Crown *or* the Catholic Church were invested with the authority to intervene in matters, both political and spiritual, in the Americas.

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<sup>28</sup> Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “AAR Centennial Roundtable: Religion, Conquest, and Race in the Foundations of the Modern/Colonial World,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 82, no. 3 (September 1, 2014): 636–65.

## Challenging the Doctrine of Discovery

Vitoria used natural law theory to challenge the scope of the power of both the Castilian Crown and the authority of the Papacy. Vitoria challenged their authority by asking three questions: 1) "by what right (*ius*) were the barbarians subjected to Spanish rule?", 2) "What powers has the Spanish monarchy over the Indians in temporal and civil matters?", 3) "What powers has either the monarchy or the Church with regard to the Indians in spiritual and religious matters?"<sup>29</sup>

As the following history of contestation shows, there was hardly consensus about the Church's authority, even within the papacy. It was the papal Bull *Inter Caetera*, issued by Pope Alexander VI, that granted "all non-Christian lands" to the Spanish Crown in 1493. Citing *Inter Caetera*, many claimed that the right of the Spanish Crown to rule in the Americas had *already* been given by the Pope in 1493. But did the Pope, or the Spanish Crown, *really* have any right to such authority? Vitoria's lecture revisited a controversy raised in 1513 by King Ferdinand, who brought together lawyers and theologians to discuss whether colonization of the Americas was legitimate or justified.<sup>30</sup> This gathering led to the Laws of Burgos, one of the first laws geared toward regulating colonial practices.

Though Pope Alexander VI granted the Spanish Crown dominion over all non-Christian lands with a papal bull, in 1537 Pope Paul III nullified this bull through another papal bull *Sublimus Deus*, which asserted that Indigenous people had property rights, were not slaves by nature, and could not be forcibly converted. There was even a document called *Pastorale*

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<sup>29</sup> Vitoria, *Vitoria*, 233.

<sup>30</sup> Pagden, "Introduction," in *Vitoria*, xxiii.

*Officium*, which enforced sanctions on people who disobeyed this new decree, claiming to excommunicate people who did not comply. However, Vitoria's treatise is delivered shortly after this document was quietly revoked. Knowing this background of contestation, Vitoria argued against both the right of the Church and the Crown to "dominion" over non-Christian lands by skillfully negotiating the differences between human law, natural law, and divine law.

#### Natural Law Theory, the Crown, and the Pope

The definition of law highlights multiple facets at play in the debates about dominion in *De Indis*. Vitoria built on Aristotle and Aquinas to construct his claims. In the first section of the second part of the *Summa Theologicae* (*Summa Theologicae II/I*), Thomas Aquinas synthesized Christian monotheism with Aristotle's treatment of justice in Book V of *Nicomachean Ethics* and Book III of the *Politics*. By distinguishing different aspects of law, namely, *ius* and *lex*,<sup>31</sup> Aquinas outlined a complex relationship between human beings and God, mediated through the rational soul.

Aquinas defined four different aspects of law: eternal law, natural law, divine law, and human law. According to Aquinas, the eternal law is "nothing else than the type of Divine Wisdom, as directing all actions and movements."<sup>32</sup> The eternal law emanates from God, and because God has made all of creation, the eternal law is present throughout, determining the laws of existence. Natural law, then, is *human participation* in the eternal law, accessed through the

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<sup>31</sup> According to Thomas Osbourne, "Two Latin words are sometimes used to indicate 'law,' namely '*lex*' and '*ius*.' The first only refers to law. '*Ius*' according to Thomists generally indicates an objective right, or something that is due to another, although among later Thomists it can also mean a subjective right or power. Sometimes '*ius*' also indicates a kind of law, as when natural law or natural right (*ius naturale*) is contrasted with the law or right of nations (*ius gentium*). Roman jurists and the Christian tradition had included the law of nations (*ius gentium*) as a kind of law distinct from both the natural law and the civil law." Osbourne, *Francisco de Vitoria on the Law of Nations and the Natural Partnership of Different Peoples*, 2017.

<sup>32</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 93 art. 1.



use of reason. While animals are guided by the structures of the eternal law, it is only humans who can participate through the use of their rational capacities. This means that the truth is accessible, to greater and lesser degrees, to *all* humans who have this rational capacity. As Aquinas said,

“no one can know the eternal law, as it is in itself...But every rational creature knows it in its reflection...for every knowledge of truth is a kind of reflection and participation of the eternal law, which is the unchangeable truth...all men know the truth to a certain extent, at least as to the common principles of the natural law.”<sup>33</sup>

Aquinas drew heavily from Aristotle, particularly regarding the connection between the natural law and the faculties of the soul. Following Aristotle, Aquinas described the soul as having both irrational and rational capacities. Most importantly, the function of the rational capacity was to discern a human’s *telos*, or proper end. For Aristotle, this *telos* was *eudaimonia*, or human happiness, which had two aspects: material wellbeing and the wellbeing that comes from studying philosophy. By contrast, Aquinas, with his concern for monotheism, defined the ultimate *telos* of rational human beings as union with God.

It was very important for Aquinas that faith and reason were compatible. Aquinas distinguished the eternal law from divine law. Whereas the eternal law emanated from God and determined the laws of existence, the divine law came from revelation through sacred scripture. One could only engage the divine law if one was endowed with reason. The divine law was a source of rational guidance given for human beings to reach this greatest end of union with God.

Finally, Aquinas defined human law as something that should be *derived* from the natural law but could also not be aligned with it in certain cases. Human law could be fallible, but its main purpose, following Aristotle, was to instill virtue in citizens of a particular polity or

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid. I-II, q. 93. a. 2.

political community. If necessary, human law could be applied with force to restrain evil. The scope of human law was thus much smaller than that of the natural law, even if it was under the jurisdiction of eternal law, i.e. happening within God's creation determined by the laws of existence that were divinely structured. Four components are necessary for something to be considered a law. It must be 1) rational, 2) promoting the common good, 3) created by someone who has the power to care for the common good, and 4) made widely known.<sup>34</sup> Conversely, the irrationality of a lawmaker or a lack of authority to make laws for a particular community would nullify the legitimacy of a law. Thus, it is easy to see how rational capability and capacity, the abilities to govern, intelligibility, and establishing the bounds and responsibilities one has toward a community, are important in this discussion.

Vitoria, both a lawyer and a moral theologian, was equipped to argue not just on legal grounds, but also according to the divine law because salvation was a factor within the colonial conquest. Thus, one must consult "wise men" in cases like these. In the beginning of his treatise, Vitoria compares the Crown to an obediently submissive woman who should consult theologians regarding difficult matters of conscience. Vitoria uses examples that solidify a heteropatriarchal view of feminine submissiveness, both sexually and intellectually. Sinfulness can only be prevented by consulting with wise *men* learned in theology training. "Women are obligated to obey the experts in all matters necessary to salvation, and they place themselves in danger of damnation if they commit acts which in the opinion of wise men are mortal sins."<sup>35</sup> He gives one peculiar example of a man who is unclear whether he is married to a woman:

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., I-II, q. 90 a. 4.

<sup>35</sup> Vitoria, *Vitoria*, 237.

Take the example of a man who is uncertain whether he is legally married to a particular woman. A doubt arises: is he bound to perform his conjugal duty with the woman? May he lawfully do so, if he wishes? Or indeed, may he demand her to perform it with him? He consults the experts; the answer is an emphatic negative. Nevertheless, the man decides on his own authority to disregard their verdict from love of the woman. Now in this case the man certainly commits a sin by having intercourse with the woman, even if it is in fact lawful, because he is acting willfully against conscience. It must be so, because in matters which concern salvation there is an obligation to believe those whom the Church has appointed as teachers, and in cases of doubt their verdict is law.<sup>36</sup>

Vitoria, while physically not in a liminal space, used this strategy to gain epistemological control during a time of uncertainty. Theologians speculating on the humanness regarded themselves as agents of power and knowledge. For even if their power was contested regarding how much authority they had to intervene in colonial endeavors, it was clear that clergy had power over women, who must submit to their judgment. Regulating sexual access to women's bodies through marriage contracts became the metaphor of whether Spain, depicted as a man who was not sure if he was allowed access to the feminized body/the Americas, could only be without sin if he followed the advice of the experts.

Anne McClintock's work highlights the ways that male colonizers dealt with anxieties of the unknown through feminizing land to reassert their dominance and control. She claimed that

...feminizing terra incognita was, from the outset, a strategy of violent containment...feminizing the land is a compensatory gesture, disavowing male loss of boundary by reinscribing a ritual excess of boundary, accompanied, all too often, by an excess of military violence. The feminizing of the land represents a ritualistic moment in imperial discourse, as male intruders ward off fears of narcissistic disorder by reinscribing, as natural, an excess of gender hierarchy."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 235.

<sup>37</sup> Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (Taylor and Francis, Routledge, 2013), 24.

Though there were uncertainties about the legitimacy of state and religious authority, Vitoria relied on an excess of gender hierarchy to reinscribe the certainty of his theological authority with the Pope and the Spanish Crown. Women, like the category of “barbarians”, are talked about in a symbolic way, with negotiations happening across their bodies by the wise men who claim power to determine what is just and unjust. Indigenous women, in Vitoria’s particular case, are not even mentioned.

Vitoria claims that “in doubtful cases...we must consult those whom the Church has appointed for the purpose: that is, the prelates, preachers, confessors, and jurists versed in divine and human law...”<sup>38</sup> Someone was needed who was versed in jurisprudence, both legal and theological. Only the Spanish Crown and its legal jurists had the right to determine human law for the Crowns’ subjects. Consequently, if legal jurists were working from a framework of human law (*lex*), i.e. positive law, then the contestation of the *humanity* of Indigenous persons made it unclear if the human law even applied. Vitoria took the concept of law of nations further than Aquinas’s analysis, consulting Isidore and Roman texts for alternative methods of engaging differences beyond one’s own political community.

Since Indigenous people were in full dominion of their own lands, Vitoria claims that Spanish control of non-Christian lands was outside of the scope of human law. For “the emperor is not master of the whole world...dominion (*dominium*) can exist only by natural law, divine law, or human law. But the emperor is not master of the world by any of these.”<sup>39</sup> Vitoria claimed that, rather than just a legal issue, these were matters of faith as well. Even the

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<sup>38</sup> Vitoria, *Vitoria*, 236.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.

jurisdiction of the Pope was much more limited, since the Pope is only a “vicar of Christ,” and even Jesus never claimed dominion over the entirety of the political sphere. “No one,” Vitoria said, “was ever master of the whole world by divine law.”<sup>40</sup>

Controversies around baptism were directly connected to larger questions of justification and authority with the Catholic Church. Before arriving at this question of the scope of political or papal authority, the treatise first opens with a quote from Matthew 28:19: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.”<sup>41</sup> Following this quote, Vitoria questions the ethics of forced baptism for “children of unbelievers.” Why is this gospel quote paired with a question of forced baptism? Vitoria’s use of the natural law framework situates theological power *above* political power regarding colonization, but it is only because the concern of Christian conversion is on the table. If enough people in the Americas converted, Vitoria claims the Pope may be able to claim Indigenous people as under his jurisdiction.

Because conversion was such an important factor in the colonization of the Americas, Vitoria says that the Pope *does* have some level of temporal power, but “only insofar as it concerns spiritual matters; that is, as far as is necessary for the administration of spiritual things.”<sup>42</sup> The connection between religious identity and land rights was central to the justification of colonization in the Americas. But Vitoria claims that “they are not obliged to believe in the Christian religion, nor in the dominion of the pope, and hence not in the dominion

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 254.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 233.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 261.

of the emperor either.”<sup>43</sup> Vitoria shows that the Pope did not have full jurisdiction over anyone who was not Christian. The lawyers could only speak in terms of human law. The Crown was in between with interests both material and spiritual, yet subservient to “wise men.”<sup>44</sup>

#### Sodomy and Idolatry Not as Valid Grounds for Just War

Within a natural law framework, some claimed sins that “go against nature” are (at least in theory) observable across all cultures, should be punished through violent force.<sup>45</sup> It was common to claim that war could be justified because Indigenous people were not Christian or following Christian sexuality norms. We have already discussed, in Chapter Two, the example of Vasco Nuñez de Balboa, who justified the murder of people outside his concept of natural gender and sexuality. Sepúlveda wrote in 1547 that “War against these barbarians can be justified not only on the basis of their paganism but even more so because of their abominable licentiousness...”<sup>46</sup>

However, Vitoria denied that these are justifiable grounds for multiple reasons. Vitoria cited Thomas Aquinas (*ST* II-II 154, 11-12) and New Testament writings (2 Corinthians 12:21, and Romans 1:24-7), defining “sins against nature” as “pederasty, buggery with animals, or lesbianism.”<sup>47</sup> But he also clarified that there are two senses of “sins against nature”: 1) a universal sense of sins against nature includes adultery, fornication, murder, and theft, and 2) a *special sense* of sins against nature goes against the natural order, such as the abovementioned

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 276.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 237.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 273.

<sup>46</sup> Mintz and McNeil, “Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda (1547).”

<sup>47</sup> Vitoria, *Vitoria*, 273.

sex practices. Vitoria claims that “if it is lawful to punish men for these ‘sins against nature,’ it must also be lawful to punish them for murder,”<sup>48</sup> and thus any justification of killing in the scenario is null.

Even more so, if the pope cannot wage war against the Christians within his *own* jurisdiction who are also committing sins against nature, why would this power extend to people who are not Christian, and thus not even bound by Christian norms? Vitoria claimed that

...the pope may not make war on Christians because they are fornicators or robbers, or even because they are sodomites; nor can he confiscate their lands and give them to other princes...such sins are more serious in Christians, who know them to be sins, than in the barbarians, who do not.<sup>49</sup>

Vitoria also thought that the truth of Christianity was more easily provable than assumptions about natural law which would prohibit certain sex acts. He argued that the natural law may not be as inevitable as some might claim, since “not all sins against natural law can be demonstrated to be so by evidence, at least to the satisfaction of all men...”<sup>50</sup> Vitoria says that “we actually have better proofs to show that Christ’s law is true and God-given than to show that fornication is evil or that the other things prohibited by natural law are to be avoided.”<sup>51</sup> We will return to this rational proof of Christian laws toward the end of the chapter, but for now it is clear that Vitoria disproved many of the justifications for war on the grounds of religious difference or sexual practice.

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 274.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 274.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 274.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 275.

## Ius Gentium and the Law of Nations

What, therefore, can be assumed to be universally applicable across different nations, religions, and cultures? Vitoria revives the law of nations, or *ius gentium*, after disproving seven unjust titles that the Spanish Crown or the Pope could not claim over the Americas. Neither the “most serene Emperor” or the “supreme pontiff” are the “master of the whole world”<sup>52</sup>; the “right of discovery” is illegitimate, since Indigenous people had public and private dominion;<sup>53</sup> refusing to convert to Christianity or committing mortal sins is not grounds for just war;<sup>54</sup> claims that Indigenous people voluntarily accepted papal or Spanish authority are invalid. The *Requerimiento*, where Spanish troops would read a statement, ask for immediate conversion and, if there was not agreement, wage war, were coercive and not clearly communicated in a rational way;<sup>55</sup> and finally, the Americas are not a providential gift from God in response to barbarian abominations.<sup>56</sup> Vitoria presents “seven just titles” that constituted his law of nations framework in the final section of his treatise. This includes the right to travel (*ius peregrinandi*), the right to preach (*ius praedicandi*), and the right to trade. According to Vitoria, if any of these are violated, then the Spaniards, if they have *caused no harm*, have grounds for a just war.

Aquinas discusses the philosopher Isidore of Seville’s definition of the law of nations in *Summa Theologicae* II/1, Question 95 article 4. Was the law of nations contained under human law or natural law, as objection 1 asks?

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 252–58.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 264.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 265–72.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 275.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 276.



The law of nations is indeed, in some way, natural to man, in so far as he is a reasonable being, because it is derived from the natural law by way of a conclusion that is not very remote from its premises. Wherefore men easily agreed thereto. Nevertheless it is distinct from the natural law, especially it is distinct from the natural law which is common to all animals.<sup>57</sup>

Human law was always derived from the law of nature, but human law could be divided between the law of nations and the civil law. The example Aquinas provided was buying and selling: if human beings were social animals by nature, then there was something natural about the need to buy and sell things amongst peoples to survive. Civil law was about specific reinforcements of these transactions that particular states decided for themselves in order to support the common good, whereas the law of nations only names things that are *already* common custom across all cultures.<sup>58</sup> Since Vitoria already proved that neither the Pope nor the Crown had the authority to make laws in the Americas, his appeal to the law of nations importantly established a framework that was built on consent and already observable custom.

Vitoria references “natural partnership and communication” to establish the right to travel and the principle of hospitality. “[I]t is a law of nature to welcome strangers...the Spaniards are the barbarians’ neighbours...and the barbarians are obliged to love their neighbors as themselves (Matt. 22:39) and may not lawfully bar them from their homeland without due cause.”<sup>59</sup> He also argued for a global concept of the commons, where all people should be entitled access to waterways, along with unrestrained travel. Vitoria said that

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<sup>57</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 95 a. 1.

<sup>58</sup> For more on the differences between Vitoria’s and Aquinas’s understandings of the law of nations, see Thomas Osborne, “Francisco de Vitoria on the Law of Nations and the Natural Partnership of Different Peoples” (University of St. Thomas, Houston, September 28, 2017), <https://www.thomasaquinas.edu/news/lecture-text-audio-dr-thomas-osborne-francisco-de-vitoria-and-law-nations>.

<sup>59</sup> Vitoria, *Vitoria*, 279.

in the beginning of the world, when all things were held in common, everyone was allowed to visit and travel through any land he wished. This right was clearly not taken away by the division of property (*diuisio rerum*); it was never the intention of nations to prevent men's free mutual intercourse with one another by this division.<sup>60</sup>

He also upheld the right to preach, but this came with several qualifications. The gospel, in Vitoria's account, must be taught without force, in a reasonable manner. The *Requerimiento* was certainly on Vitoria's mind in making these qualifications. In return, Indigenous people should not obstruct this preaching of the word, especially if it was rational and peaceful.

However, Vitoria did not think that the Christian faith has been presented in a reasonable way:

it is not sufficiently clear to me that the Christian faith has up to now been announced and set before the barbarians in such a way as to oblige them to believe it under pain of fresh sin...I hear only of provocations, savage crimes, and multitudes of unholy acts.<sup>61</sup>

Because "fear considerably diminishes the freedom of the will," Vitoria claims that "barbarians cannot be moved by war to believe, but only to pretend they believe and accept the Christian faith; and this is monstrous and sacrilegious."<sup>62</sup> Vitoria decries common practices that would convert people through force rather than reason.

### **Contradictions and Implications**

A close reading of the text brings to the surface more contradictory statements. This uneven applicability may signal discrepancies in Vitoria's thinking; the political nature of arguing against both Pope and Crown meant Vitoria was up against the major power structures of his time. Did his final reflections assuage the fears of the powers that be, assuring them that economic gain and the winning of souls would continue? Vitoria *justified*, or leaves a narrow

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 278.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 271.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 272.

space for possible justification, much of what he speaks against in the first half of the text. The law of nations established rights to travel, trade, and preach outside of the jurisdiction of human law and divine law. Vitoria used the natural law to argue for land rights and the humanity of Indigenous people. However, the consequences of this line of thinking need to be explored further.

### Rationality Reconsidered

Vitoria challenged the Doctrine of Discovery, argued for the full humanity of Indigenous people, and thus their land rights, and claimed that different religious practices and different sexual norms did not justify a war. However, due to the epistemology of natural law theory and rationality, Vitoria's framework reinforced assimilation to Christian norms as the only rational outcome. Vitoria argued that Indigenous people have the *capacity* for reason, though this "potential" is underdeveloped due to "barbarous education."<sup>63</sup> Exposure to the Gospel taught in rational and persuasive ways is offered as a civilizing solution. Vitoria says, "If they seem to us insensate and slow-witted, I put it down mainly to their evil and barbarous education. Even amongst ourselves we see many peasants (*rustici*) who are little different from brute animals."<sup>64</sup>

Political theorist Anthony Pagden points to the way that the principle of the law of nations, which was based on 'the general consensus of men', could mix with Christian faith and reason in a way that reinforced one worldview over another. Pagden describes it in this way

...if what I and all my (Christian) fellows, as rational beings, consider to be true is not in fact so, then God, who implanted in my mind the *prima praecepta* of the natural law by which I form my understanding of the world, must be deceiving me. This is clearly

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 250.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 250.

unthinkable. Knowledge, therefore, must be, 'that thing on which all men are in agreement.'<sup>65</sup>

But what was to happen if all men were, in fact, not in agreement? Pagden does not address the theological concept of sin and how it can distort one's perception of the natural law; however, he does offer insight into the theological difficulties of equating reason and faith.

For Vitoria, as for Aquinas, the law of nature was the efficient cause which underpinned man's relationship with the world about him and governed every practice within human society. It alone could enable the theologian to describe and explain the natural world, and man's place within it, in wholly rationalistic terms. The truth of the Gospels and of the Decalogue, and with it the rightness of the political and social institutions of Europe as set down in the Roman law texts, could all be defended, without recourse to revelation, as the inescapable conclusions of the rational mind drawing upon certain self-evident first principles.<sup>66</sup>

Statements that seem to protect religious freedom under the revamped Roman category of *ius gentium* assert the right to war and justify forced conversion all through this same line of thinking about the connection between faith and reason. Though Vitoria spoke against forced conversions using the natural law framework, his argumentation with Natural Law theory as well as with the law of nations results in justifying war if Indigenous people obstruct the preaching of the gospel in any way. Vitoria here insists on the rationality of the Christian faith, still following a natural law framework:

*if the Christian faith is set before the barbarians in a probable fashion, that is with provable and rational arguments and accompanied by manners both decent and observant of the law of nature, such as are themselves a great argument for the truth of the faith, and if this is done not once or in a perfunctory way, but diligently and observantly, then the barbarians are obliged to accept the faith of Christ under pain of mortal sin* (emphasis in original).<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Pagden, *Vitoria*, xv.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, xv.

<sup>67</sup> Vitoria, *Vitoria*, 271.

Ultimately, reason and faith are coherent, and the potentiality of developing (Christian) reason is protected by Vitoria only insofar as there is openness to the Gospel message. If enough Indigenous people converted, Spain would also be responsible for continued protection, since “it would be neither expedient nor lawful for our prince to abandon altogether the administration of those territories.”<sup>68</sup> Rationality, conversion, and national power end up being intertwined through a paternalistic developmental model undergirded by education into Christian rationality.

#### Land Rights versus Common Usage

Vitoria defended land rights of Indigenous people, and denied the right of discovery for Spaniards, since Indigenous people had dominion over their land. However, the law of nations framework also justified and legitimized an epistemology that objectified land. Even the language of “extracting natural resources” informs this way of thinking of the earth; but this extraction from Indigenous lands was a crucial economic interest of the Crown and Pope. Vitoria claimed that “if there are any things among the barbarians which are held in common both by their own people and by strangers, it is not lawful for the barbarians to prohibit the Spaniards from sharing and enjoying them.”<sup>69</sup> Vitoria claimed that digging for gold or fishing for pearls is permitted, as long as Spaniards do it “without causing offence to the native inhabitants and citizens.”<sup>70</sup>

Vitoria used a notion of the commons to claim that the right of discovery, or the way that anything “unoccupied or deserted” becomes the property of the discoverer is maintained by both

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 292.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 280.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 280.

natural law and the law of nations. “All things which are unoccupied or deserted become the property of the occupier by natural law and the law of nations...the law of nations...expressly states that goods which belong to no owner pass to the occupier.”<sup>71</sup> Though Vitoria argued that Indigenous people had dominion over their land, access to the resources of land becomes predicated on lack of a particular form of private ownership. It is difficult to believe that if Indigenous people came to Spain and began to mine, deforest, or fish at the pace of colonizers that this would also be protected under the law of nations.

By arguing for the full humanity of Indigenous people, Vitoria also locked them into a supposedly universal system that greatly privileged colonial economic interests. Ashley Bohrer writes,

The inclusion of indigenous peoples in the universal brotherhood of humanity had the effect of binding them to a putatively equal and universal system, even if it had vastly unequal effects...precisely because Amerindians are rational humans, they are bound by the laws of nature to accept the Spanish colonial presence.<sup>72</sup>

Even Vitoria himself acknowledges that economic loss and the end of the current practices couldn't be accepted: for, “if all these titles were inapplicable, that is to say if the barbarians gave no just cause for war and did not wish to have Spaniards as princes and so on,” Vitoria reasons, “the whole Indian expedition and trade would cease, to the great loss of the Spaniards. And this in turn would mean a huge loss to the royal exchequer, which would be intolerable.”<sup>73</sup> There was an economic bottom line that was beyond question, and Vitoria used

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 264.

<sup>72</sup> Ashley J. Bohrer, “Just Wars of Accumulation: The Salamanca School, Race and Colonial Capitalism,” *Race & Class* 59, no. 3 (January 1, 2018): 28–29.

<sup>73</sup> Vitoria, *Vitoria*, 291.

the law of nations to declare the practices of buying and selling as natural, even if colonial methods were of a different level of extraction and profit on a global scale.

#### Religious/Sexual Differences and Conversion

Vitoria's arguments about preaching also come with a caveat, especially because, if Indigenous people *do* have the same capacity for reason, within the natural law framework, they would be irrational to not accept the gospel preached in a reasonable way. Thus, "if reasoning fails to win the acquiescence of the barbarians, and they insist on replying with violence, the Spaniards may defend themselves, and do everything needful for their own safety. It is lawful to meet force with force."<sup>74</sup> But it is not just self-defense that Vitoria argues for, since within a just war framework, "if it is lawful to declare war on them, then it is lawful to exercise to the full the rights of war."<sup>75</sup> A just war could include not only self-defense, but also the "rights of war" that come with a situation where force is justified. In this way, the taking of land and resources, forcing people to work for no wages, and upending already existing political structures would be justified. Vitoria reminded his listeners that the sovereign has the authority to judge what the outcome should be for the combatants. Thus, the Spaniards "may then treat them no longer as innocent enemies, but as treacherous foes against whom all rights of war can be exercised, including plunder, enslavement, deposition of their former masters, and the institution of new ones."<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 282.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 283.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 283.

Benevolent paternalism is interwoven throughout the text with the claim that these actions must only serve the benefit of Indigenous peoples. Vitoria's treatise is *about* the humanity of Indigenous populations, though actual Indigenous people were never consulted as *co-producers* of knowledge within this line of argumentation. Thus, it is Vitoria who is judging whether these actions benefit Indigenous peoples, not just "the profit of the Spaniards."<sup>77</sup> However, we know that Vitoria was writing this treatise because he was suspicious that what was being done was *only* for the good of the Spaniards. Vitoria says that "I hear only of provocations, savage crimes, and multitudes of unholy acts"<sup>78</sup> in the Americas and wrote in a letter that his "blood runs cold" hearing about the atrocities of the conquest.<sup>79</sup>

Though Vitoria says, for argument's sake, that the Spanish have been travelers rather than plunderers and have caused no harm, he shares some telling pieces of information: "I myself have no doubt that force and arms were necessary for the Spaniards to continue in those parts; my fear is that the affair may have gone beyond the permissible bounds of justice and religion."<sup>80</sup> In the final section of his treatise, only Spaniards were given the permission of self-defense. Spanish innocence was assumed even though many factors proved the opposite.

#### Faith, Reason, and Colonial Pedagogies

Vitoria wrote in 1539, a time period that was after multiple decades of colonization but still early within the broader scope of colonialism. Vitoria's view of educational habituation was

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 291.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 271.

<sup>79</sup> Brian Tierney, *The Idea of Natural Rights: Studies on Natural Rights, Natural Law, and Church Law, 1150-1625*, Studies on Natural Rights, Natural Law, and Church Law, 1150-1625 (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1997), 255.

<sup>80</sup> Vitoria, *Vitoria*, 286.



popularly applied by missionaries. As theologians tried to apply this scholastic pedagogy, and as decades passed where the Gospel message and Christian practices were not easily winning complete converts, scholastic missionaries soon had to admit that their teaching was not sufficient. Either the law of the Gospel was not as rational as natural law theory may have presented it, or the ones being taught were incapable of grasping the truth or willfully ignoring it. In describing a Jesuit theologian who wrote over forty years after Vitoria, Willie Jennings describes the attitude as “faith judging intelligence” rather than the faith seeking understanding, as Anselm and Augustine defined the purpose of theology.<sup>81</sup> Faith became an arrogant measuring stick to hierarchically rank people’s worth rather than an open process of mutual learning and inquiry.

If we compare Vitoria to Sepúlveda, we can see that Sepúlveda equates humaneness and culture with a naturalized sense of national superiority. Vitoria based the lines of belonging across educational access, which was intimately connected to his conception of Christian conversion. Sepúlveda argues

...so it is with the barbarous and inhumane peoples [the Indians] who have no civil life and peaceful customs...It will always be just and in conformity with natural law that such people submit to the rule of more cultured and humane princes' and nations...Thanks to their virtues and the practical wisdom of their laws, the latter can destroy barbarism and educate these [inferior] people to a more humane and virtuous life.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 108.

<sup>82</sup> Mintz and McNeil, “Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda (1547).”

Using curious language, Vitoria said that “I myself do not dare either to affirm or condemn”<sup>83</sup> the eighth possible title in his treatise. After the first half of his treatise asserts the dominion of Indigenous people, the final title left room for a patriarchal, colonial habituation:

these barbarians, though not totally mad, as explained before, are nevertheless so close to being mad, that they are unsuited to setting up or administering a commonwealth both legitimate and ordered in human or civil terms...they are unsuited even to governing their own households (*res familiaris*); hence, their lack of letters, of arts and crafts (not merely liberal, but even mechanical), of systematic agriculture, of manufacture, and of many other things useful, or rather indispensable, for human use. It might therefore be argued that for their own benefit the princes of Spain might take over their administration, and set up urban officers and governors on their behalf, or even give them new masters, so long as this could be proved to be in their interest.<sup>84</sup>

Though he argued for dominion, Vitoria still left the possibility for Spanish rule as a “benefit” for Indigenous people. His change of reasoning returned to a particular form of governance and family structure with sanity, returning to the Aristotelian framework of order that is necessarily patriarchal. The example of the eighth title showed how an ethical reflection that centers a “community of masters” can distort the value of protection. Who will prove that such an action is in the best interest?

The phrase “unsuited to govern their own households” implied family structures that did not mimic the *res familiaris*. This structure imagined a man who was head of household to be similar to the rational soul, controlling all the “lower” inclinations that were associated with wives, children, and slaves. This is in line with natural law theory; both Aristotle and Aquinas agree that it is part of the natural law for wives to be submissive to husbands and children to be submissive to parents. These governance and family structures specifically focus on the

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<sup>83</sup> Vitoria, *Vitoria*, 290.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 290.

responsibility of the patriarchal heads of state and home to protect the same people they control. This is why it is so important that Paula Gunn Allen and María Lugones challenged the narrative that patriarchal governance and kinship structures were natural and universal.

Vitoria drew parallels in his mind between the people in the Americas and the “rustici,” or peasants of Europe, who also did not have access to scholastic theological formation. Vitoria said, “If they seem to us insensate and slow-witted, I put it down mainly to their evil and barbarous education. Even amongst ourselves we see many peasants (*rustici*) who are little different from brute animals.”<sup>85</sup> Persecution along the lines of sodomy, idolatry, and cannibalism, as we have already seen, were leveraged against peasant women, Muslims, and Jews in Europe, as well as Indigenous people in the Americas. What is the potency of this ideological traffic concerned with religious and sexual purity? How can we narrate histories of connection within the newly shifting power structures of coloniality while still acknowledging differences?

If we return to María Lugones and the colonial/modern gender system, she is specifically focused on European bourgeois femininity: Because “the new gender system...created very different arrangements for colonized males and females than for white bourgeois colonizers,”<sup>86</sup> Lugones claims that “[h]eterosexuality has been consistently perverse, violent, and demeaning, turning people into animals and turning white women into reproducers of ‘the white race’ and ‘the (middle or upper) class.’”<sup>87</sup> Lugones focuses on a particular set of ideals that were produced by

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 250.

<sup>86</sup> María Lugones, “Heterosexualism and the Colonial / Modern Gender System,” 186.

<sup>87</sup> María Lugones, 201.

the power dynamics of coloniality, but this analytical framework can also show important connections between religious ideals and lower class European women within this analysis of gender and sexuality.

Silvia Federici's research exposes the connections between the witch hunts in Europe and colonization in the Americas. Federici claims that "it was in the torture chambers and on the stakes on which the witches perished that the bourgeois ideals of womanhood and domesticity were forged."<sup>88</sup> Though all women accused of being witches were not always from lower classes, Federici claims the violence perpetrated against this group forged what Lugones calls the light side of the modern/colonial gender system. Federici says that in Europe and the Americas, the same tactics were used: the "removal of entire communities from their land, large-scale impoverishment, the launching of 'Christianizing' campaigns destroying people's autonomy and communal relations."<sup>89</sup> This is a significant insight for Lugones' colonial/modern gender system, especially in the ways that it forefronts how religious differences or projections of idolatry and control of sexuality established the bounds of who was a witch and who was not.

Federici argues that there is a "continuity between the subjugation of the populations of the New World and that of people in Europe, women in particular, in the transition to capitalism."<sup>90</sup> Federici looks to impoverished European women who were not married that were frequently the target of violence. Federici argues that the witch hunts of Europe are an often underexamined aspect of the history of the proletariat, and her research traces the developments

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<sup>88</sup> Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, 186.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.

that occur in the period during and especially after Vitoria gave his treatise. Charges of sodomy, idolatry, and cannibalism happened both in the Americas and in Europe with increasing frequency, leveraged by priests, preachers, and political officials. Federici connects the restructuring of private ownership of land and the harsh punishments for breaking Christian sex and gender norms as a mutually influential process that started in Europe, continued in the Americas, and mutually restructured both societies toward capital accumulation. Christian theological education policed these religious and sexual boundaries: claims of protection can also lead to violence.

It is unlikely that this community of masters would invite participation from the people they claim to be protecting—we have seen from the above examples that sometimes the form of “protection” is a form of coercive force. What they will offer is a narrow opportunity to *join* the community of masters, through scholastic theological education. However, for both Europeans and Indigenous people, this form of belonging was only offered to a select group of people; they must be men, and they must be ready to “travel” in Lugones’ sense to a Christian scholastic world, one that was in flux but desperately looking for stability and unified reason.

The level of participation granted to people who submitted to this theological formation was uncertain. Some Indigenous people *did* gain a form of access to the community of masters, such as the Nahua historians who worked with Bernardino de Sahagún, roughly between 1540 and 1570. Though the Franciscan friar Sahagún was credited with compiling the Florentine Codex, this bilingual volume was a team effort with Nahua scholars such as Antonio Valeriano from Azcapotzalco, Martín Jacobita from Tlatelolco, and Pedro de San Benaventura and Alonso

Vegrano from Cuauhtitlan.<sup>91</sup> Fluent in Latin, Castillian Spanish, and Nahuatl, some of these men rose to leadership positions in the newly emerging Catholic/Nahua world of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Before the codex, Valeriano had already held teaching positions in Christian colleges; Jacobita would go on to be a rector.<sup>92</sup> However, the codex was confiscated in the early 1570's due to changing views on documenting Nahua history and religious practice.<sup>93</sup>

Many colonized people had to travel to a scholastic Christian world out of survival.

According to Silvia Federici, Indigenous innocence was only defended during 1520-1540,

in which the Spaniards still believed that the aboriginal populations would be easily converted and subjugated. This was the time of mass baptisms, when much zeal was deployed in convincing the 'Indians' to change their names and abandon their gods and sexual customs, especially polygamy and homosexuality. [B]are breasted women were forced to cover themselves, men in loincloths had to put on trousers.<sup>94</sup>

Federici claims that as time went on, the rigidity of the approach escalated: "the same crimes that previously had been attributed to lack of religious education--sodomy, cannibalism, incest, cross-dressing--were now treated as signs that the 'Indians' were under the dominion of the devil and they could be justifiably deprived of their lands and their lives."<sup>95</sup> This shift coincides with the confiscation of the Florentine Codex, showing the impacts of this rigidification. Protection, it seems, can easily turn toward violence, and theological education was an important tool of this negotiation.

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<sup>91</sup> Josefrayn Sánchez-Perry, "Exclusive Monotheism: And Sa- Hagún's Mission: The Problem of Universals in the First Book of the Florentine Codex.," *Religions* 12, no. 204 (2021): 9.

<sup>92</sup> Sánchez-Perry, "Exclusive Monotheism," 9.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>94</sup> Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, 221.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 222.

### Conclusion: Vitoria's Legacy

Was Vitoria paving the way toward international justice or was he an architect of colonial power and oppression? Depending on your conversation partners, the story told of Vitoria's legacy usually falls on either side of this dichotomy. Many contemporary Catholic authors view Vitoria as a courageous voice of conscience during a time where truly Christian values of human dignity were corrupted by greed. He is also sometimes celebrated as the "grandfather of international law," since humanists like Grotius who came after him would build on his writings to construct more formalized universal rights frameworks that were not dependent on religious justification. A statue of Vitoria's bust can be found in the garden of the United Nations in New York City with a plaque reading "Fundador del Derecho de Gentes" (Founder of the Law of Peoples). On the other hand, scholars like Martti Koskenniemi argue that Vitoria provided justifications for states to wage endless wars to continue an exploitative global economic system based on profits yielded from private property ownership.<sup>96</sup>

Was Vitoria a forerunner for international rights, or did his framework further entrench what Anibal Quijano would name the coloniality of power? Many decolonial accounts gloss over the internal contestation happening within this large umbrella term "Christianity." At the same time, many Catholic accounts too quickly focus on the voices speaking out for justice, without further explanation of the many Catholic voices that would use doctrine to justify slavery, domination, and genocide. Catholic ethics needs to attend more to the history of coloniality when deploying natural law theories; this connects back to Chapter Two, where Pope Francis critiques colonialism and an objectifying anthropology without engaging the historical role of natural law

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<sup>96</sup> Martti Koskenniemi, "Empire and International Law: The Real Spanish Contribution," *University of Toronto Law Journal* 61, no. 1 (2011): 1–36.

theorizing. How history gets narrated has serious implications. Holding the complexities of internal contestation in communities of belonging as well as complexities of connection across lines of dualistic difference will be an important component of an integral ethics of belonging explored in later chapters.

Delving into this line of thinking is important because of its implications for the legacies of religious pluralism and sexual ethics within the Catholic Church. In chapter 4, I will discuss how Gloria Anzaldúa names this awareness of one's own history as a facet of connecting with *las raíces del árbol de vida*, the roots of the tree of life. But for Anzaldúa, the metaphor of these roots also encompasses an honest confrontation with our shadows. It is in this underground darkness where we are invited to get in touch with sexual repression, animality, and the ways that people project their deepest fears onto "others"—oftentimes leaving women, people of color, and queer individuals to grapple with the effects. Thus, this chapter is also a reckoning with the logic of othering, particularly within one example of Catholic theology rooted in a universal rights framework. Specific to my point here is the way that this logic of othering was built into a framework *intended* to establish universal rights, *even* for people who were not aligned with Christian epistemologies or ethics. However, it still ranked human beings based on their capacity for reason, ultimately positioning themselves as the pinnacle of rationality, which became synonymous with Christianity. Conversion, rationality, consent, and the justified use of force all must be carefully examined under this line of thinking that became so popular.

What is clear about Vitoria's legacy is that a universal rights framework emerged during a debate about *who counted as human*, and this question is one that is inherently ethical. Clerical negotiations of the parameters of human anthropology connected to the parameters of national, religious, and racial belonging; they also continue to be interconnected to sex and gender in



fundamental ways. Lugones's insights on racialized gender point to this gap, but her ideas also get sharpened by delving further into religious and legal complexities that influenced colonial ethics and epistemologies. By looking at the argumentation of Francisco de Vitoria's writings, the theological negotiations of personhood, rationality, and conversion become clearer with particular attention to the ways that sexuality, gender, and religious difference influenced each category. Reviewing the criteria for this humanness and placing this history into conversation with Gloria Anzaldúa will offer insights about the ongoing wounding still happening up until today at the interstices of religion, sexuality, and coloniality.

## CHAPTER FOUR

## GLORIA ANZALDÚA, CONOCIMIENTO, AND BELONGING IN THE BORDERLANDS

I now turn to Gloria Anzaldúa (1942-2004) as a conversation partner about belonging. Anzaldúa was an author who made important contributions in the fields of Chicana literary studies, queer theory, women's and gender studies, and disability studies, even giving rise to a burgeoning field of "borderlands studies." Anzaldúa's method was very explicitly derived from her own lived experience, and her method *was* "mestiza," a Spanish term meaning that a person is *mezclado*, "mixed" with both Indigenous, European, and oftentimes African ancestry. Anzaldúa believed that "[w]e stand at a major threshold in the extension of consciousness," while simultaneously being "caught in the remolinos (vortices) of systemic change across all fields of knowledge."<sup>1</sup> Her writings intentionally brought the reader into these vortices on the threshold of shifting consciousness from many different systems of knowledge. From beautifully combined genres of essay, poetry, autobiography to using Chicano Spanish, English, Nahuatl, and even the insider jargon of the academy ("academese," in her terms) Anzaldúa wove together themes from colonial histories of violence, Chicana literary critique, women's and gender studies, spirituality, and community organizing.

Later in her life, the *patlache* (queer) Chicana feminist author had a daily routine of walking to the ocean and sitting with a tree for inspiration. Her special connection with this

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<sup>1</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz En Lo Oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality*, ed. AnaLouise Keating, Latin America Otherwise (Duke University Press, 2015), 119.

particular tree was cemented with the image that she saw in the space left behind when one of the branches was severed: la Virgen de Guadalupe seemed to be visible in the knots, rings, and coloration of the space where this branch was cut off. One day, Anzaldúa wrote about absorbing this tree's energy as she waited for inspiration for her writing process, eventually merging her consciousness with it.

Today I walk to the ocean, to my favorite tree, what I call la Virgen's tree... With my back against its trunk, I meditate, allowing it to absorb my body into its being; my arms become its branches, my hair its leaves, its sap the blood that flows in my veins. I look at the broken and battered raíces dangling down the edge of the cliff, then stare up at the trunk. I listen to the sea breathing us in and out with its wet sucking sounds, feel the insects burrow into our skin, observe the birds hopping from rama to rama, sense people taking shade under our arms.<sup>2</sup>

I begin with this image because it embodies the intersection of what I find so important about Anzaldúa's work for this chapter. By shifting amongst multiple worlds, Anzaldúa theorizes a different form of knowing, *conocimiento*, that challenges colonial worldviews as well as other monological structures of belonging. She attends to wounds caused by structures like colonialism, racism, and sexism that fix bodies into hierarchies of worth. The particularly Mexican and Catholic imagery of la Virgen de Guadalupe, whom Anzaldúa referred to as "the single most potent religious, political, and cultural image of the Chicano/mexicano,"<sup>1</sup> spoke to her because of the ways that la Virgen existed amongst many different worlds: "like my race, she is a synthesis of the old world and the new, of the religion and culture of the two races in our psyche, the conquerors and the conquered."<sup>3</sup> For Chicanos, la Virgen mediated amongst the internal cultural influences of Spanish, Indigenous, African, and other ancestries while also

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<sup>2</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz En Lo Oscuro*, 67.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

mediating between “Chicanos and the white world.”<sup>4</sup> Anzaldúa saw La Virgen as a mediatrix of multiple cultures among human beings, different religious systems, and planes of reality, too. For Anzaldúa, “La Virgen de Guadalupe is the symbol of ethnic identity and of the tolerance for ambiguity that Chicanos-mexicanos, people of mixed race, people who have Indian blood, people who cross cultures, by necessity possess.”<sup>1</sup>

Seeing the face of the Mother of Jesus in a severed tree branch also highlights the way Anzaldúa creatively interacts with Catholic imagery beyond the limits of ecclesial authority. The Mary tree points to important elements of Anzaldúa’s thought that allowed her to construct alternative ways of belonging. Anzaldúa narrates the miraculous apparition on December 9, 1531, when la Virgen appeared on Tepayác Hill, the exact same location where the temple for the Nahua goddess Tonantsi was destroyed during the conquest:

Speaking Nahuatl, she told Juan Diego, a poor Indian crossing Tepayác Hill, whose Indian name was Cuautlaohuac and who belonged to the mazehual class, the humblest within the Chichimeca tribe, that her name was María Coatlatlopeuh. Coatl is the Nahuatl word for serpent. Lopeuh means ‘the one who has dominion over serpents.’ I interpret this as ‘the one who is at one with the beasts.’<sup>5</sup>

This one example of her narrative storytelling shows how she reads against the grain of standard Catholic and Nahua interpretations, highlighting her creative agency to participate in meaning-making across cultures and religious traditions. Anzaldúa envisioned la Virgen de Guadalupe as a mediator who bridged the connection between human beings and other animals.

The Guadalupe tree also frames the intimate connection she felt with non-human living species: her writing process required this contact with the ocean and the trees. She narrated an

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

alternative ontology and epistemology, one that doesn't place human beings as superior or distant from plant life. It is not just people who are thought of as participating in these global processes of negotiating more complex forms of belonging: the earth itself, as well as all plant and animal species, are participating in this collective shift, too. Humans, animals, plants can all participate in this relation of mutuality. La Virgen mediated "between humans and the divine, between this reality and the reality of spirit entities." For Anzaldúa, this spiritual mediation meant traversing multiple realms of reality. This multiplicity held more than that which could be empirically tested, the measure for what is real in a scientific paradigm of instrumental reason.

The Catholic approaches we have already explored have no problem trafficking beyond the material and into the spirit world; however, this framework cannot handle metaphysical multiplicity, thus reducing differing understandings of the real to the human realm of cultural differences. For Vitoria, these should be left behind after gaining proper Christian education. For Francis, these realities should be assimilated into Catholic doctrine through inculturation—a term that implies no change in doctrinal parameters. If that is not possible, then they should be engaged through a dialogue that maintains distance and difference. Anzaldúa leaned into the spaces of blending, impurity, and creativity without knowing the final outcome. She respected difference but did not make distance into difference: modes of connection and the possibility of transformation were key within her theories. According to Anzaldúa, reality is fluid in the spaces in between.<sup>6</sup> She narrates her own traveling across multiple realities and worldviews, but she also keeps this movement tethered to the necessary change of material conditions.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 122.

One of Anzaldúa's most important goals was to transform the violence that stemmed from colonial legacies, and this lack of ability to inhabit in-betweenness safely perpetrated many forms of epistemic violence. But these legacies were expressed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as the militarized U.S./Mexico border that erased the people living in the borderlands who didn't fit on either side of the simplistic us/them division. It manifested in the anti-Mexican US educational system, where Anzaldúa suffered the Anglo-American disdain for bilingualism while growing up in Hargill, Texas. She also experienced it in higher education, like the first PhD program that she didn't complete because she was told that Chicana literary critique that was in both English and Spanish was not a valid field of literary study. She also confronted the monologic of patriarchal and homophobic domination within white, Mexican, and Indigenous cultures; the poisonous fiction of white supremacy that fractured the psyches of both white people and people of color; and the objectivizing logic that furthered the disconnect of body, soul, and nature that destroyed spirit.

Each of these experiences, however painful they may have been, aided Anzaldúa in developing her theory of *conocimiento* from the spaces in between. Anzaldúa admired the quality of shifting, holding ambiguity, and bridging amongst multiple worlds, arguing that this fluid way of thinking produced a particularly potent epistemology for transforming the pain of oppression. Anzaldúa narrates the violence that established such social hierarchies while offering creative amalgamations for rethinking identity. These insights are important for rethinking belonging as a process, and Anzaldúa centers the vulnerability of wounding as a particularly fruitful site for building connection amongst human and non-human beings living together on this planet.

Anzaldúa envisions another way of thinking, *conocimiento*, and this thinking creates the conditions for alternate modes of belonging. Through the metaphor of a tree, *el árbol de la vida*, Anzaldúa outlines a process of evaluating one's history, hearing other people's stories, and building coalitions that can hold many different spiritual realities. These ideas only began to emerge in her unfinished dissertation work, so part of this chapter is about bringing these ideas into conversation with her more famous earlier work on the borderlands. I will begin by exploring the many facets of the borderlands and how these sites develop *conocimiento* before turning to *el árbol de la vida* as an image for rethinking belonging.

### **Conocimiento in the Borderlands**

Anzaldúa's theory of *conocimiento* redefined rationality and brought together many of the most important insights of her writings. When introducing the concept of *conocimiento*, Anzaldúa compared two accounts that described how Xochiquetzal, the Aztec goddess of flowers, and Eve, the first woman from the biblical creation story in Genesis 2:4-3:24, were demonized for their desire for knowledge:

According to Christianity and other spiritual traditions, the evil that lies at the root of the human condition is the desire to know—which translates into aspiring to *conocimiento* (reflective consciousness)...In pursuit of knowledge, including carnal knowledge (symbolized by the serpent), some female origin figures 'disobeyed.' Casting aside the Edenic conditions and unconscious 'being,' they took a bite of awareness—the first human to take agency. Xochiquetzal, a Mexican indigenous deity, ascends to the upper world to seek knowledge from 'el árbol sagrado,' the tree of life, que florecía en Tamoanchan. In another Garden of Eden, Eve snatches the fruit (the treasure of forbidden knowledge) from the serpent's mouth and 'invents' consciousness—the sense of self in the act of knowing.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 120–21.

In their quest for *conocimiento*, or a deeper sense of knowing that involved “opening all your senses, consciously inhabiting your body and decoding its symptoms,”<sup>8</sup> Anzaldúa highlighted that these mythical female origin figures that were characterized as disobedient also rightfully hunger for self-reflection and invent agency. Anzaldúa reclaimed this spiritual urge for knowledge as at the root of a deeper sense of consciousness and awareness, contrasting it with more materialistic, dualistic, and instrumental forms of rationality.

In the glossary of terms at the end of Anzaldúa’s unfinished dissertation, AnaLouise Keating traced the development of *conocimiento* to be a combination of previous terms from Anzaldúa’s work that lead to a “nonbinary, connectionist mode of thinking.”<sup>9</sup> The word *conocimiento* brought together expansive onto-epistemologies that are developed through traumatic experiences, coined “*la facultad*” by Anzaldúa, with her other term “*mestiza consciousness*,” which named the embodiment of plural epistemologies that can be found outside oneself but also within oneself. *Conocimiento* thus acknowledges that our thinking impacts our being, that we can change our ways of thinking if we want to change our ways of being, and that we are not limited to choosing one singular system of thinking-and-being over another. In fact, Anzaldúa explicitly shows the limitations of a monological onto-epistemology, the cost of maintaining such a worldview, and a method for changing it. Keating claims that, with *conocimiento*, Anzaldúa “develop[ed] the imaginal, spiritual-activist, and radically inclusionary possibilities” that were always present in her earlier writings.<sup>10</sup> Anzaldúa’s writings on the

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 243.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 243.



borderlands illustrate the trauma of the borderlands as well as the possibilities for recovering different ways of knowing and being that were oftentimes suppressed by dominant models of belonging.

Anzaldúa's work exposes the violence of monological belonging, denaturalizes the borders of these unnatural constructions that define us vs. them, and offers a mode of critical ethical reflection on belonging that happens not in the academy or in the Vatican, but in the unstable and myriad spaces in between clashing realities.

People who refuse to pick sides and identify exclusively with one group trouble the majority, disturbing the dominant discourse of race, just as bisexuals trouble that of sexuality, transpeople confound that of gender. Cracks in the discourses are like tender shoots of grass, plants pushing against the fixed cement of disciplines and cultural beliefs, eventually overturning the cement slabs.<sup>11</sup>

By developing her definition of the borderlands, Anzaldúa destabilized notions of the state, religion, gender, sex, race, and even singular notions of reality in a deeply personal way that is also political. Her works show the value of this form of knowing derived from the spaces in between for ethical reflection, particularly considering the violence of simplistic forms of belonging that cannot handle ambiguity, multiplicity, or changefulness.

#### Autohistoria-teoría

Those who carry *conocimiento* refuse to accept spirituality as a devalued form of knowledge and instead elevate it to the same level occupied by science and rationality. A form of spiritual inquiry, *conocimiento* is reached via creative acts...Through creative engagements, you embed your experiences in a larger frame of reference, connecting your personal struggles with those of other beings on the planet, with the struggles of the Earth itself.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 119.

According to Anzaldúa, *conocimiento* was both the journey and the destination; she highlighted that the process is valued more than an end goal. The process and the sharing of the process for Anzaldúa came about through writing, her favorite creative act. Anzaldúa emphasized that her writing process was embodied and that she wanted the words she wrote to impact other bodies. If the imagination can have the same visceral impact as material existence, as Anzaldúa claimed, then writing is a powerful tool for impacting transformation. Anzaldúa loved the written word, but she wanted to use it in ways that engaged more than just the mind. In an interview, Anzaldúa said, “I don’t know of anyone who writes through the body. I want to write from the body; that’s why we’re in a body.”<sup>13</sup> This creativity was her response to a spiritual questioning that drew her toward being an artist and a *chamana*, or the word she used for a healer who could shapeshift across realities, dive into the subconscious, and reach otherworldly experiences through the written word.<sup>14</sup> She wanted to be someone who was “healing through words, using words as a medium for expressing the flights of the soul, communing with spirit, having access to these other realities or worlds.”<sup>15</sup> Anzaldúa’s own body (rather than the academy or the Church) was what she relied on for her authority, and her use of words were intended to lead her readers back to their own experiences, their own bodies, and their own process of shifting consciousness individually and communally.

While a theory like natural law claims access to a form of objectivity that is dependent on a *telos* or end goal, Anzaldúa situated her theories within her specific context, narrating the

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<sup>13</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, *Interviews/Entrevistas* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 63.

<sup>14</sup> For more on the implications of this shapeshifting, see Kelli D. Zaytoun, “‘Now Let Us Shift’ the Subject: Tracing the Path and Posthumanist Implications of *La Naguala* / The Shapeshifter in the Works of Gloria Anzaldúa,” *MELUS* 40, no. 4 (2015): 69–88.

<sup>15</sup> Gloria. Anzaldúa, *Interviews/Entrevistas*, 19.

continuous *process* of negotiating the borderlands, or places where contradictory realities touch.

Anzaldúa integrates her personal realization with communal processes through the creative act of writing, aiming to shift the collective understanding of what is possible through her own experiences.

Anzaldúa called this theorizing that came from personal experiences *autohistoria-teoría*. In an interview, Anzaldúa defined “autohistoria” as “the concept that Chicanas and women of color write not only about abstract ideas but also bring in their personal history as well as the history of their community.”<sup>16</sup> In Spanish, there is also a play on words: where “auto” is referring to the process of writing the self, *historia* in Spanish can refer to history, which Anzaldúa emphasized as something that was “collective, personal, cultural, and racial” as well to “fiction, a story you make up.”<sup>17</sup> Anzaldúa brought theory to life through historical, fictional, and personalized modes of storytelling. Importantly, she named a mode of theorizing that specifically validated drawing theory from experience for Chicanas and women of color. People who were denied the status of human and producer of knowledge through colonial domination were authorized to write themselves into being through Anzaldúa’s method.

*Autohistoria-teoría* is a different approach than any theory that may claim objectivity is reached through *distance* from the personal. The narration of particularities gives the context for how these ideas were formed. This method invites the messiness of our desires, contradictions, and multiplicities. It claims validity through naming its own situated subjectivity instead of claiming objectivity. Womanist ethicist Emilie Townes makes a similar claim, highlighting how

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 243.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 243.

the particularities of experience can often draw stronger connections amongst different people than trying to create an overarching abstract theory.<sup>18</sup> Autohistoria-teoría embodies this sentiment, especially when it creates connections across people situated differently because of the highly specific nature of the writing.

It also highlights the mutual influence of individual and communal processes of meaning-making: the stories we tell about ourselves shape our communities; the stories we tell about our communities shape ourselves. Later, I will address how Anzaldúa showed how we can tell our stories in ways that redefine our communities of belonging. In this way, autohistoria-teoría named theory making as a process of individual and collective knowledge forged from particular locations and experiences. Autohistoria-teoría doesn't fall into the trap of thinking that the stories we tell about ourselves are transparent, or that the stories we tell are unmotivated. Instead, the method invites naming one's motivations, with all of their contradictions, acknowledging how these might change as we shift over time.

More than anyone in her family, Anzaldúa soaked up the stories that her grandmothers used to tell. She found that the power of the imagination was central to her survival and flourishing. Starting in her childhood, Anzaldúa cultivated alternate realities as a form of protection when she was perceived as alien and different as a small child.

“Being different was really right for being an artist or writer because you start dealing with all the other levels of reality besides the physical, concrete level. To protect myself I had to invent this whole new world, the world of symbols and the imagination.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> For more on this, see the opening chapter of Emilie M. Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, Palgrave Macmillan US, 2007).

<sup>19</sup> Gloria. Anzaldúa, *Interviews/Entrevistas*, 23.

Anzaldúa used her imagination as a form of protecting herself from trauma. Anzaldúa's writings blurred the boundaries between reality and the imaginal world to make her current conditions more survivable. Autohistoria-teoría was motivated towards healing and transformation, and saw autobiography, motivated historical narrative, and imaginative storytelling as valid forms of knowledge production, especially when confronting monological claims about reality. Anzaldúa's autohistoria-teoría shows the epistemic advantages of critiquing monological belonging from the physical, sexual, psychological, and spiritual borderlands.

### **Border Theories and Borderlands**

Understanding Anzaldúa's contributions to different concepts of belonging requires an unpacking of theories of borders and borderlands. Anzaldúa's theory of the "borderlands" came from growing up near the physical border that divided Texas and the United States. This heavily militarized national border provides powerful imagery for the impetus to draw straight lines of separation to demarcate what I refer to as simplistic forms of belonging.

Anzaldúa defined a border as a "dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge" that is used to set up "the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*."<sup>20</sup> Anzaldúa highlights the distinction created through a border that separates people into differing categories of affiliation. It creates a sense of distance through one straight line of division. This demarcation doesn't only define communities of belonging against others, but also connects to perceptions of safety and danger. Far from being a neutral barrier of separation, the border reinforces notions of security for those who belong and can readily justify the necessity of violence against those who

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<sup>20</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 5.

do not. It also creates fear for both parties: a fear of those inhabitants from the other side as well as fears of what might happen if one crosses over into a territory where one doesn't belong.

The border manufactures a separation, creating a perceived distance. However, this work of division was also accompanied by an inescapable influence, or an undeniable commonality, between the two things that were attempting to be separated. While a border divided, it also was a place of *connection*, of meeting. We will return to the image of the wound as a site of pain *and* connection in her later works, but the next segment from *Borderlands/La Frontera* is one of her most quoted passages. When describing the border as “an open wound,” Anzaldúa said that the U.S./Mexico border was “una herida abierta where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country—a border culture.”<sup>21</sup> Anzaldúa’s description is graphic but telling: the power differences between two groups, the violence of contact, and yet the mutually bleeding open wounds that mixed together—this leads to the birth of a borderland, that “vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary.”<sup>22</sup> This border that aims at a clear separation is not always so clear; oftentimes it must be maintained through violent force. The economic impacts of this border make it so that two worlds collide: The First and the Third, attempted to be separated but now hemorrhaging and constantly bleeding into each other. Notice that in this description, there is no room for a scab to form; the trauma persists since the conditions of collision have not changed. The borderlands show the pain and confusion left in the wake of enforcing a border that oversimplifies.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

Reckoning with the different forms of emotional residue that come from such borders will be the subject of much of the rest of the chapter. Especially important for the concept of belonging is the way that those who live in the borderlands *denaturalize* the constructed borders of belonging: this unnatural boundary is not inevitable, and the identities that come from its demarcations are not a given. According to Anzaldúa, those who live in the borderlands experience life as “a constant state of transition” outside of the perceived norms of the dominant culture.

The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. Los *atravesados* live here: the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed, the half-dead; in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the ‘normal.’<sup>23</sup>

Sexual deviancy, racial impurity, strangeness: those who break culturally dominant social and structural categories are the dwellers of the borderlands. Los *atravesados*, those who challenge dominant norms and values with their being, show the limits of these social constructs while frequently having to negotiate them to survive. This is often traumatic: the pain of non-belonging includes exclusion, erasure, unintelligibility, lack of opportunities, social support, among many more constant struggles. But Anzaldúa’s theorizing shows the ways that people who lived in this crossroads could take this pain and transmute it into a deeper sense, what she calls *la facultad*, the capability of an expanded consciousness that could shift across multiple locations, cultures—even planes of reality.

Though much attention was given to the geopolitical implications of borderlands theory, Anzaldúa herself was adamant that the borderlands were broader than just national boundaries. It was easy for academics to engage the political aspects of her writing, but Anzaldúa wanted to

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 109.

explore more facets that accompanied the thinking of borders and borderlands. In the preface to the first edition of *Borderlands*, Anzaldúa clarifies that she is addressing multiple borderlands that exist beyond geopolitical borders.

The actual borderland that I am dealing with in this book is the Texas-U.S. Southwest/Mexican border. The psychological borderlands, the sexual borderlands and the spiritual borderlands are not particular to the Southwest. In fact, the Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy.<sup>24</sup>

Thus, according to Anzaldúa, the physical, sexual, psychological, and spiritual borderlands could be found in many different contexts. The shrinking of distance between people due to some form of intimacy, proximity, and/or touch precipitated a borderland that could also be theorized in this way.

However, it was turbulent to be in these shrinking spaces in between. Anzaldúa frequently trafficked in multiple social spheres that demanded conflicting loyalties from her. She was in the borderlands with many different norms and groups beyond just the domination of white supremacy or heteropatriarchy. She refused singular belonging and narrated a process of holding these different worlds in tension, ultimately critiquing the limited nature of identity categories rather than herself.

“I am a wind-swayed bridge, a crossroads inhabited by whirlwinds. Gloria, the facilitator, Gloria, the mediator, straddling the walls between abysses. “Your allegiance is to La Raza, the Chicano movement,” say the members of my race. “Your allegiance is to the Third World,” say my Black and Asian friends. “Your allegiance is to your gender, to women,” say the feminists. Then there’s my allegiance to the Gay movement, to the socialist revolution, to the New Age, to magic and the occult. And there’s my affinity to literature, to the world of the artist. What am I? A third world lesbian feminist with

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 20.



Marxist and mystic leanings. They would chop me up into little fragments and tag each piece with a label.”<sup>25</sup>

While this is a critique about identity, it also speaks to concepts of belonging. Anzaldúa leans in to the inseparable influences between nature and culture, individual and community. As different people demanded that Anzaldúa associate herself with different communities of belonging, she stayed in the tension of holding connections across all these different communities. She rejected the categorization and neat fragmentation of singular belonging for a turbulent relationality of connection. The bridge and the crossroads were places of confluence and touching that she held within herself; the winds that rock the bridge, the whirlwinds that travel the crossroads, seem to be like the chorus of voices that challenge her to choose just one allegiance. But they are also images of the natural world and its processes.

Anzaldúa lamented how singular concepts of belonging restrict the possibilities for alliances and ways of connecting across identity differences.

For the politically correct stance we let color, class, and gender separate us from those who would be kindred spirits. So the walls grow higher, the gulfs between us wider, the silences more profound. There is an enormous contradiction in being a bridge.<sup>26</sup>

The insight that Anzaldúa offers holds the tension between assimilation *and* isolation by finding a way to be in multiple conflicting realities without losing herself. She held connections with people that were different from her *and* similar to her. Though this may create psychological distress, it is better than caving to overly simplistic definitions.

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<sup>25</sup> Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds., *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, Fourth edition (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015), 205.

<sup>26</sup> Moraga and Anzaldúa, 206.

## Sensitivity and Participation

Those who lived in the borderlands could cultivate sensitivity—but who does that include? Some claim that Anzaldúa’s work “has been received throughout the hemisphere and the world as a text that addresses new global realities, advancing our understanding of many aspects of the cross-cultural exchange increasingly characteristic of contemporary society.”<sup>27</sup> However, the particularities of Anzaldúa’s geographical place and physical embodiment were central to this mode of theorizing. In an introduction to the 4<sup>th</sup> edition of *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Cantú and Hurtado said that “Anzaldúa uses the geographical location of her birth as the source of her theorizing.”<sup>28</sup> The role of the body—of concrete, embodied experience—was central to Anzaldúa’s theorizing. Does this mean that Anzaldúa’s theorizing should only be relevant for queer Chicana feminists?

Cantú and Hurtado would claim that queer Chicanas have an epistemic advantage for understanding Anzaldúa’s experience and thus theories. However, we also need to be careful about not reinscribing monological forms of belonging: assuming that shared identity equals sameness could erase the internal complexities among queer Chicanas who have different experiences from Anzaldúa’s. Theresa Delgadillo notes that Anzaldúa’s book *Borderlands* functions on two levels, both as a narration of Anzaldúa’s personal experience and as a theoretical lens. These two levels “remain tightly interwoven throughout the text and apply to the cultivation of new levels of consciousness about the material, social, and conceptual frameworks

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<sup>27</sup> Theresa Delgadillo, *Spiritual Mestizaje: Religion, Gender, Race, and Nation in Contemporary Chicana Narrative* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 2.

<sup>28</sup> Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 5.

through which we define ourselves.”<sup>29</sup> Thus, analyzing the borderlands must hold the tension of the particularities of Anzaldúa’s experience and the particular importance of her work for Queer Chicana scholarship while also acknowledging the wider application that this embodied theory lends. But this is where forging connections across differences through particularities is essential.

People who have experienced living in the borderlands have a deeper understanding of navigating this complexity—but only if they are able to transmute the trauma of the borderlands into sensitivity. People that derive safety and group membership from clear distinctions like borders need to look to the knowledge produced by people in the borderlands who are skilled at navigating this space in between. Struggling to maintain crumbling forms of monological belonging can lead people toward simplistic modes of thinking that require splitting, relying on fundamentalist mentalities, intensifying blame of the other, and oftentimes increased violence. In “Now Let Us Shift...Conocimiento...Inner Work, Public Acts,” Anzaldúa claims that everyone is “undergoing profound transformations and shifts in perception. All, including the planet and every species, are caught between cultures and bleed-throughs among different worlds—each with its own version of reality.”<sup>30</sup> Whether becoming numb through trauma or becoming numb in order to maintain simplistic (and often violent) worldviews, people who are situated in different ways must come into this sensitivity through different modes.

The borderlands challenge modes of thinking about race, religion, and gender by exposing the violence necessary to claim such separations are natural (or neutral). While the borderlands may destabilize people who feel safety in the stability of certain identity categories,

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<sup>29</sup> Delgado, *Spiritual Mestizaje*, 5.

<sup>30</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz En Lo Oscuro*, 118.

they also show our interconnectedness and mutual influences. Though in the next section I name these aspects with different terms, you will notice the bleed throughs within these categories as well, since even the physical, sexual, psychological, and spiritual cannot be so neatly separated. Thus, I will be reflecting on the interconnection of all the borderlands, even when I am speaking about only one of them.

### **The Physical, Psychological, Sexual, and Spiritual Borderlands**

In the most literal sense, the physical borderlands referred to the Southwest Texas/Mexico border where Anzaldúa was born and raised. This signified both a geological location as well as a geopolitical physical construct. The connection with the land, and the political history of drawing lines of ownership across it, were etched within Anzaldúa's own family history, her theorizing, and her spirituality. Anzaldúa traces the historical legacies that constructed national borders, private property, and relationships with the body and the land as objects. Her writings challenge the stability of identity categories forged through what Anibal Quijano and María Lugones called the coloniality of power.

Born in the Rio Grande Valley in 1942, Anzaldúa was a 6th-generation Chicana whose ancestors had lived in "El Valle" before Texas was part of the United States. Anzaldúa's work attended to the violence and intergenerational trauma experienced in the borderlands, both from colonization by the Spanish as well as warring with the United States. The connection between land and body was very central in Anzaldúa's work and reclaiming connections to both are part of what makes her method so important.

For women the conquest has always been about what happens to their children and about what happens to their bodies because the first thing the conquistadores did was rape the Indian women and create the mestizo race...it was a conquest through penetration.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Gloria. Anzaldúa, *Interviews/Entrevistas*, 181.

History is embodied in Anzaldúa's work. The pain of shifting geopolitical borders will be carried in the bodies of the inhabitants caught in the crossfire. The wound of the border can also be found as a wound on the Chicana's skin, the violence of the border playing out as violence on the body.

Growing up on a ranchito in houses with no electricity and no running water, Anzaldúa said she "grew up with the land, animals, woods, and coyotes."<sup>32</sup> Her closeness to the land impacted her understanding of belonging, but she also narrates history from the land's perspective. In *Borderlands*, Anzaldúa described *the land* as having "survived possession and ill-use by five countries: Spain, Mexico, the Republic of Texas, the U.S., the Confederacy, and the U.S. again. It has survived Anglo-Mexican blood feuds, lynchings, burnings, rapes, pillage."<sup>33</sup> In this description, the land is surviving the violence done to human beings as different lines of authority get drawn across it.

Though both sides of her family owned land a few generations back, they lost their land rights through "carelessness, through white people's greed, and my grandmother not knowing English."<sup>34</sup> In an interview, Anzaldúa said "It's so senseless to chop up the land and give everyone a little piece...Private ownership didn't occur until the whites came."<sup>35</sup> The racism of the geopolitical line meant that Anzaldúa lived with the oppression of white landowners treating her as if she was a squatter on *their* land. Anzaldúa said that as a Chicana in the United States,

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>33</sup> Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 112.

<sup>34</sup> Anzaldúa, *Interviews/Entrevistas*, 88.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

she was treated like an 80,000-year-old immigrant, with the border crossing her people, not her crossing the border.

Gringos in the Southwest consider the inhabitants of the borderlands transgressors, aliens—whether they possess documents or not, whether they’re Chicanos, Indians or Blacks. Do not enter, trespassers will be raped, maimed, strangled, gassed, shot. The only ‘legitimate’ inhabitants are those in power, the whites and those who align themselves with whites.<sup>36</sup>

Anzaldúa illustrates the lunacy of geopolitical constructions that align belonging in the United States with white racial identity. An entire history of land theft, murder, and war must either be erased or justified for the monological belonging of white nationalism to function. The people who experienced such violence are told that they are “trespassers” for existing, sometimes for centuries in the same place. Not aligning with white values justifies sexual and physical violence. Aligning with white values means becoming numb to these histories, the physical traces on the skin, the lived realities of the ongoing trauma of this form of belonging.

Anzaldúa also explored complexities in her own family lineages. She described her father Urbano as “this peasant-type with aristocratic, Spanish-German, blond, blue-eyed, Jew...”<sup>37</sup> and her mother Amalia’s family as “very india, working class, with maybe some black blood which is always looked down on in the valley where I come from.”<sup>38</sup> Though her family experienced exploitation from white landowners, she also named her father’s aristocratic and European ancestry. Though Black people and Chicanos were both treated as disposable in the borderlands, she doesn’t shy away from naming the internalized anti-Blackness within her mother’s side of

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<sup>36</sup> Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 25–26.

<sup>37</sup> Anzaldúa, *Interviews/Entrevistas*, 89.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

the family. Quijano illustrates the ways that racialized identity justified who was worthy of getting paid wages and who was exploitable as slave labor. The strategic distancing from Black ancestors by her more Indigenous and working class family members shows the way that these systems impress upon us, shaping which histories we tell when grappling for survival amidst oppressive systems.

Anzaldúa still described her family as being “like slaves” as they worked land that was stolen from them. The family was often going into debt just from buying the necessary supplies from the white landowners who banded together to form the corporation, Rio Farms, Inc. When she was growing up, her family worked together in the fields as sharecroppers. Anzaldúa wrote about covering watermelons with paper plates in the wintertime, picking cotton, and the day when she left her gorra, the hat that came to symbolize women’s roles and gendered working conditions in the fields. Dropping the sunhat designed to “protect” her skin from getting darker and trading it for one of the sombreros that men wore was a formative memory from her youth.<sup>39</sup>

Her family only migrated for work once, since her father didn’t want his children to miss school. These experiences, along with Anzaldúa’s passion for learning and reading despite the racism she experienced throughout her life in educational institutions, fortified Anzaldúa’s commitments toward accessible education, including a time when she traveled with families as an educator as they moved across the Midwest for seasonal work. “For a woman of my culture there used to be only three directions she could turn: to the Church as a nun, to the streets as a

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<sup>39</sup> Cindy Cruz speaks about this moment as a crucial point of theorizing that combines Chicana conditions of labor, gendered politics of cultural clothing, citing the passages in *Borderlands* that discuss the gorra, along with el rebozo and la mantilla, as cultural symbols of protection that lock women into rigid gender roles. See Cindy Cruz, “UTSA El Mundo Zurdo-Gloria Anzaldua Conference 2013 - YouTube,” accessed April 18, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pOzf4Rue0Lk>.

prostitute, or to the home as a mother. Today some of us have a fourth choice: entering the world by way of education and career and becoming self-autonomous persons.”<sup>40</sup> Anzaldúa wanted to create pathways for other Chicanas to define themselves beyond what both Anglo and Chicano culture offered. Though the previous chapter showed the harms of colonial education, Anzaldúa hoped that education could be a gateway toward transformative autonomy and self-definition. This self-definition could even challenge concepts of the self.

Anzaldúa’s strong sense of her own raíces, or roots, were central to her work as an educator and a writer. In a cultural context that shamed non-Anglo culture, her work reclaimed and honored the beauty and possibility of “mestizaje,” the confluence, in her case, of Indigenous, European, and African ancestry.

...we grew up in a country that used to be Mexican territory, a Mexican state that was sold to the U.S. All of a sudden we Mexicans became Mexican Americans, became foreigners in our own country. What and who we were was not valued, was treated as inferior. From kindergarten through college we were bludgeoned with these views. Reading and writing books that show Chicanos in a positive way becomes part of de-colonizing, disindoctrinating ourselves from the oppressive messages we’ve been given.<sup>41</sup>

Her deep sense of rootedness also gave her the ability to be critical of her Tejana upbringing in Texas, making her critical of the cultural romanticism witnessed from others trying to reclaim a devalued culture from the degradation of white supremacy. Though she eventually moved from her home in El Valle to continue her education and found community in queer and feminist circles during her time spent in the Bay Area as a writer, she always kept a strong

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<sup>40</sup> Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 39.

<sup>41</sup> Anzaldúa, *Interviews/Entrevistas*, 244–45.



connection to her roots. “I am a turtle, wherever I go I carry ‘home’ on my back.”<sup>42</sup> This security in her roots made her feel like her home was always with her.

As we transition toward the psychological borderlands, it is important to note that Anzaldúa carried more than just a sense of home within her; the physical borderlands mimicked the divisions created in our psyche by these notions of belonging. The self was etched with communal divisions, just as communal divisions were challenged by autonomous selves.

[T]he struggle is inner: Chicano, indio, American Indian, mojado, mexicano, immigrant Latino, Anglo in power, working class Anglo, Black, Asian—our psyches resemble the bordertowns and are populated by the same people. The struggle has always been inner, and is played out in the outer terrains. Awareness of our situation must come before inner changes, which in turn come before changes in society. Nothing happens in the ‘real’ world unless it first happens in the images in our heads.<sup>43</sup>

The external splitting of the physical borderlands, according to Anzaldúa, will not be mended until our internal psychological fractures are attended to. In her unfinished dissertation work, Anzaldúa even wrote about the body as a microcosm of these borders drawn across the land. Her concept of a “geography of selves” held the important reflection of the larger political structures and divisions that get etched onto the body, and how that might contribute to a conception of the self that is multiple. “I see the mestiza as a geography of selves—of different bordering countries—who stands at the threshold of two or more worlds and negotiates the cracks between the worlds.”<sup>44</sup> The splitting and segregation also happens internally, shaping how we view our selves in excess of singular forms of belonging. When external borders split one’s

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<sup>42</sup> Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 43.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>44</sup> Anzaldúa, *Interviews/Entrevistas*, 268.

understanding of self, an internal borderlands also gets formed. However, Anzaldúa proposes this internal negotiation with different parts of oneself as a site for cultivating *la facultad* as well.

She also claims that for structures to change, we must first change our mentalities. To some extent, the psychological borderlands are described in *every* aspect of gaining *conocimiento*, but a closer look provides examples that show psychological discomfort as a necessary part of the process of transforming one's perception. Mapping the stages of change brings readers through a non-linear process; one that can be related to as well as adapted for one's own negotiation of complex belonging.

The psychological borderlands attend to the mutual influences of individual thought processes and social constructs while focusing on the internal work of transformation. Anzaldúa highlighted the epistemic *advantage* of having this multiplicity of perspectives on the inside, as many thinkers who have been split by white supremacy have proposed. Norma Cantú and Aída Hurtado note that Anzaldúa's theorizing builds on W.E.B DuBois' theory of double consciousness while specifically applying it to the experiences of being Chicana on the South Texas border.<sup>45</sup> Negotiating these contradictions meant that Anzaldúa became highly self-reflective, particularly regarding the psychological impacts of living as a bridge amongst conflicting realities and claims.

However, there is a violence of being split within oneself due to the categorical splicing of the physical borderlands; even Anzaldúa claims that the *emotional residue* is what needs to be attended to in the borderlands because of the border. Trauma, according to Gabor Maté, is an internal psychological wound. It is not just about what has happened to us; if that were the case,

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<sup>45</sup> Norma E. Cantú and Aída Hurtado, "Breaking Borders/Constructing Bridges: Twenty-Five Years of Borderlands/La Frontera," in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 4th edition, 2012, 5–6.

then there would be nothing we can do to change it, since we cannot change the fact of something traumatic happening. But trauma *is* about what happened *inside* of us because of what happened to us, and that manifests in our bodies.<sup>46</sup> Anzaldúa gives great attention to this internal process, and the internalized borders. But she also challenges a focus that might become *too* internal, losing touch with broader communities of accountability and the necessary systemic change that must happen for these forms of trauma to subsist. Anzaldúa proposes a spiraling back and forth between inner and outer, a process of internal work that transforms the external then returns to the internal, over and over again. This process captures the blurring between self and other—our inseparable influences on each other. It also highlights the need for mental shifts of imagination to shift concrete structures into other figurations.

What should we do when confronted with situations that undo our sense of who we are? Anzaldúa gives many examples, like surviving through natural disasters, receiving a diabetes diagnosis, getting physically assaulted on the street, processing the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, having an out-of-body experience, experiencing racism from white colleagues at a feminist conference, and feeling like an outsider in her graduate degree program. These experiences catapulted Anzaldúa into a space of struggle and transformation that she narrated as a never-ending step by step process of gaining *conocimiento*.

Anzaldúa created re-interpretations of Aztec goddesses to symbolize different stages of *conocimiento*. Anzaldúa reinterpreted two goddesses from the Aztec pantheon as archetypes for confronting the shadow and re-envisioning one's story. Coatlicue, whom she began to write about in *Borderlands*, became her symbol for when someone is frozen, paralyzed by *un susto* or

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<sup>46</sup> Rich Roll, "Dr. Gabor Maté On How Trauma Fuels Disease," Rich Roll Podcast, n.d., <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AEpD2o6MZOk>.

shock that is difficult to confront. Anzaldúa described Coatlicue (“Serpent Skirt”) as the earliest form of “Mesoamerican fertility and Earth goddesses.”<sup>47</sup> Coatlicue is the mother of Huitzilopochtli, the war god who received human sacrifices, and Coyolxauhqui (described below). However, in Anzaldúa’s reinterpretation, the Coatlicue state is the second stage of *conocimiento*, where one falls deeply into shock, unavoidable feelings, and confrontation with a reality that is not yet accepted and reformulated.

Delgadillo argues that “Coatlicue, the goddess, as of life and death, names the site of death and rebirth in spiritual *mestizaje*, a metamorphosis that opens the way to acts of interpretation...”<sup>48</sup> In Coatlicue states, one is up against their own *desconocimientos*. The opposite of *conocimiento*, *desconocimiento* is how Anzaldúa defined states that move one away from sensitivity and consciousness. The psychological borderlands require negotiating the ways that *desconocimiento* and alternative forms of *conocimiento* can split the psyche and fragment one’s understanding of who they are.

But Anzaldúa strongly believed that even *desconocimientos*, or those ways of being or interacting that keep us from knowing the things we *do not want to know*, can also reveal important insights. “Each irritant is a grain of sand in the oyster of the imagination. Sometimes what accretes around an irritant or wound may produce a pearl of great insight, a theory.”<sup>49</sup> Interestingly, Anzaldúa defined *desconocimiento* in contrast to the seven deadly sins defining “small acts of *desconocimientos*” as “ignorance, frustrations, tendencies toward self-

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<sup>47</sup> Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 49.

<sup>48</sup> Delgadillo, *Spiritual Mestizaje*, 7–8.

<sup>49</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz En Lo Oscuro*, 2.

destructiveness, feelings of betrayal and powerlessness, and poverty of spirit and imagination.”<sup>50</sup>

Healing will not happen, Anzaldúa often remarked, if people are unable to access this deeply uncomfortable and painful psychological subconsciousness. Anzaldúa talked about entering this Coatlicue state for many different reasons: the shock of a medical diagnosis, assault, surviving a natural disaster. However, she also made a point that confronting this shadow was necessary for white people to come out of their forgotten forgetfulness of systemic racism and white supremacy, the ultimate form of desconocimiento.

Anzaldúa normalized the paralysis of the Coatlicue state as one that is a necessary precursor for transformation. By describing it, she gave readers tools to both feel this stage and move past it. The next phase required reconstructing oneself after becoming fragmented. She named this process of creative recreation the Coyolxauhqui imperative, where one is tasked with reconstructing the broken pieces into a new form. The Coyolxauhqui imperative was “a struggle to reconstruct oneself and heal the sustos resulting from woundings, traumas, racism, and other acts of violation que hechan pedazos nuestras almas, split us, scatter our energies, and haunt us.”<sup>51</sup> Anzaldúa described the legend and its symbolism for her own process of reconstructing self and narrative:

“When Coyolxauhqui tried to kill her mother, Coatlicue, her brother Huitzilopochtli, the war god, sprang out from the womb fully armed. He decapitated Coyolxauhqui and flung her down the temple, scattering her body parts in all directions, making her the first sacrificial victim. Coyolxauhqui is your symbol for both the process of emotional and psychical dismemberment, splitting body/mind/spirit/soul, and the creative work of putting all the pieces together in a new form, a partially unconscious work done in the night by the light of the moon, a labor of re-visioning and re-membering.”<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 124.

This psychological splitting came with the possibility of continuing to reconstruct a never complete wholeness of self. Like the moon's constantly shifting phases, the psychological borderlands can be spaces where the splitting of one's mind can find healing in a reformulation rooted in continual changefulness and becoming.

Anzaldúa's psychological borderlands show negotiations of combining pre-modern thought with fields like psychology and gender studies. Other theoretical influences on Anzaldúa's psychological thinking include James Hillman,<sup>53</sup> as well as the theories of Freud and Jung, particularly in regard to confronting the repressed subconscious.<sup>54</sup> But Anzaldúa said, "I know things older than Freud, older than gender."<sup>55</sup> Her method is the creation of something new through amalgamation, the rejection of a stance of purity that may claim superiority or inferiority of any knowledge systems. Though Anzaldúa revives older symbols for healing, she is not claiming to return to a previous, more authentic Indigeneity untouched by Western approaches. Creative reintegration and experimentation for survival amongst different influences is the goal.

For Anzaldúa, the psychological borderlands also possessed a sexual component, and this had to do with connecting with devalued aspects of one's sexuality as well as the ways that sex influenced gender norms. For Anzaldúa, the sexual borderlands broke through all cultural norms. Connected to the shadow, the sexual borderlands went deeper into the subconscious and challenged culturally constructed gender norms in Spanish, Anglo, and Indigenous cultures influenced by religious suspicion of deviant sexualities. Someone who crosses sexed boundaries

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<sup>53</sup> James Hillman, *Re-Visioning Psychology*, Reissue edition (New York: William Morrow Paperbacks, 1997).

<sup>54</sup> Matthew A. Fike, "Depth Psychology in Gloria Anzaldúa's Borderlands/La Frontera," *Journal of Jungian Scholarly Studies* 13 (2018): 52.

<sup>55</sup> Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 48.

may also gain access to different modes of knowing, showing how sex and gender norms impact the psyche.

Interestingly, Anzaldúa stated that she *chose* to be queer. Instead of staying within the “straight indoctrination” of her upbringing, she says that it was a choice for her to inhabit the sexual borderlands. She described her sexual behavior as “the ultimate rebellion” for the lesbian of color, a choice that furthered her need to negotiate multiple worlds:

...being lesbian and raised Catholic, indoctrinated as straight, I made the choice to be queer (for some it is genetically inherent). It’s an interesting path, one that continually slips in and out of the white, the Catholic, the Mexican, the indigenous, the instincts. In and out of my head. It makes for loquería, the crazies. It is a path of knowledge—one of knowing (and of learning) the history of oppression of our raza. It is a way of balancing, of mitigating duality.<sup>56</sup>

Anzaldúa claimed that this queerness was its own path of knowing that came from the sexual borderlands. Her word choice of being “indoctrinated as straight” is quite telling. Indoctrination typically refers to doctrine, such as the doctrines of the Church or a political ideology. In her experience being raised Catholic, heterosexualism was also a doctrine that was instilled in her. Choosing to challenge the assumptions of heterosexual sexual attraction meant delving deeper into gender roles that had been defined based on the duality of men versus women. As we will see later, Anzaldúa highlights choice and agency within the sexual and spiritual borderlands. This does not mean choosing to submit oneself to the violence of the border; it means choosing to align with ways of being that exist outside of the parameters that borders dictate, opening up possibilities.

However, there were also many risks of being in the spaces in between. Like the projections that racialized people experienced from white culture, the sexual borderlands can

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 41.

also be places of violence and projection. Anzaldúa experienced both forms of projection and combatted both with her writings, confronting white supremacy and heteronormativity. “The queer are the mirror reflecting the heterosexual tribe’s fear: being different, being other and therefore lesser, therefore sub-human, in-human, non-human.”<sup>57</sup> Anzaldúa tried to look at the roots of the discrimination, murdering, and devaluing of queer people. Queerness placed someone outside of the “normal,” and, thus, outside of being perceived as belonging within the category of being fully human.

This space of sexual in-betweenness was not completely unknown in Anzaldúa’s cultural context in Southwest Texas. Anzaldúa remembered that there were stories in her neighborhood about a woman who was “mita’ y mita’,” or half and half:

There was a muchacha who lived near my house. La gente del pueblo talked about her being una de las otras, “of the Others.” They said that for six months she was a woman who had a vagina that bled once a month, and that for the other six months she was a man, had a penis and she peed standing up. They called her half and half, mita’ y mita’, neither one nor the other but a strange doubling, a deviation of nature that horrified, a work of nature inverted.<sup>58</sup>

Anzaldúa confronted the psychological norms that would claim that people who are queer are somehow dysfunctional. Turning the critique on the very dualistic binaries of sex and gender, Anzaldúa claimed that queer people embodied an overcoming of such dualities and show the limits of psychiatric assessments of the human person:

There is something compelling about being both male and female, about having an entry into both worlds. Contrary to some psychiatric tenets, half and halves are not suffering from a confusion of sexual identity, or even from a confusion of gender. What we are suffering from is an absolute despot duality that says we are able to be only one or the other. It claims that human nature is limited and cannot evolve into something better. But

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 41.



I, like other queer people, am two in one body, both male and female. I am the embodiment of the *hieros gamos*: the coming together of opposite qualities within.<sup>59</sup>

The sexual and the spiritual were deeply connected for Anzaldúa. Gender norms signified different worlds, with differing customs, expectations, and ways of being that Anzaldúa traversed in between throughout her own life. Her description of embodying the *hieros gamos*, an ancient near-Eastern ritual of a woman priestess anointing the man who was the next heir to the throne, depicted not just the coming together of masculine and feminine aspects within oneself, but also a level of self-authorized agency and sacredness.

People in the sexual borderlands often suffer from negative projection, but not only from the dominant culture. Monological belonging can function on multiple different registers, and countercultural movements can repeat these rigid lines of belonging as well. Being racialized and being queer intersected in important ways for Anzaldúa, particularly as she confronted white supremacy and homophobia in her family, as well as the various political movements she was involved in, including Chicano and feminist movements.

Anzaldúa wrote her way into a very embodied sense of the spiritual and the sexual. She also went through long phases of abstaining from sex, prioritizing her time for writing instead of cultivating sexual relationships. In an interview, Anzaldúa framed her connection to the sacred and the sexual in terms of reclaiming that which has been alienated:

To me, spirituality, sexuality, and the body have been about taking back that alien other. According to society and according to Eastern philosophy and religion, I must suppress or kill a certain part of myself—the ego or sexuality. But I don't believe you have to slay the ego. I believe you have to incorporate all the pieces you've cut off, not give the ego such a limelight but give some of the other parts a limelight.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>60</sup> Anzaldúa, *Interviews/Entrevistas*, 40.

Rather than cutting off or disowning that which is often stigmatized, Anzaldúa created spaces of connection, both internally and externally with others, to integrate that which has been othered. Gaining knowledge about this internal alienness meant addressing taboos of the unspeakable and uncovering aspects of oneself hidden because of their shamefulness.

Much of Anzaldúa's feelings of alienation came from her rare hormonal condition that caused her to start menstruating when she was just three months old. Not only did she suffer the physical impacts of very high fevers, long stretches of heavy bleeding, and cramps, but she also suffered ostracization for being different. She managed the intensified shame that already surrounded women's bodies from an early age. To deal with this pain, she recalled cutting off any connection with the feelings of her sexual organs. Anzaldúa narrated her own process of regaining sensitivity, a sensitivity lost for self-protection, but regained for self and communal transformation.

In interviews, Anzaldúa shared about why she cut herself off from her own body during severe bouts of physical pain. Anzaldúa described herself as a "sponge" when she was little because of her extreme sensitivity to other people's thoughts, feelings, and even the sensations of plants, animals, and the earth:

...[A]s a little kid I was wide open—like a sponge; everything came in. I had no defenses, no way of keeping anything out, so I was constantly bombarded with everything. Once when I was in Prospect Park in Brooklyn for a picnic everyone was smoking cigarettes and putting them out in the grass. My whole body reacted: I could feel the pain of the grass. These people were turning their live cigarettes on it.<sup>61</sup>

While Anzaldúa described herself as having incredible empathy for other living beings, she claimed that this constant experience of lack of differentiation was overwhelming. Anzaldúa

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 26.

said that she developed ways to protect herself from this intense level of sensory bombardment, oftentimes at the expense of her own connection with herself:

Yes [a feeling of becoming one with everything happening around me] comes and goes: at times, I feel a real unification with people, real identification with someone or something—like the grass. It's so painful that I have to cut the connection. But I can't cut the connection, so instead of putting a shield between myself and you and your pain, I put a wall inside, between myself and my feelings. For a long, long time I had a really hard time getting in touch with what I was feeling—especially around pain because I had very severe menstrual periods. Instead of walling people out, I'd censor my feelings within my body.<sup>62</sup>

Anzaldúa claimed that this disconnect with her body was supported by Christian influences, and much of her writing in *Borderlands* attempts to reclaim the body and invite back all of the parts of ourselves, especially the ones banished to the subconscious due to cultural and religious stigma.

The Catholic and Protestant religions encourage fear and distrust of life and of the body; they encourage a split between the body and the spirit and totally ignore the soul; they encourage us to kill off parts of ourselves. We are taught that the body is an ignorant animal; intelligence dwells only in the head. But the body is smart. It does not discern between external stimuli and stimuli from the imagination. It reacts equally viscerally to events from the imagination as it does to 'real' events.<sup>63</sup>

Even if Aristotle and Aquinas did value the lower inclinations as good, Anzaldúa's description of separating from the body resonates with many Catholic people's experiences. Conocimiento was gained through acknowledging that "the body is smart." Somatic therapies also attempt to tap into the memories and knowledge that are stored within the body. Resmaa Menakem writes about healing the trauma of racialization held within our bodies, collective

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>63</sup> Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 59–60.

memories and impulses passed down to us through our lineages.<sup>64</sup> But healing can take a long time. Anzaldúa said, “Forty years it’s taken me to enter into the Serpent, to acknowledge that I have a body, that I am a body and to assimilate the animal body, the animal soul.”<sup>65</sup>

There is also a space in Anzaldúa’s work that is saved for the unspeakable, the undefinable, that which cannot be neatly named or closed. Anzaldúa was intensely aware of this other within herself. “We only know that consciousness part of ourselves because we don’t want to think that there’s this alien being in the middle of our psyche. For my whole life, I’ve felt like there’s this alien being inside myself.”<sup>66</sup> Alienation, then, doesn’t only come from processes of belonging or non-belonging: there is something alien that may be invited back, but it is never fully subsumed. If that were the case, then Anzaldúa would claim that wholeness could be achieved, not just yearned for in a continuous process of reintegration. Creative acts, like poetry, drawing, and storytelling, can communicate stigmatization while holding space for an alienness that cannot be ultimately foreclosed. Gaps of meaning can be described without being explained away; in certain ways, Anzaldúa’s *conocimiento* is driven by a need to make meaning while also acknowledging the indefinable aspects of breakdown, confusion, suffering, as was explored through Coatlicue and Coyolxauhqui.

We have already seen multiple examples in this chapter of Anzaldúa reimagining religious symbols for transformative ends while blurring religious boundaries and confronting the patriarchal bent in Nahua and Christian religious imagery. She used the term spiritual

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<sup>64</sup> Resmaa Menakem, *My Grandmother’s Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies* (Las Vegas, NV, 2017).

<sup>65</sup> Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 48.

<sup>66</sup> Anzaldúa, *Interviews/Entrevistas*, 39.

mestizaje as a moniker for this creative negotiation of the realm of the spiritual. Spiritual mestizaje challenges singular religious belonging as the norm while gesturing toward the linkages between religious purity and racial purity. It happened through the blending of multiple religious practices found within one's own history, but like the sexual borderlands, Anzaldúa emphasized that there was agency to choose affiliation with spiritualities beyond one's own cultural milieu. I want to highlight how Anzaldúa shows this process happening through relationships, encountering people, trees, bodies of water, and spiritual practices that influence our perceptions of the world. Metaphysically this blending had an impact as well, as one learned how to shift amongst multiple worldviews, ways of being and knowing, even planes of reality. But spiritual mestizaje stays connected to the goal of changing material conditions of suffering through Anzaldúa's concept of spiritual activism. I look to her concept of *el árbol de la vida* as a helpful metaphor for transformation of personal and collective consciousness that connects spiritual mestizaje and spiritual activism while reimagining forms of belonging.

### **Spiritual Activism and Spiritual Mestizaje**

In her unfinished dissertation, Gloria Anzaldúa began to trace the contours of a practice that she had cultivated throughout her entire life: spiritual activism. In her characteristic way of blurring the boundaries drawn between us and them, insider and outsider, and the personal and political, Anzaldúa highlights the ways that individual transformation leads to communal transformation, and communal transformation leads to individual transformation.

Interestingly, her definition of spirituality foregrounds belonging and participation as central concepts. But spirituality was a fraught term, one that necessarily needed to be more fluid than academic "objective" studies and more grounded to transforming structures of oppression.

...the spiritual is a deep sense of belonging and participation in life...made to feel embarrassed for using a spiritual vocabulary, we bear the negative connotations it carries. Academics disqualify spirituality except as anthropological studies done by outsiders, and spirituality is a turn-off for those exposed to so-called New Agers' use of flaky language and Pollyanna-like sentiments disconnected from the grounded realities of people's lives and struggles. And no wonder. Most contemporary spiritual practitioners in this country ignore the political implications and do not concern themselves with our biggest problem and challenge: racism and other racial abuses. They're not concerned with violence against children and women, with poverty and attacks on nature. I describe the activist stance that explores spirituality's social implications as 'spiritual activism'—an activism that is engaged by a diverse group of people with different spiritual practices, or spiritual mestizaje.<sup>67</sup>

Anzaldúa rejected many forms of organized religion but formed community in the 1970's and 1980's with spiritually minded feminists. Not surprisingly, her writing communities and her spiritual communities frequently overlapped. Luisah Teish, Chrystos, Audre Lorde, and Barbara Smith, among many others contributed to her edited collections like *Haciendo Caras* and *This Bridge Called My Back* (coedited with Cherrie Moraga). In these books, Black, Chicana, Latina, Asian, Indigenous, and mixed-race feminists wrote about their experiences. They especially highlighted experiences that were ignored or undervalued by white feminist circles; racism and spirituality were especially important topics in these collections of writing by women of color feminists. These relationships and writing projects deeply influenced Anzaldúa's imagination for building coalitions across different communities of feminists. Later in her life, she co-edited with AnaLouise Keating *This Bridge We Call Home*, a collection that expanded beyond just queer women of color to include transgender and white authors, a decision that was controversial but modeled Anzaldúa's frustrations with closed identity categories.

I've already shown many examples of Anzaldúa's engagement with Aztec deities and Mexican Catholicism. However, Anzaldúa's spiritual mestizaje also included Orishas, Indian

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<sup>67</sup> Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark*, 39.

goddesses, yogic understandings of the body, and more. In *Borderlands*, Anzaldúa wrote about Yemayá, the Yoruba water goddess who was present at the barbed wire fence of the border, wearing away fragile manmade boundaries of violence through her oceanic power.<sup>68</sup> Perhaps this was the influence of her friends who practiced Candomblé, Santería, and other African diasporic religious traditions; perhaps she was reclaiming parts of her family history that were erased and undervalued because of internalized white supremacy.

Anzaldúa also engaged religious practices and symbols that she could not trace to her family of origin. For example, the structure of her essay “now let us shift” moved through seven stages of *conocimiento*, connecting with the seven chakras, or energy centers common to many different yoga systems. The serpent was a key symbol present in Anzaldúa’s early and later writings, and especially in “Now Let Us Shift,” Anzaldúa discussed a kind of serpentine knowledge coming from the opening of one’s third eye, the sixth chakra.<sup>69</sup> Deities from the Indian subcontinent, like the wrathful mother goddess Kali, were contrasted with the fierce mother goddesses who were also demonized in the Aztec pantheon. Anzaldúa connected the ways that the serpent goddess Coatlicue was “‘darkened’ and disempowered much in the same manner as the Indian Kali.”<sup>70</sup> In another passage, Anzaldúa compared herself to Kali’s consort, Shiva, the lord of destruction who dances in between worlds:

You say my name is ambivalence? Think of me as Shiva, a many armed and legged body with one foot on brown soil, one foot on white, one in straight society, one in the gay world, the man’s world, the women’s, one limb in the literary world, another in the

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<sup>68</sup> Micaela Díaz-Sánchez, “‘Yemaya Blew That Wire Fence Down’: Invoking African Spiritualities in Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* and the Mural Art of Juana Alicia,” in *Yemoja: Gender, Sexuality, and Creativity in the Latina/o and Afro-Atlantic Diasporas*, ed. Solimar Otero and Toyin Falola (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2013).

<sup>69</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz En Lo Oscuro*, 117.

<sup>70</sup> Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 49.

working class, the socialist, and the occult worlds. A sort of spider woman hanging by one thin strand of web... Who, me confused? Ambivalent? Not so. Only your labels split me.<sup>71</sup>

Anzaldúa's spiritual blending involved conscious choice and adoption of religious images and practices outside of ones that she inherited. These images helped her depict broader forms of belonging and participation. In both processes, she highlighted the agency of re-envisioning, consciously engaging and choosing alternative ways of knowing.

Anzaldúa's explorations with spiritualities that went outside of her own cultural milieu were sometimes considered taboo. Her consultation with tarot decks, the I-Ching, and dabblings in New Age spiritualities have not always been a source of insight for scholars that want to use her work toward non-spiritual ends. That she claimed to receive yogic teachings psychically, only to discover 25 years later that they were from yogic Guru Sri Aurobindo, showed the ways that Anzaldúa certainly felt deep connections across commonly held understandings of space and time.<sup>72</sup> However, her engagement with these symbols and practices was grounded in strategizing transformation and healing in the face of global destruction and dehumanization. This linking of spirituality with ameliorating suffering was what made the concept of spiritual activism both politically engaged and more expansive in its understanding of multiple modes of spiritual realities.

In a description of how Anzaldúa was trying to forge something new from within herself, she also gave an apt description of the task of critically reflecting on moral norms, social practices, and institutions, both in their lived reality and in their ideal, then finding the pathways

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<sup>71</sup> Moraga and Anzaldúa, *This Bridge Called My Back*, 205.

<sup>72</sup> Anzaldúa, *Interviews/Entrevistas*, 100–101.



of congruence and avenues of change between the two. “In short,” Anzaldúa described her task, “I am trying to create a religion not out there somewhere, but in my gut. I am trying to make peace between what has happened to me, what the world is, and what it should be.”<sup>73</sup> What this culminated in for Anzaldúa was her sense of spiritual activism.

Anzaldúa named spiritual activism as an “ethical, compassionate strategy” that involved “shifting realities” to “negotiate conflict and difference within self and between others” to “find common ground by forming holistic alliances.”<sup>74</sup> Spiritual activism leads to expansive awareness, dialogue, telling of stories and shifting our own ways of thinking and being with each other.

this work of spiritual activism and the contract of holistic alliances allows conflicts to dissolve through reflective dialogue. It permits an expansive awareness that finds the best instead of the worst in the other, enabling you to think of *la otra* in a compassionate way. Accepting the other as an equal in a joint endeavor, you respect and are fully present for her. You form an intimate connection that fosters the empowerment of both (*nos/otras*) to transform conflict into an opportunity to resolve an issue, to change negativities into strengths, and to heal the traumas of racism and other systemic desconocimientos. You look beyond the illusion of separate interests to a shared interest—not to surface solutions that benefit only one group, but to a more informed service to humanity.<sup>75</sup>

Notice how Anzaldúa emphasizes equality and co-participation in this process that creates coalitions through dialogue. It also foregrounds intimacy as the base of a connection that mutually empowers us (*nos*) *and* them (*otras*), while unpacking the systems that have created these separations. The us and them can be defined by colonial processes discussed above like racial and national belonging: Anzaldúa named the processes that constructed white people

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<sup>73</sup> Moraga and Anzaldúa, *This Bridge Called My Back*, 208.

<sup>74</sup> Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz En Lo Oscuro*, 123.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

against people of color, the United States against Mexico. But she also tries to break down the categories of difference by showing their leakiness in the borderlands. Important to engaging in this way of knowing is the way that binary constructs need to be both interrogated and redefined. As is the case with most analyses of social construction, Anzaldúa walks a fine line between naming the very real impacts of these constructs while also challenging us to live beyond them. I think that the fluidity of us vs. them narratives can be shown through emphasizing internal contestation within a supposedly stable community of belonging, as well as finding points of connection that complicate the separateness of different communities of belonging.

Finally, the outcome of this process is the ability to act together, an acting that, through this process of redefining us and them, can benefit those participating. Co-participation, intimacy through storytelling, transformation of one's sense of self and one's communities, and building coalitions to change systemic oppression are all given further consideration in the concept of a "tree of life," *el árbol de la vida*, from Anzaldúa's later writings. I find these insights to be crucial for what Anzaldúa contributes to new models of belonging.

### **El Árbol de la Vida**

Anzaldúa narrated a description of her *tío's* dying orange tree as the origin of this concept. When her uncle noticed that the tree was sick, he grafted another species onto the sturdy root structure, reviving the entire tree and causing both species to flourish after being grafted together. Anzaldúa envisioned "a new tribalism" through this image of a tree.

*El árbol de la vida* (the tree of life) symbolizes my "story" of the new tribalism. Roots represent ancestral/racial origins and biological attributes; branches and leaves represent the characteristics, communities, and cultures that surround us, that we've adopted, and that we're in intimate conversation with. Onto the trunk *de mi árbol de la vida* I graft a new tribalism. This new tribalism, like other new Chicano/Latino narratives, recognizes that we are responsible participants in the ecosystems (complete set of interrelationships

between a network of living organisms and their physical habitats) in whose web we are individual strands.<sup>76</sup>

Anzaldúa's *árbol de la vida* offers another way of thinking about belonging, one that centers a mode of intimate connection and sharing, rooted in knowledge of one's history that honors real differences without claiming complete alterity. But it also gives an analysis of the different aspects of self and community where issues of belonging can become rigidified into monological forms. A systematic look at the roots, grafting, and branches highlights interventions for monological forms of belonging.

### Raíces

We have already discussed the ways that Anzaldúa felt a strong connection to her own raíces; for her, this meant delving into one's own familial lineages and knowing one's own history. These root structures are accompanied by shadowy complexity; Anzaldúa continuously named oppression while pushing back against simplistic dichotomies of oppressor/oppressed. She did not shy away, for example, from narrating the confluence of oppressor and oppressed that flowed through her bloodstream or the patriarchal and war-mongering tendencies of the Nahua society before contact with Spanish colonizers, and these forms of honesty gave her a sense of security in her analysis. Aurora Levins Morales compliments this understanding of knowing one's roots through her own concept of raicism:

Raicism, or rootedness, is the choice to bear witness to our specific, contradictory, historical identities in relationship to one another. The decision to examine exactly who our ancestors, all of them, have been – with each other and with everyone else. It is an accounting of the debts and assets we have inherited, and acknowledging the precise nature of that inheritance is an act of spiritual and political integrity.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., Anzaldúa, 67.

<sup>77</sup> Aurora Levins Morales, *Medicine Stories: History, Culture, and the Politics of Integrity* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1998), 75.

Both Anzaldúa and Levins Morales highlight a spiritual component of acknowledging these complexities; but leaning into these more complicated histories also involves unsettling simple understandings.

Sometimes, these interactions will even destabilize a concept of “home,” making one’s original social context unfamiliar. Anzaldúa challenged herself to continuously embrace discomfort in order to keep growing:

I must forsake “Home” (comfort zones, both personal and cultural) every day of my life to keep burgeoning into the tree of myself. Luckily, the roots of my trees are deep enough in la cultura mexicana and strong enough to support a widespread branch system...<sup>78</sup>

Anzaldúa saw this sense of security within her sense of home as an important tool for critiquing cultural understandings that may become too rigid or closed. But protecting a comfortable sense of “home” was antithetical to her self-growth. She diagnosed the problems that arise when someone’s sense of their roots is insecure or severed, rehearsing the yearning for belonging that can become monological, repeating the patterns of wounding that happen through borders:

For some, home-ethnic roots may not be as clear-cut as those connected to the land, nor as portable and potable as the diaspora roots clinging to immigrants’ feet and carried from one the community, culture, or country to another. Some immigrants are cut off from ethnic cultures. Como cabezas decapitadas, they search for the “home” where all the pieces of the fragmented body cohere and integrate like Coyolxauhqui. Many urban, multiethnic people, as well as others adopted out of their racial group, have mixed or tangled, distant or mangled roots. Others, like Richard Rodriguez (known for his anti-bilingualism stance), have in some respect severed their raíces. Many try to recuperate their roots by becoming the most ardent Chicanos or Salvadoreñas, etc., turning into border patrol bearing rigid nationalistic tendencies.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz En Lo Oscuro*, 67–68.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

Seen through the lens of belonging, Anzaldua describes the issues that arise for people who may have been severed from their roots for various reasons. While some immigrants maintain strong narratives of culture and lineage, others, in hopes of assimilation, cut their own roots. People who live in cities, people who belong to more than one ethnic group, or people who are adopted may not be able to trace their lineages with such confidence. They can enter a process, according to Anzaldúa: acknowledge the complexity of their search, like “decapitated heads” pursuing the process of reintegration, which Anzaldúa symbolizes symbolized through Coyolxauhqui. But she also warns people trying to restore their roots to not become monological. While a new monological belonging might provide a less complicated home, it may mimic the border policing and singular identifications that were unpacked in the first part of the chapter.

Interestingly, Anzaldúa ultimately claims that one’s sense of *spirituality* can also act as a root structure, especially if one may not be able to recover familial or ethnic ties.

To partake in the new tribalism, you don’t have to be connected to your home-ethnicity; other root systems will suffice. The ‘root’ you connect to becomes your spiritual ground of being, your connection to your inner self, which is your greatest strength.<sup>80</sup>

Regardless of how one narrates this history and sense of rootedness, attempting to struggle with one’s own situatedness is essential for the sharing of the next step.

### Grafting

This is where Anzaldúa’s theories of grafting branches to el árbol de la vida, the tree of life, become very interesting, for her personally as well as for complex belonging. Since she engaged with what was not just there in her own raíces, or roots, Anzaldúa grafted many different worldviews into her vision of healing and transformation.

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 68.

“propagating other worldviews, spiritual traditions, and cultures to your árbol de vida. You pick and choose views, cultures with transformational potential—a partially conscious selection, not a mestizaje imposed on you, but one whose process you can control...A retribalizing mestizaje becomes your coping mechanism, your strategy of resistance to both acculturating and enculturating pressures.”<sup>81</sup>

Because of the ways that Anzaldúa saw individual and communal identity as so intrinsically connected, I see el árbol de la vida as a model for going beyond monological forms of belonging. Singular notions of belonging can leave people in the borderlands the equally unfulfilling options of assimilation to one form of belonging or creating another singular form of belonging through modes of separatism. In her unfinished dissertation work, Anzaldúa writes about grafting briefly, but she also wrote about the power of connecting *through* our open wounds in other essays.

I synthesize some of these unfinished dissertation writings to flesh out el árbol de la vida and the possibilities of alternate forms of belonging forged by grafting together in bonds of accountability and solidarity through learning each other’s stories.

Anzaldúa talked about the possibility to build connections through understanding each other’s wounds. These openings don’t always have to be painful, since there are many ways that people are opened through joyful and positive experiences as well. However, Anzaldúa saw the commonality of wounding and painful experiences as a source that was more readily available for points of connection. Quoting Jean Houston, Anzaldúa saw the importance of stories and how the greatest stories frequently told the ways that wounding granted access to the sacred.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 153.

Anzaldúa's understanding of connecting through wounds reformulates a mode of belonging that is built from mutual yet different experiences of alienation. In a chapter of her unfinished dissertation titled "Let Us Be the Healing of the Wound: The Coyolxauhqui imperative—La sombra y el sueño," Anzaldúa writes "We are all wounded, but we can connect through the wound that's alienated us from others. When the wound forms a cicatrix, the scar can become a bridge linking people split apart."<sup>83</sup> Connecting through woundedness is how the actual process of grafting happens. For a branch to be grafted to a different rootstock, or the root structure of the host tree, the tissues from both must grow together. This could only happen if there is an opening where the branch and rootstock can grow together.<sup>84</sup>

This connection through the wound reaches across differences that singular forms of belonging may deem unbridgeable. As Anzaldúa writes,

Although all your cultures reject the idea that you can know the other, you believe that besides love, pain might open this closed passage by reaching through the wound to connect. Wounds cause you to shift consciousness—they either open you to the greater reality normally blocked by your habitual point of view or else shut you down, pushing you out of your body and into desconocimiento... Using wounds as openings to become vulnerable and available (present) to others means staying in your body.<sup>85</sup>

But couldn't dwelling on wounds be problematic as well? What if this woundedness becomes reliving trauma, or going deeper into victimhood? Anzaldúa certainly knew the dangers of entering the wound, but her goal was healing and transformation, using the wound as the very site for addressing pain and oppression. Turning the harm of alienation into connection could

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>84</sup> For more information about the different methods of grafting, see Jeff Wilson, Wayne Porter, and Casey Barickman, "Basic Grafting Techniques," Mississippi State University Extension Service, 2019, <http://extension.msstate.edu/publications/basic-grafting-techniques-0>.

<sup>85</sup> Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz En Lo Oscuro*, 153.

build greater networks; these coalitions could shift the very structures that often caused the wounding in the first place. This quote connects the need for attentiveness to our embodiment while addressing wounds of belonging and imagining new forms.

Recovering our sensitivities lost in simplistic forms of belonging, either numbed through trauma or complacency, requires staying with painful embodied feelings of ourselves and others without getting stuck in thought patterns. She further explains,

Excessive dwelling on your wounds means leaving your body to live in your thoughts where you reenact your past hurts, a form of desconocimiento that gives energy to the past where it's held ransom. As victim you don't have to take responsibility for making changes. But the cost of victimhood is that nothing in your life changes, especially not your attitudes and beliefs. Instead, why not use your pain as a conduit to recognizing another's suffering, even that of the one who inflicted the pain...<sup>86</sup>

In this way, Anzaldúa sees woundedness as an avenue for transmuting oppression into agency. If we apply this to the wounds of non-belonging, then a victim stance would not challenge the norms and create new ways of relating. Anzaldúa is radical in her non-oppositional stance, even asking those who have been victimized to see the pain of the one's who caused harm. Though Anzaldúa would never claim that this pain is experienced in similar ways, her analysis of the borderlands shows the ways that even those who seemingly benefit from such structures are also damaged by them. Regarding singular belonging, this damaging results in severing connections to one's own multiplicity in order to belong.

### Branches

For Anzaldúa, the branches of el árbol de la vida point to the ability to hold multiple realities simultaneously, while staying rooted in changing conditions of oppression. I see spiritual activism as yoking spiritual mestizaje together for transformative coalitions geared

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid.



toward action. Creative acts are an important source for expressive self- and communal reflection according to Anzaldúa. They can increase our awareness of experiences beyond our own, developing our bludgeoned sensitivities to the cruelties of coloniality. Creative acts can express the sensitivity that comes from colonial trauma. Engaging with creative acts that clarify the conditions of coloniality enables people to participate in reflection from multiple particularized sites. This is necessary for getting out of colonial categories of belonging.

Along with an expanding of the subject, a form of communication and expression must accompany it. This is carried out through creative acts that link self-transformation to social change and offers strategies for maneuvering amongst multiple worlds. Roots, grafting to a trunk, and branches make up a tree that holds multiple shifting processes together. Only then can we reach toward the ever-great expanse of sky, a pluralistic communion of many different branches of the Divine that never forgets its roots striving toward justice in this world.

### **Conclusion**

The mixture of bloods and affinities, rather than confusing or unbalancing me, has forced me to achieve a kind of equilibrium. Both cultures deny me a place in *their* universe. Between them and among others, I build my own universe, El Mundo Zurdo. I belong to myself and not to any one people.<sup>87</sup>

Gloria Anzaldúa gives us much to consider when thinking about an ethics of belonging. The concept of *conocimiento* provides an epistemic space that challenges the limits of the individual subject and re-envision self/other and us/them relationships, not only among human beings but also in relationships with animals, plants, the earth, and all sentient beings. She defines spirituality as crucially connected to a deep sense of belonging and participation. But in these final quotes about belonging, she also highlights a necessity of being comfortable with

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<sup>87</sup> Moraga and Anzaldúa, *This Bridge Called My Back*, 209.

aloneness: being with oneself can also be a deep form of belonging. How can alienation and belonging be conceptualized together?

Suzanne Bost claims that Anzaldúa provides an “other-than-Humanist” ethics because of her emphasis on the vulnerability of pain and love and the possibility of connections. Bost claims that Anzaldúa’s work “queers hierarchies of race, gender, nation, ability, and species” in ways that challenge readers to “rethink not just kinship but also ontology and relation.”<sup>88</sup> However, according to Bost, Anzaldúa posits “intimacy with alienation as the defining feature of (her) life.”<sup>89</sup> I agree that Anzaldúa provides many fruitful avenues for rethinking belonging, but the paradox of this alienation and ability to connect amidst and across communities of belonging must be central if concepts of belonging are not to become rigid.

Anzaldúa also emphasizes the importance of being open to fluidity, change and transformation, things that are antithetical to the surety of many monological forms of belonging. Keating notes that, in Anzaldúa’s work, “self-awareness, oppression, resistance, and transformation” are inextricably connected.<sup>90</sup> Anzaldúa’s theorizing normalizes the discomfort of change by naming it as a necessary part of the process of transformation.

I think normalizing the disorientation inherent to going through an identity shift needs to be normalized when thinking about belonging as well. Concepts of belonging need more comfortability with the processes that accompany change: an ethics of belonging must not lose sight of these processes by shying away from alienation or overly determining communities of

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<sup>88</sup> Suzanne Bost, *Shared Selves: Latinx Memoir and Ethical Alternatives to Humanism* (Urbana, 2019), 135.

<sup>89</sup> Bost, *Shared Selves*, 137.

<sup>90</sup> AnaLouise Keating, *“I’m a Citizen of the Universe”: Gloria Anzaldúa’s Spiritual Activism as Catalyst for Social Change* (Ann Arbor, MI: Michigan Publishing, University of Michigan Library), 58.

belonging as stable. At the end of this dissertation, I argue for what I call an integral ethics of belonging. An integral ethics of belonging can hold the *entire process* of navigating differing forms of belonging by focusing on the interactions between alienation and belonging.

There are many issues when one tries to negotiate a monological border, and these are very different depending on where one is situated. Without falling back into rigid or linear categorizations, I want to name some of the processes that a concept of belonging must account for. There are those who are unaware of the monological border; this form of simple belonging takes the world as it is, without awareness of another way of being. If their behavior does not challenge the border, they adhere to the standards and receive protection. Then there are others who either are aware or become aware of complexities.

There are issues when one is outside of the monological border that look different depending on one's subject stance. There are some who are outside of the monological border who experience it as an exclusion that defines them as other, who experience alienation. I call this exclusionary non-belonging. Sometimes, adhering to the standards is required for safety, for survival; someone may be aware of the complexities, but they hide the contradictory evidence of their life in order to fit within the borders. However, this safety is temporary; it depends on their continual self-fragmentation and adherence to monological norms. I call this assimilationist belonging. For people who benefit from a monological border, there can be a form of what I call "blacked out" belonging, when someone actively ignores the evidence that may challenge their certainty to stay in simple belonging. This active ignorance is what Anzaldúa calls *desconocimientos*. There are also those who speak the contradictions and question the standards of belonging from the stance of being an insider. They forgo protection to exercise their

participation and perhaps change the border; they risk expulsion for speaking the complexities. I call this critical belonging.

There are some outside of belonging that are not even seen as an other; an other resembles a shadow of a subject, but there are those who are only seen as exploitable objects. I call this the non-belonging of being commodified as a belonging. Then there is the condition of not being acknowledged at all, neither seen as subject nor object. I call this the non-belonging of erasure.

However, there can also be a level of freedom outside of monological belongings: to define against, or to opt out and forge a different way without being reactive to one set of logic that dictates a singular reality are also possibilities. I call these agential non-belongings. This non-belonging can also forge new communities through mutual exclusion, commodification, or erasure. Belongings of mutual alienation form when we are alienated by the same system, particular group, or lived experience. This form of belonging can also turn into assimilationist, blanked out, or uncritical belongings. Belongings of differential alienation happen when we are alienated by different systems, different groups, different lived experiences.

The next chapter will explore how this space in between, called the borderlands or nepantla, can be a space that opens itself to challenging norms, even ones within countercultural movements.<sup>91</sup> The borderlands/nepantla can be seen as a space for regaining a sense of ourselves beyond the confines of systemic oppression/monological thinking. If the borderlands are so multiple, then people will have to go through this process of cultivating sensitivities by both healing from trauma from certain borders while coming to consciousness about the violence used

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<sup>91</sup> For more, see Lucie Fremlova, *Queer Roma* (London: Routledge, 2021).

to maintain others. This also necessitates an analysis of how different borders may reinforce each other, leading people with different experiences to meet in the borderlands. The borderlands show the cost of neat categorization through simplistic forms of belonging. As we explore in the next chapter, they can also be sites of reflection for people to break out of singular methods of reflection.

Conocimiento is forged in the space of in-betweenness known as *nepantla*, and those who traverse multiple cultures, genders, religions, and realities can train this sensitivity that brings about a knowledge that can transform the wounds of unnatural borders—whether those be forged through white supremacy, heterosexism, or anthropocentrism. Following the path of *conocimiento* requires an honest confrontation with one's shadow, releasing patterns that block one's view of reality and dull *la facultad*, or the sensitivities developed through this traversing. When this sensitivity is fully embodied, one may glimpse their place within one (or many) larger cosmological backdrop(s), expressing that knowing through artistic forms. *Conocimiento* helps to confront paradoxes, and Anzaldúa's theorizing gives an *embodied* account of both traversing and simultaneously existing within multiple epistemological frameworks.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE CONTOURS OF ETHICAL PRAXIS IN NEPANTLA

We have already seen how Anzaldúa redefined rationality as *conocimiento*.

*Conocimiento* transmutes racialized and gendered colonial trauma into a deeply sensitive way of perceiving multiplicity. Creative acts like writing, artistic expression, and creative ritual were used as a medium for integrating personal and communal change. Reclaiming hybrid religiosities, queer sexualities, and modes of perception delegitimized by colonial definitions of rationality are central aspects to her project. Now, I would like to explore how this redefinition invites a way of doing ethics that is different from the universal ethics based on the natural law used by Francisco de Vitoria and Pope Francis.

Rather than the complete “crossing over” that the epistemology of Christian conversion required, what would it look like to privilege the epistemological site of *nepantla* for doing ethics? In her later work, Anzaldúa shifted from the language of borderlands and *mestiza* consciousness to *nepantla*, a Nahuatl word for being “in between.” Her shift of language expanded the scope of who could identify with this mode of theorizing that emerged from her particular experiences and geographical location. Using the word *nepantla* highlighted her concern with not letting the physical borderlands overshadow other psychological, sexual, and spiritual aspects of the borderlands. But she also rooted all these aspects of the borderlands within the body and the imperative to transform material conditions that create suffering in this world by transforming ourselves.

As we have seen in chapter 3, Diego Durán is the first missionary to document the use of the term ‘nepantla,’ when questioning a Nahua man who declared himself to be in between the cultural norms of the Christian religion and the Nahua rites customary for celebrating a family member’s wedding. In a natural law framework, Catholic theologians in the colonial period could not see themselves as being in between two religious laws. Almost 450 years later, I think that Anzaldúa modeled another form of pluralistic reasoning through the reclamation of this term nepantla, seeing the space of ambiguity and contradiction where multiple value systems clash as a possible site for transforming the wounds of colonial trauma still festering centuries later. Rather than being an abominable excuse for morality, as the 16<sup>th</sup> century missionary claimed, nepantla can be seen as a moral space that develops more ethical acumen to negotiate a wide variety of conflicting values systems through relationships.

Ways of knowing are important for how we do ethics and who can participate in ethical reflection. Whose testimony is considered credible? Whose social experience can be understood within a given set of interpretive tools? What forms of knowing are valued? Miranda Fricker names these difficulties in conveying knowledge forms of epistemic injustice, or injury that is specifically done to a person in their capacity as a knower.<sup>1</sup> In many cases, perceptions of belonging influence whether someone is perceived as an ethical reasoner or eligible conversation partner. Who participates in a process of ethical reflection can also determine the scope of who is considered as a stakeholder within the deliberation process. According to John A. Powell, what

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<sup>1</sup> Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*, 1st edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 1.

distinguishes belonging from inclusion is *participation*.<sup>2</sup> How differing epistemologies are valued can be an important factor that determines who is considered a moral agent capable of participating in ethical deliberation.

Not being perceived as a moral agent and dialogue partner for ethical decision making is an openly bleeding wound of coloniality. This is especially the case amongst religious, racial, and sexual differences, factors that we have seen can place one outside of the bounds of being perceived as rational. Belonging impacts who we think we can ethically reflect with and what modes are considered valuable for ethical reflection. This chapter engages the nuances of what I call belongings of differential alienation, or the process of meeting in the borderlands where multiple forms of monological belonging may intersect.

First, I will bring Pope Francis's and Francisco de Vitoria's approaches to ethical reflections on belonging into conversation with Anzaldúa's focus on shifting consciousness forged at sites of in-betweenness outlined in the previous chapter. I argue that this disorienting site is the place where participatory ethics *needs* to happen. Then, we will go deeper into the difficulties of being in the reflective space in between worlds, taking up critical reflections from María Lugones about oversimplifying a form of belonging based on mutual alienation. Drawing on later works from Anzaldúa, I return to the image of el árbol de la vida to concretize this process in re-narrating histories of connection, building relationships of accountability, and being open to mutual transformation, on the personal, political, and spiritual level. I conclude with a synthesis of these themes connected to feminist narrative ethical approaches, ending with an

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<sup>2</sup> John A. Powell, "Bridging or Breaking? The Stories We Tell Will Create the Future We Inhabit," *Nonprofit Quarterly*, February 15, 2021, <https://nonprofitquarterly.org/bridging-or-breaking-the-stories-we-tell-will-create-the-future-we-inhabit/>.



example of intersectional feminist activists redefining US foreign policy. This example demonstrates how key insights from Anzaldúa's method can be applied beyond just a personal and communal level in order to shift institutional structures that reinforce monological belonging.

### **Synthesis: Vitoria, Francis, and Anzaldúa**

Though Anzaldúa's context in the 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century is quite different than Vitoria's in 1539, the lines of thinking established in the earlier days of colonialism continue to impact our lives today. Vitoria's political theories solidified protocols for interactions between nation states on a global scale and universal frameworks for global trade and travel. Vitoria argued theologically that the distinguishing line between human beings and animals was the rational soul. Though Vitoria's work does not engage with *mestizaje* (or the *casta* system from which this term emerges), he used a natural law framework to argue for the full humanity of Indigenous people. Because the rational soul, according to Aquinas's natural law epistemology, gives each human being the capacity to perceive God's created order, each human being's final end is union with God. If Divine revelation clarified this perception of human beings' place within the rational structure, Vitoria argued, each person with a rational soul, given the proper theological education, will ultimately lead to conversion to the Catholic faith. Everything that from this Catholic perspective is considered idolatrous, any non-procreative, non-heterosexual sexuality, and any gender expression that does not conform to a strict male/female binary, would naturally be apparent due to the rationality of Christ's law. Pope Francis lauds a more expansive way of knowing found in many Indigenous communities but does not deeply engage the ways that rationality is entangled with a Catholic natural law framework, nor how this mode of thinking might impact Catholic assumptions about belonging and participation in ethical

reflection. As presented in Chapter Two, Francis's approach to gender and the debates about inculturation demonstrated this dynamic. For both Francis and Vitoria, who qualifies as needing protection is discerned by those in positions of ethical authority. I want to emphasize another way of doing ethics that is more focused on creating spaces of participation for reflection.

In contrast to Pope Francis and Francisco de Vitoria, Anzaldúa works with an alternate epistemology, *conocimiento*, that reclaims a shifting knowledge that integrates embodied, sexual, subconscious, and spiritual knowledge as valuable ways of knowing beyond just intellect. Anzaldúa confronts the epistemic injustices that devalue certain forms of knowing and certain people who are judged to fall outside the scope of one mode of rationality. Anzaldúa specifically names Christianity (and most other world religions) as being concerned with protection because of the ways that women are seen as less rational and more connected to the body. "...[W]oman is carnal, animal, and closer to the undivine, she must be protected. Protected from herself. Woman is the stranger, the other. She is man's recognized nightmarish pieces, his Shadow-Beast. The sight of her sends him into a frenzy of anger and fear."<sup>3</sup> Judgment coming from a "community of masters" can emphasize protection while blocking the possibility of participation.

Anzaldúa cultivates a form of sensitivity that questions the subject/object divide that was so crucial for justifying the colonial exploitation of the land as well as certain racialized and gendered human beings. Aristotle and Aquinas both conceived of the human as having both lower and higher inclinations. Though they affirmed that the lower inclinations were good, they also believed that these passions needed to be ordered hierarchically to obey the rational soul. The hierarchy of God over creation; governance structures over people; the *pater familias* or the

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<sup>3</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 4th edition (San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 2012), 39.

property-owning husband over his wife, children, and slaves; and reason over the lower inclinations of the body: these constellations were thought of in a similar way. If we can imagine all four of these examples as a pyramid, then we can see how the ruling entity is placed at the top, with the lower obeying in alignment. The pyramid is a closed whole.

In contrast to a pyramid with one line moving from the bottom up towards the top, I propose thinking of Anzaldúa's theory of *conocimiento* also as a tree-like structure. Similar to the xylem and phloem of a tree, there are multiple avenues of knowing that don't just channel upward but move up and down in both directions. Instead of a pyramid, there is the mirror-like reflection of the root structure and the branch structure, fanning out in many different directions. There are multiple avenues and none of them are closed; there is a continuous openness and movement happens in every direction. Tolerance for ambiguity that comes from this openness is a crucial contribution to the perspective on belonging that Anzaldúa provides.

Epistemologically, Vitoria debates the limits of who can be considered rational, but capability is dependent on conversion. While Pope Francis calls for overcoming colonizing mentalities, he fails to interrogate the power dynamics and histories of a natural law framework. The synodal process claims to invite participation, but it still centers clerical power. Anzaldúa's epistemology of *conocimiento* widens the circle of beings that we can be in relation with, drawing our attention to the increased faculties that can be cultivated in places where differing epistemologies meet.

For an ethics of belonging, how one sees oneself and others becomes inherently ethical. With a rebellious penchant against clerical and state authority, Anzaldúa framed herself as a mediator and a co-participant navigating complexities and aiding others in doing the same. While Vitoria argued for the humanity of Indigenous people through the concept of rationality, he also

did not engage Indigenous people as interlocuters. Vitoria framed himself as an expert, a wise man who must be consulted by the powers that be in an ethically difficult situation. He used this status creatively to confront the powerful actors of the Church and the Spanish Crown. However, the supposed rationality of Christian conversion within a natural law framework created less of a dialogue with actual stakeholders and more of an ethical monologue amongst scholastic European clerics. This led to definitions of humanness based on the universalization of very particular notions of land ownership, gender hierarchy, and sexual relationships. Assimilation into a Christian norm was the only rational option in this schema. His framework is more of a proclamation than a dialogue.

Pope Francis's focus on dialogue, inculturation, and solidarity attempts to renegotiate Christian assimilation and respect for difference, but one can see the limits of this inclusive approach, especially when the process of dialogue, inculturation, and solidarity threatens the stability of doctrinal borders. Keeping with the form of clerical power, he also gives a proclamation. It proclaims dialogue, yet the limits of this approach become apparent. Questioning who has the authority to decide what inculturation is and what counts as idolatry exposes these fault lines of belonging. Historicizing colonial sex and gender norms also gives us an example of this tension where sex/gender norms and religious practices can become evidence of irrationality.

Second, the ways that we narrate history deeply influence how we see ourselves and who we see ourselves as connected to and responsible for. Historical narratives play an important part for imagining communities of belonging. Vitoria engages Greek philosophy and Roman law as tools to revive a framework that is congruent but different than natural law. His use of the term "barbarians," taken from Roman law, shows how a category of otherness traffics outside of

historical situatedness and becomes placed upon a generalized other. Pope Francis quickly acknowledges colonial histories of the Catholic Church. He also puts more focus on the ways that the Catholic Church defended the poor and the marginalized. Anzaldúa's autohistoria-teoría situates her as a different kind of narrator of history. Her method of historical engagement acknowledges a bias that it is motivated toward healing from trauma and building lines of connection. The ways that we narrate our histories—of ourselves (*raíces*) and of our connections with each other (grafting branches to *el árbol de la vida*)—facilitate coalitions that can act in ways that transform these wounds.

Through the lens of narrative ethics, Anzaldúa's work shows the interconnections of experiences of violence, the role of storytelling, and making ethical claims. Anzaldúa's narrative approach begins with the concrete suffering of individuals who have been fragmented by categories of belonging that emerged in the earliest days of colonization. The borderlands are forged from this splitting experience. And yet, Anzaldúa's method attempts to transform this pain, with individuals and groups witnessing the open wounds through a space of moral reflection that invites a response. As we have already seen, Anzaldúa's spiritual activism is far from relativistic: the goal is transformation of the wounds and structures of oppression, and if this is not a part of one's pursuit for self-transformation and meaning making, then one risks losing touch with the very real suffering present in the world. This process reconstitutes the moral agency denied to certain subjects who were not seen as interlocutors or moral agents within a colonialist frame. Reconstituting moral agency becomes a prerequisite to coalition building.

Laura E. Pérez describes a process of mutual influence and attunement through concrete interactions that recover human worth in the face of domination:

The lived experience of on-the-ground, co-inhabited cultural diversity has functioned as a fluid, omnipresent, alternative and global social imaginary always-in-the-making. This is different from cultural appropriation; this is multicultural coformation, cross-cultural synchronization, sympathetic attraction to the humane against the dehumanization of beliefs and practices from dominant cultures.<sup>4</sup>

The outcome of this pluralization of forms of being, animated through hybrid and locally situated creative acts, must be open to unexpected outcomes. Pérez highlights that these activities of meaning-making and influence are continuously in process. Unlike teleological frameworks that aim for a particular end destination beforehand, this pluralist approach would require a radical sense of openness to multiplicities interacting in ways that are not predetermined.

A relational spirituality animates the thrust of Anzaldúa's approach, allowing multiple strands of spirituality to exist separately while sympathetically attracting and conforming each other through a commitment to attending to the open wounds bleeding from structural injustices. Anzaldúa's concept of spiritual activism is also helpful for reclaiming theological agency, since her move toward inner and outer transformation facilitated by creative acts also opens avenues for theological language to be played with, shifted, transformed, and shared. Like Édouard Glissant's concept of rooted errantry,<sup>5</sup> Anzaldúa's approach emphasizes awareness of one's own location and context as a starting point without foreclosing the possibilities for transformative relational wandering beyond one's "home" context. Glissant's poetics of relation highlights the difference between projection and interweaving;<sup>6</sup> Pérez highlights the difference between cultural appropriation and multicultural co-formation. Regarding belonging, Anzaldúa provides a

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<sup>4</sup> Laura E. Pérez, "Writing with Crooked Lines," in *Fleshing the Spirit: Spirituality and Activism in Chicana, Latina, and Indigenous Women's Lives*, eds. Elisa Facio and Irene Lara, (The University of Arizona Press, 2014), 27.

<sup>5</sup> Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor, 1997), 56.

<sup>6</sup> Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 32.

power analysis of the creation of borders that separate. But because she aims to heal and transform these power imbalances, Anzaldúa emphasizes the possible sites of connection at the wound, inviting relational co-figurations that can—or for survival, must—look otherwise.

Along with giving a dialogical model where history, agency, and broad participation are centered, I argue that Anzaldúa can enhance a feminist ethical approach when we conceptualize nepantla as a moral space and the wound as a starting point for ethical reflection. I also bring up critiques from María Lugones about power dynamics in nepantla that may further wounding rather than transform it. Though I think Anzaldúa's later unfinished writings begin to address Lugones's concerns, I take up Lugones's insights about complex communication and the importance of respecting multiplicity for nepantla to actually be a space for transforming wounds. Out of this conversation, I argue that holding the tension of alienation and belonging is a key component for theorizing complex modes of belonging. I then integrate some of the terms from feminist narrative ethicists to show how Anzaldúa contributes to an ethics of belonging.

### **Border as Wound, Borderlands as Nepantla**

When Anzaldúa names the US/Mexico border as an open wound, she links together the concepts of a border, the borderlands, and wounding in her theorizing. These ideas are especially helpful for reflecting on belonging. The concept of the borderlands breaks open the sorting and protection impetus of singular identification that accompanies monological understandings of belonging. The US/Mexico border is an instrument that creates identity categories through the action of its separation. The unnatural drawing of a border is legitimized through violence to maintain a “pure” separation. The border is an open wound. However, the violence of the border leads to the creation of the borderlands; there is pain coming from this division, but the division is also never as total as those maintaining the border wish it could be. This site of ambiguity is

where conflicting norms and values meet. The wound of the monological border also shows the complex possibilities of the borderlands. Anzaldúa's life experiences show the fallacy of this border's singular identification of national belonging, racial belonging, and linguistic belonging. The borderlands show the very material consequences of these monological definitions that support life for some and support death for others.

An epistemology of the borderlands can traverse multiple contradictory cultural values, increasing agency for those who have developed this sensitivity or "facultad" to compare differing views. Though forged through trauma, the pain of wounding can be transmuted. People who go through this process gain agency to assess, compare, and mix the values most beneficial for survival under conditions of oppression. I argue that this skill, as we shall explore later, is also essential for coalition building.

Anzaldúa expands the concept of the borderland through a reclamation of the term "nepantla"—a term she uses to broaden the range of contexts of ambiguous, painful, yet transformative spaces when multiple worldviews meet. When she expands this beyond the idea of a national border, she also expands the understanding of the wound. A concept that is crucial for both Chicana feminists and decolonial thinkers alike, nepantla can be an important tool for reworking concepts of belonging. This is especially the case for notions of belonging that reinforce simplistic and singular criteria for insiders/outsideers.

The meaning of nepantla still holds the material conditions of negotiating colonial histories and epistemologies within a very specific context. Walter D. Mignolo claims that the term contextualizes colonial relations within the Americas, because

links the geohistorical with the epistemic with the subjective, knowledge with ethnicity, sexuality, gender, and nationality in power relations. The 'in-between' inscribed in Nepantla is not a happy place in the middle, but refers to a general question



of knowledge and power. The kind of power relations inscribed in *Nepantla* are the power relations sealing together modernity and what is inherent to it, namely, coloniality.<sup>7</sup>

*Nepantla* is a place of conflict for Mignolo, an eruption of suppressed worldviews.

Mignolo importantly points out that *nepantla* isn't just a median of two perspectives or an equal compromise between one worldview and another. This concept of in-betweenness is not neutral. According to him, *nepantla* exposes operations of knowledge and power forged within modernity/coloniality.

Anzaldúa reclaims the term *nepantla* from her own Chicana/mestiza background, so she recognizes how this concept has been forged in the struggles of coloniality/modernity. But *nepantla* for Anzaldúa signaled to a more expansive understanding of her theory of the borderlands, one that could also hold emotional, psychological, sexual, and spiritual spaces of meeting. AnaLouise Keating contrasts Anzaldúa's framework to other decolonial approaches because of its grounding in what she calls "a metaphysics of interconnectedness." Keating calls these "threshold theories," approaches that center our undeniable relationality and the possibilities that emerge from this way of thinking.

Whereas border thinking generally begins from a point of breakage—from the 'subaltern perspective[,] emerging from the cracks between civilization and culture' (Mignolo 44), threshold theories start elsewhere—with the presupposition that we are intimately, inextricably linked with all human and nonhuman existence.<sup>8</sup>

If *nepantla* holds these power relations for Mignolo, then, for Anzaldúa, *nepantla* also holds the possibility for dismantling the certainty of these structures and possibilities for new

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<sup>7</sup> Walter Mignolo, "Introduction: From Cross-Genealogies and Subaltern Knowledges to *Nepantla*," *Nepantla* 1, no. 1 (2000): 2.

<sup>8</sup> AnaLouise Keating, *Transformation Now: Toward a Post-Operational Politics of Change* (Baltimore: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 11, <https://doi.org/10.5406/j.ctt3fh5zv>.

modes of identifying and relating. These theories offer modes of belonging not defined solely in opposition to coloniality/modernity without ignoring the power dynamics. Anzaldúa uses many terms for these differing modes of belonging: a new tribalism, el Mundo Zurdo, a new mestizaje, and el árbol de la vida. Common to all these terms is how they link to history while gesturing to something new, a non-oppositional consciousness that doesn't get stuck in the categories dictated by the coloniality of power:

This new mestizaje eschews the racial hierarchies inherent in older mestizaje. We do not allow ourselves to shelter in simplistic colonialist notions of racial difference, exclusionary boundaries, and binaries (such as other-insider). We must unchain identity from meanings that can no longer contain; We must move beyond externalized forms of social identity and location such as family, race, gender, sexuality, class, religion, nationality.<sup>9</sup>

The term itself highlights historical specificity and context, but Anzaldúa's usage also broadens this scope to be applicable in multiple different settings. Awareness of these forms of social identity is important, but Anzaldúa does not stop at critique. She relies on the possibility of constructing new narratives for futures that can move beyond simplistic dualisms.

Anzaldúa claims the vulnerability of residing in the borderlands can build an epistemic sensitivity necessary for resisting dominant ideologies. While this is a skill that some people develop out of a necessity for survival, I argue that it can also be a form of vulnerability that people choose and cultivate through entering this vulnerable space of in-between-ness. When this form of sensitivity is respected, then confronting the continuing legacies of these sites of collision becomes necessity for making life more livable for those who have no choice but to be in the borderlands. Chosen disruption of monological belonging may destabilize people who fit

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<sup>9</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz En Lo Oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality*, ed. AnaLouise Keating (Duke University Press, 2015), 73.

on either side of a border, but an openness to that which is in-between can mitigate the violence necessary to maintain closed categories. For example, this vulnerability could challenge the value of overly nationalist definitions of separation that define security as invulnerability to outside influence.

However, shutting down sensitivities and responsiveness to wounding is a wound in itself. This can be experienced for people who are survivors, perpetrators, or bystanders of colonial violence. Numbing to survive trauma is evident for people and communities who have lived through exploitation and degradation, but even people fully aligned with power may experience the harm of “blinking out” so that cruelty goes unchallenged. Mab Segrest names whiteness as an “anesthetic aesthetic,” showing examples where whiteness, racialized gender norms, and addiction to numbing substances work in tandem to shut down the inevitable emotions that arise for perpetrators and bystanders of violence. This form of sensitivity demands that ethics and ethicists alike to attend to histories of violence, the wounds still open and bleeding, and the transformative potential of *nepantla* as a critical space for moral reflection.

Laura E. Pérez claimed the site of *nepantla* as one that is necessary for reimagining new futures. According to Pérez, Anzaldúa named

the place that by necessity we must occupy, *nepantla*, as the space of visionary politics...In that place, the social world is thankfully disturbed, its logic upended. Here we together begin to imagine and thus call into being a visionary, political eros that is simultaneously individual and social, spiritual and political. Here, it is true that we are different and same, we the many, the unknown, the welcome, where self is also somehow other, *donde tú eres mi otro yo, según los maestros maya*, where you are my other me: *In Lak'ech*.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Laura Elisa Pérez, *Eros Ideologies: Writings on Art, Spirituality, and the Decolonial* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 146.

Pérez highlights the beauty and possibility of when the givens of our social world can be questioned and reimagined in the spaces in between. But nepantla also exposes the *multiplicity* of selves and social worlds, each with differing meanings of how the individual, social, spiritual, and political can and should interact.

In order for the process of ethical reflection in nepantla to be non-hierarchical and participatory, the multiplicity of the borderlands need to be attended to with the utmost care and caution. Though nepantla can be a space where one sees how “you are the other me,” because sites of power are multiple, one can meet one’s oppressor in the borderlands as well. Lugones picks up this point, probing this assertion from Anzaldúa that it is possible to meet in the borderlands and easily understand those who also inhabit liminal spaces.

In this next section, I engage Lugones’s critiques of Anzaldúa’s concept of the borderlands/nepantla. Lugones worries that Anzaldúa’s concept of the borderlands may collapse differently situated experiences of liminality into sameness. An assumption that all liminal experiences are the same, according to Lugones, could negate the multiplicities of our conversation partners, especially the ones that we may not know or understand. This may end up reinforcing a false monological belonging in the borderlands, reinscribing the wounds of non-belonging and alienation. Though I do not think Anzaldúa’s early or later work reinforces this sameness, I agree with Lugones that this dynamic needs to be attended to if this ethical model is to be egalitarian and expansive. I review Lugones’s insights while bringing them into conversation with Anzaldúa’s concept of el árbol de la vida. Then I sketch how Anzaldúa can create this new form of belonging because she holds a paradox, belonging and alienation together, through nepantla.

### María Lugones and Complex Communication in the Borderlands

Lugones questions the implications of a quote from Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera*. Is it true, Lugones asks, that all "atravesados," or people who cross over "beyond the confines of the normal," will automatically understand each other's experiences? Departing slightly from Anzaldúa, Lugones talks about the space of in-betweenness as the *limen* instead of the borderlands or *nepantla*. According to Lugones, the *limen* is not automatically a site of transparent understanding. This would reinforce the very power dynamics of knowledge that *nepantla* is helpful for resisting. Lugones's main concern is that differences should not be erased.<sup>11</sup> This is important for a narrative ethical approach to complex forms of belonging; to assume sameness if someone has experienced *any* form of oppression that made one feel non-belonging could cause more wounding in the place that is supposed to be healing.

The *limen* can go against dominant narratives that narrowly define subjects. Lugones sees the *limen* as a space to counteract these internalized perceptions of inferiority that limit one's imagination for other ways of being beyond dominant norms. However, Lugones emphasizes how the *limen* does not expose a singular authentic self, but gives breathing room for being selves that are multiple.

...as we exercise double vision, it is clear that this gives us a way of rejecting the reality of the oppressor as true even when we recognize that it rules our lives, even from the inside. To reject it is not to diminish one's sense of its power, but it is a call not to be consumed by it.<sup>12</sup>

Seeing oneself in the *limen* gives the possibility of rejecting monological reality while still seeing the ways that its operation has constituted our lives, languages, and ways of relating.

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<sup>11</sup> María Lugones, "On Complex Communication," *Hypatia* 21, no. 3 (2006): 76.

<sup>12</sup> Lugones, "On Complex Communication," 79.

Lugones acknowledges a self that exists within master narratives; however, for communication to be ethical, one must know that there are multiple other selves that live outside of a singular structure. Lugones also leaves room for those other selves to not be immediately comprehensible to someone who also lives amongst multiple structures, since everything existing in the borderlands that falls outside of a master narrative is not automatically transparent. This has implications for oneself, as well as how one relates to others who are also in a limen.

Recognition of another as liminal, as standing in a borderlands, is a necessary condition for reading their words and gestures differently. If I think you are in a limen, I will know that, at least some of the time, you do not mean what you say but something else... To understand that you are in a limen is to understand that you are not what you are within a structure. It is to know that you have ways of living in disruption of domination.<sup>13</sup>

Though we may know ourselves as multiple, maintaining the fact that others are multiple, too, is what provides the space for coalition building across many different sites of difference.

The limen also provides a space for relating with subjects that do not share the same experiences, identities, or social positionings. However, what subjects that meet in the limen *do* share is the common experience of moving within and amongst multiple contradictory frameworks. The limen also builds sensitivity to the ways that someone may be acting a particular way due to constraints that may be hidden or not spoken within a dominant paradigm. Even if people are situated differently, a sense that they are negotiating multiple different sets of meaning, though these meanings may be unknown for both interlocuters, can bring a level of humility. Respecting communicative opacity, to me, feels like an important consideration for communicating ethically amidst different power dynamics.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

Lugones names the ways that challenging monological thinking doesn't automatically restructure the ways that these logics determine possibilities. Seeing oneself outside of dominant structures can be experienced as a call,

...a call that many of us hear as a revolutionary call, a call to dismantle oppressive reality. But the inhabitation of the limen is not a revolutionary move, it is rather a preparation, a creative preparation. The creation of liminal spaces involves this going back and forth from domination, negotiating that movement so as to maximize our freedom in an unfree situation. All of this, so far, is not about coalition but about reconstituting oneself as active. But it is here that we should see the need for coalition: a loving connection toward liberation.<sup>14</sup>

Even the movement of perceiving oneself within as well as beyond the logics of domination has the possibility to "maximize our freedom in an unfree situation."<sup>15</sup> The limen can also increase the ability for someone to act, after they have critically examined themselves and the power structures they are navigating, perhaps in ways that were previously unnamed.

Ultimately, though not automatically, Lugones claims that the limen *can* be the space for coalition-building. This glimpse of another way is also an invitation to live beyond oppressive structures and actively work to dismantle them. Acting together to overcome arrogant perception, challenging systemic violence, building connections that transform our sense of self and our sense of community; these are the conditions that lead to coalition, which Lugones defines as "a loving connection toward liberation."<sup>16</sup>

Coalitions will only happen if complex communication, an "intercultural polyglossia,"<sup>17</sup> is the mode of relating in the limen. Lugones says of complex communication,

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 83.

Liberal conversation thrives on transparency and because of that it is monologized. Complex communication thrives on recognition of opacity and on reading opacity, not through assimilating the text of others to our own. Rather, it is enacted through a change in one's own vocabulary, one's sense of self, one's way of living, in the extension of one's collective memory, through developing forms of communication that signal disruption of the reduction attempted by the oppressor.<sup>18</sup>

Lugones gives helpful insights into managing the power dynamics of communication amidst multiplicity. This experience with moving across different frameworks can also make those who meet in the limen more sensitive to power dynamics. Complex communication entails respecting the opacity of multiplicity and difference without limiting the possibility of connection.

Lugones also emphasizes “an openness to the interlocuters as real--rather than a shared vocabulary--is a central condition for communication. Real, that is, not a figment of my imagination nor completely foreign.”<sup>19</sup> Those who we relate with are much more than our perceptions of them; we are much more than people’s perceptions of us. But perceiving them and their experiences as real is the starting point for relating across these modes of perception. This sensitivity requires an openness to being transformed by other’s experiences. Thus, Lugones says through complex communication “we create and cement relational identities, meanings that did not precede the encounter, ways of life that transcend nationalisms, root identities, and other simplifications of our imaginations.”<sup>20</sup>

Lugones’s work gives us much to think about regarding belonging. In the space of the limen, the limitations of imposed and predetermined identities are exposed. Often, these narrow

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 84.



identity formations are maintained by singular concepts of belonging. A wounding occurs when a predetermined identity is forced upon someone. Rather than complicating a static binary of belonging, this predetermined identity fractures or erases that which exceeds it. Rejecting the either/or choice of belonging or non-belonging means acknowledging multiple selves, ones that are changing and transforming through our relationships. It also means challenging the ways that singular belonging often requires a singular reality—typically the reality that members of one group espouse.

While there is a coalitional possibility for constructing alternate forms of belonging in the limen, it is dependent on people speaking back against singular perceptions of reality, creating new senses of themselves, and being open to mutual transformation through expanding one's own collective history as well as one's own sense of self. Lugones shows the way that negotiating multiple communities of belonging can create an internal separateness, one that opens up freedom to perceive oneself beyond the constructed categories given by dominant power structures.

Ethical reflection in nepantla requires being ready to have yourself expanded, your collective narratives stretched, your sense of self shifted, and ways of living impacted, through getting to know multiple worlds that others inhabit. Being open to transformation means that complex communication does not have a set end goal or telos besides this openness to being shifted and changed through encounter. If nepantla is to be seen as a critical space for moral reflection, then Lugones's insights highlight how communication in these liminal spaces must not reproduce patterns of monological belonging. It would be the ultimate irony if the borderlands became another rigidified form of monological belonging. Remembering the importance of complex communication can be an important tool for creating future conditions

for communities of belonging that are continuously open to new creative constellations of meaning-making. In the face of monological belonging, narratives need to interweave what simplistic reductions have separated—the historical, the personal, and the communal will all necessarily be transformed in this process.

Though Lugones' critiques Anzaldúa's earlier works, Anzaldúa more explicitly offers models for building new configurations of belonging in her later works. Knowing one's raíces, grafting new branches, and forming bonds of solidarity for action need the tools of complex communication. An extension of one's collective memory not only can particularize the ways that histories are narrated, claimed, and affiliated with due to our relationships; it also builds the space for multiple stories and narratives to exist, especially if they challenge overly-generalized master narratives. Anzaldúa's árbol de la vida names the types of narratives and concrete sufferings that need to be addressed in the limen, but complex communication also needs historical reflexivity, attentiveness to wounding, and narratives that make other modes of belonging imaginable.

Anzaldúa's later work more explicitly emphasizes that the borderlands are multiple through the concept of nepantla; Lugones gives the important reminder that the experience of one borderland does not automatically mean understanding the dynamics of another. Nepantla is also multiple, and Anzaldúa could also challenge some of the ways Lugones falls into the binary of oppressor/oppressed. Though Lugones emphasizes speaking back against one's oppressor, Anzaldúa also highlights the agency of "putting history through a sieve," claiming any and all elements from both dominant and marginalized standpoints that can aid in transformation and healing. Anzaldúa's non-oppositional understanding of nepantla offers another creative avenue for when one *does* meet one's oppressor in the borderland. Besides acknowledging opacity,

Anzaldúa also emphasizes radical interconnectedness. Interconnectedness is not always positive; but relationality emphasizes that we are impacted and transformed by our encounters with each other and each other's experiences. We can be connected by a disconnection. Interconnectedness emphasizes mutual influence and responsibility. The person who is in the position of oppressor must position themselves as interconnected with the person experiencing trauma; recognizing this influence highlights why responsibility for transforming such structures is necessary. An analysis of our co-constitution within this system will highlight the agency and involvement of all people, especially if one is a beneficiary of such unjust organizational systems. As Iris Marion Young's structural analysis of responsibility shows, even if you are not responsible for the creation of systemic oppression, you do have a responsibility to change and transform these structures.<sup>21</sup>

### **Nepantla as Moral Space**

A tricky interplay of connection and disconnection needs to be held at the center of this alternate mode of belonging. Keeping Lugones's concerns for opacity and multiplicity in mind, I now turn to Anzaldúa's acknowledgment of nepantla as a space where an entirely different kind of belonging emerges. Anzaldúa claims that nepantla is a place of both connection and detachment, belonging and separateness:

Nepantla is the place where at once we are detached (separated) and attached (connected) to each of our several cultures. Here the watchers on the bridge (nepantla) can 'see through' the larger symbolic process that's trying to become conscious through a particular life situation or event. Nepantla is the midway point between the conscious and the unconscious, the place where transformations are enacted. Nepantla is a place where we can accept contradiction and paradox.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Iris Marion Young, "Responsibility and Global Justice: A Social Connection Model," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 23, no. 1 (2006): 102.

<sup>22</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz En Lo Oscuro*, 56.

The dialectic of separation and connection is important in this definition. Separateness and belonging are important aspects of individual identity, but one can also experience belonging and separateness within a single community. We can feel simultaneously connected and disconnected to multiple communities at the same time. The site of nepantla, and my later discussion of the wound in this chapter, illustrate this tension.

Anzaldúa claims that transformation can happen because of the space of nepantla, where one can see through two different perspectives because one is seeing both at the same time. Nepantla is the liminal space that provides reflective distance beyond the narrow logics of one set of norms and values in a society. This space is also constructive for new subject formations outside of dominant norms.

Nepantla doesn't provide a view from nowhere; in contrast to Lugones's concerns of assumed transparency, Anzaldúa's nepantla isn't a place of omniscient understanding of all realities outside of dominant views. It does, however, claim an overlap of multiple different ways of perceiving, showing the assumptions of each worldview to be constructed and not a given. Views that may be dominant in one location or social community may be marginalized in another. Context is crucial for perception. Nepantla is especially attuned to the knowledge that comes from multiple proximities. These multiple proximities are always partial and must continue to be so if they are to avoid totalizing perceptions. Being in relation with someone does not imply complete understanding, but it does occasion more moments of experiencing a multiplicity of ways of knowing, being, and interacting.

Being in nepantla invites a process of transformation. Larger symbolic processes are renegotiated, but there is no fixed end point. Lugones says this happens through complex

communication; Anzaldúa imagines this process as becoming a tree grafted with multiple branches. Openness to transformation in nepantla is important because ethical subjects are expected to change through the process, shifting their perceptions of themselves as well as their perceptions of who they can relate to. Transformation cannot claim a particular telos or end goal. The means are the ends; the process is the product, and it is never finished. Nepantla is a never-ending practice of engagement.

There will always be aspects of ourselves and others that we will not fully understand. If we did have full understanding, if we were transparent to ourselves and others, we could not continue to change in unexpected ways. Though we can connect through experiencing each other's worlds, there is never a promise of complete understanding. But this unknowing is what safeguards the possibility of transformation. If communities of belonging were static, they would wither and die with the original, supposedly unchanging members. Possibility for transformation is necessarily opaque, but honoring this can make unexpected connections possible.

Creative acts become an important aspect of moral reflection in nepantla. Because of their artistic fluidity, they can create opportunities for connecting while honoring disconnect. They can gesture to spaces of alienation and build connections through them without annihilating the reality of its not-fully-knowable existence. Poems, songs, murals, interpretive dances—different artistic mediums can be tools that both expresses something that reaches beyond our understanding without claiming to disclose a finality.

The wound of alienation, I argue, can be seen as an avenue for enacting more dynamic forms of belonging. But Anzaldúa holds the hope that wounds can heal, and that we must

transform them together. The next section shows why we must center concrete experiences of suffering in our ethical reflections.

### **Starting at the Wound for Ethical Reflection**

In her later work, Anzaldúa writes “We are all wounded, but we can connect through the wound that’s alienated us from others. When the wound forms a cicatrix, the scar can become a bridge linking people split apart.”<sup>23</sup> The quote can be read in a few different ways: people are internally split apart, and externally split apart from each other. Anzaldúa gestures to the fact that *all* people experience wounding and splitting, though in different ways. Anzaldúa highlights the connection of the personal and the communal, offering avenues for people to tend to their internal and external splitting. Thus, connecting through the wound, Anzaldúa advises, is the process for bridging fractured selves and expanding our relationships. The shared permeability of the wounds and the fractures are what enable connection. I see this as an important aspect of extending our perceived communities of belonging. I argue that, within this schema, the wound of alienation itself becomes the avenue for creating non-rigid, non-singular forms of belonging.

I use the terms belonging and alienation instead of belonging versus non-belonging for multiple reasons. It is true that belonging can be seen as the opposite of alienation, and vice versa. Non-belonging can be experienced as a wound that one grapples with in nepantla’s paradoxical connection and disconnection. But alienation and belonging can also go hand in hand, showing how one can both feel belonging and alienation at the same time, as is this case with the borderlands/nepantla. Alienation *can* be experienced through non-belonging, which can lead to isolation, ostracization, unintelligibility, etc. But it can also be felt through other

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<sup>23</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, *Light in the Darkness*, 21.

experiences that are not inherently tied to belonging. Alienation can also happen apart from processes of belonging and non-belonging, as illustrated by Anzaldúa's shock from a medical diagnosis like diabetes and surviving through a seismic earthquake.

The pain of alienation can be transmuted if it is understood as an engine of yearning for healing modes of connection. According to Anzaldúa, "In shadow work, the problem is part of the cure--you don't heal the wound; the wound heals you."<sup>24</sup> Though this wound is experienced as suffering, following Anzaldúa, the wound also holds the possibility of being an opening. When we come together through the wound, it becomes the connection that matters.

Holding this tension at the center of ethical reflection can highlight the benefits of both belonging and non-belonging for constructing an ethical paradigm that takes the violence and pain of alienation seriously. This paradox can be an important counterforce to simplistic notions of belonging without discarding the importance of the concept of belonging altogether. It can add nuance to the importance of belonging for identity and social action without defaulting to simplistic identity categories. Non-belonging itself can be the wound, but other forms of alienation like sickness or natural disasters may also disconnect us from others. Woundedness can fracture one's understanding of their identity. Likewise, if a reductive identity is forced upon us, it can cause wounding and isolation from a sense of ourselves and others.

While the negative aspects of this wounding are apparent, there are also positive aspects that this approach would center. Above we already discussed the ways that the separateness and non-belonging of *nepantla* can create critical spaces for reflecting on cultural norms and values. But the pain of separateness can also open avenues for re-establishing belonging. Attending to

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 89.

the wound thus holds the possibility for transformation through this attentiveness. In this way, an experience of alienation can become the site for new forms of connection.

The grafting metaphor walks a fine line of seeing the wound as a possibility for transformation without forgetting the trauma of experiencing wounding and woundedness. Thus, the wound transforming into scar tissue also offers important insights for an ethical approach. In Anzaldúa's quote, she talks about the cicatrix, or the scar that forms a bridge for healing, for linking. Earlier we have discussed Anzaldúa's metaphor of grafting branches to el árbol de la vida as a growing together that happens through sharing narratives. But I also argue that this language of the scar directs attention toward the concrete, material connections that necessarily grow amongst participants if structures are to be transformed.

Reflecting on how a wound heals gives us important considerations: it is a process that happens over time. It is incremental, hopefully healing, but oftentimes non-linear: a scar needs to have a scab first, an excess of regenerating cells that nourish the site for growing back together. Sometimes scabs reopen, necessitating another round of healing. Eventually, if the healing is complete, the scab falls off. There are times, like Anzaldúa's own description of the borderland as una herida abierta, where the wound will not heal before more traumatic impacts are experienced. The wound will stay open but, until it heals, it will continue to be a site needing care, connection, and transformation.

The cicatrix also points toward the lasting traces that are left behind, even after healing has happened. The scar itself signals toward a memory; it is a reminder to not forget that this is a site where violence happened, where healing happened—where transformation happened. The scar can witness to an alternative telling of history, marking old wounds while being a reminder



of new possibilities for growth. Being a part of this process can transform our sense of self, our sense of history, our languages, and our stories.

However, we cannot connect with each other without understanding the differing natures of our wounds, attending to differing power dynamics through complex communication, listening to each other's histories and seeing how we are interconnected within them, and physically showing up to support each other in dismantling these systems that have caused harm. The ethical dimension of negotiating multiple different social positionings requires being or becoming sensitive to the paradox of belonging and alienation. This method can also challenge some of the strict binaries of oppressor and oppressed. In different ways, Anzaldúa and Lugones both point out how one can simultaneously be oppressed and oppressor in different social contexts. One can meet one's oppressor in the borderlands; one can be the oppressor, encountering a person they have oppressed in nepantla. People can hold power and oppressed identities at the same time. Holding onto this complexity is essential for understanding the ways that power functions. It is also important for not falling back into simplistic understandings of belonging.

While the force of master narratives has often been gained through punishment and violence, I claim that nepantla also illustrates how the monologic is never as powerful and all-encompassing as it claims to be. Inspired by women of color feminists like Anzaldúa and Lugones, Dean Spade's critical trans politics critiques legal inclusion by claiming that we need a form of participation that will "transform current logics of state, civil society security, and social equality."<sup>25</sup> Spade warns about oversimplifying power dynamics by conceiving of it as

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<sup>25</sup> Dean Spade, *Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics, and the Limits of Law* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 1.

something that only exists for one dominant person or group. Spade claims that a structural analysis of power

helps us understand that there is not one source of power, no one person at the top dominating everyone below. Rather, there are regimes of practices and knowledge that coalesce in conditions and arrangements that affect everyone and that make certain populations highly vulnerable...<sup>26</sup>

If power cannot be singularly instituted as Spade claims, then we need to be careful about narratives that may claim that power consolidation is unquestionable. The coloniality of power is also not a singular entity, but a matrix with different axes. Master narratives of belonging are never as static as a monological stance might make it seem. We break the limits of these structures all the time, in unknown ways and in ways that we get reprimanded, disciplined, molded back into the contours.

This is another reason why the concept of belonging can be a helpful concept for pushing against monological thinking. If even the axes of monological power are not singular, then focusing on identificatory acts rather than identity categories increases our ability to act beyond our assumed categories of belonging. Monological power requires “buy-in,” participation, and a continuous active forgetting of multiplicity that automatically overflows any singular category. Identifying the social mechanisms that maintain such forms of belonging allows us to act in solidarity across oppositional categories, breaking down us versus them dualities.

### **Feminist Narrative Ethics**

Feminist narrative ethicists have spelled out some theoretical elements of a narrative approach that I think Anzaldúa’s work actively demonstrates. In an article titled “Keeping Moral Space Open: New Images of Ethics Consulting,” Margaret Urban Walker offers the image of

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<sup>26</sup> Spade, *Normal Life*, 3.

clinical ethicists as facilitators that can hold communal space for processes of moral reflection.

Clinical ethicists should not only be valued for their expertise in ethical theories; skillfully bequeathing theoretical frameworks to people who passively apply them misses important aspects of *how* ethics should be done. Urban Walker emphasizes participation when she claims that an ethicist's job "is to keep open, accessible, and active...those moral-reflective spaces in institutional life where a sound and shared process of deliberation and negotiation can go on."<sup>27</sup>

Urban Walker claims that clinical ethicists should be valued based on how attuned they are to the differing modes of communication that are important amongst the community reflecting on moral decision making.<sup>28</sup> In order to make these spaces participatory and engaging for all moral stakeholders, she claims that clinical ethicists doing consultation work need expansive knowledge not just of ethical frameworks, but also of differing cultural backgrounds and philosophies. Ethicists need keen perception of the power dynamics at play within social relationships where deliberation happens. Urban Walker claims that a narrative ethical lens is best for this approach, since it can point to the ways that we can see "morality as construction and negotiation"<sup>29</sup> rather than an abstract set of principles to be applied.

Though Urban Walker is speaking of best practices for clinical ethics consulting, she gives me the language of moral space to describe the process and praxis of ethical reflection in nepantla. I believe that the process of ethics described here is egalitarian, participatory, and focused on safeguarding a space for multiplicity. I think this is aligned with what Anzaldúa

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<sup>27</sup> Margaret Urban Walker, "Keeping Moral Space Open: New Images of Ethics Consulting," *The Hastings Center Report* 23, no. 2 (1993): 38.

<sup>28</sup> Walker, "Keeping Moral Space Open," 37–39.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

envisioned when she describes the process of people grafting branches through storytelling and working to make changes to confront violence. She even coined a new Spanish/Nahua term, *nepantleras*, for the beings who hone these skills by engaging in *nepantla*. If, according to Urban Walker, the role of the ethicist in ethics consulting is to be a facilitator, I think Anzaldúa models being a facilitator as well as the necessity of co-participation in the ethical process.

For Anzaldúa, facilitators must be attentive to other people's narratives, but they also must engage their own self-creating narratives, moving along with the process while being open to influence in *nepantla*. Anzaldúa's concept of *nepantla* as a moral space for critical reflection can help reformulate conceptions of belonging to better attend to the wounds of coloniality. Urban Walker claims that narrative ethics doesn't shy away from the ways our values and norms are socially constructed. This way of doing ethics invites broader participation in that construction.

Hilde Lindemann Nelson's work goes deeper into the ethical relevance of storytelling. Lindemann Nelson claims that narratives are important for how we conceptualize agency and identity. They transmit our understanding of responsibility, give us models of action, and increase our sensitivity to ethical issues. Narratives impact who can be perceived as a moral agent, and this importantly intersects with an ethics of belonging. She focuses on the ways that narratives can help repair identities that have been damaged by what she calls master narratives, or the dominant stories that circulate within a culture and impact the ways that people make meaning in their lives.

Telling counterstories to these master narratives, in Lindemann Nelson's view, can ameliorate the diminished sense of moral agency that subjects living under conditions of

oppression experience. When stories are used to repair a group identity, this becomes moral.<sup>30</sup>

These counterstories can be told in many ways. They can be told by individuals or constructed by groups. Counterstories can shift people's perceptions of themselves, or they can attempt to shift an oppressor's perception, reinstating the storytellers as active moral agents. Counterstories resist the "evil of diminished moral agency" through challenging master narratives.<sup>31</sup> Lindemann Nelson furthers the moral importance of storytelling and the need for people (especially marginalized ones) to come together and redefine themselves by constructing alternate narratives against dominant ones that foreclose moral action and moral subjecthood. Anzaldúa is also concerned with changing oppressive structures through narratives that make complex identities possible.

How history is narrated is extremely ethically relevant. Lindemann Nelson shows how narratives link the past, present, and future,

...creat[ing] a moral track record that commits her to certain values for the future. The review of her history is a backward-looking story that explains to her who she has been. The commitment to a future course of action is a forward-looking story that shows her where she wants to go.<sup>32</sup>

Constructing a moral track record is extremely important for ethical reflection since it is necessary for discerning our responsibility and acting in the future. But Anzaldúa also uses creative re-tellings of history to confront colonial trauma that is still bleeding. When there is trauma, the distinctions between past and present are not so stable. How can creative narratives

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<sup>30</sup> Hilde Lindemann Nelson, *Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair*, 1st edition (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 19.

<sup>31</sup> Nelson, *Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair*, 7.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

address trauma that yokes past and present while aiming to transform social conditions in the future?

María Pía Lara's work spells out the ethical implications of another central part of Anzaldúa's method: creative acts. Her work also shows how re-narrating history can create forward-looking stories, and how future courses of action can be backward looking when particular narratives have been systematically covered up by people in power. Pía Lara claims that "it is necessary to revise our past if we are to change our societies."<sup>33</sup> Moral imagination is developed when societies publicly engage in self-reflection about the past, and Pía Lara is arguing for the need for this type of reflection. Through engaging with plays, movies, novels, and stories that show these dimensions of human violence, Lara calls for dialogue in the public sphere that would "materialize justice" by creating institutions of accountability.

Our moral outlook is shaped both by individual and social factors, and Pía Lara says we need to engage with stories from the past in order to change the future. Pía Lara looks to the role of narrative for constructing reflective judgments in the face of human cruelty. Unlike determinant judgments that come from an abstract, generalizable principle, Lara argues for *reflective* judgments that stem from particular experiences and disclose the real yet often hidden impacts of human cruelty. She emphasizes the need to talk about and construct our histories in the public sphere to make institutional changes.

Lara calls for the necessity of public dialogue to produce terms that expose the hidden dimensions of human violence against each other—she even notes that a normative term like

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<sup>33</sup> María Pía Lara, *Narrating Evil: A Post Metaphysical Theory of Reflective Judgment*, *New Directions in Critical Theory* (New York ; Columbia University Press, 2007), 4, <https://doi.org/10.7312/lara14030>.

“humanity” is the result of a dialogical process spurred by atrocity.<sup>34</sup> Critical retrieval of memories, the creation of new institutions that would secure justice, and securing the space for new narratives to continue to be engaged by the public sphere are Lara’s main concerns.<sup>35</sup>

Anzaldúa’s autohistoria-teoría produces narratives of human cruelty for discussion in the public sphere. Anzaldua depicts the border as an open wound that continues to bleed as economic national interests violently collide. The trauma of this wound is historical; narrating thousands of years of history etched within her own body, Anzaldua’s writing reflected on the impacts of colonialism, the Spanish American War, and free trade agreements that could still be seen on her skin, her tongue, on her gender presentation. To see the border as an open wound requires a retelling of histories that highlights historical trauma, the ways that people’s personal histories and relationships complicate simplistic us versus them dichotomies, and the necessity of mutuality and responsibility for these shared histories.

Her work invites reflective rather than determinant judgments on the past while encouraging participation from her readers to situate themselves and their communities within these stories, seeing how they are not just in the past, but viscerally here in the present. Colonial epistemologies justified violence by judging who fell outside of particular communities of belonging, such as the sphere of being human. This judgment also determined who could be engaged with as a producer of knowledge. Anzaldúa’s narratives also expand beyond just humanity; her writings illustrate how belonging determines who we conceive of as being possible to relate to, and brings trees, rocks, and animals into this process as well.

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<sup>34</sup> Pía Lara, *Narrating Evil*, 10.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

These ethicists help me spell out why nepantla can be seen as a moral space for ethical reflection. In its ideal form, it is non-hierarchical and encourages expansive participation. It holds the possibility for reflecting on forms of belonging, and how these definitions of belonging preclude some from participating in ethical reflection. Those who meet in nepantla have the possibility to reclaim their moral agency by breaking out of oppressive dominant narratives. Sometimes, these dominant narratives have been forged by a community of ‘ethical experts’ rather than a dialogical process of engaging moral concerns. Re-narrating histories can bring awareness to atrocities in the public sphere; nepantla shows how these violences of the past can still be felt in the present. As we will explore next, this *can* (but doesn’t necessarily) lead to a group co-construction of an expanded sense of subjectivity woven within larger storehouses of collective memory oriented towards change.

### Conclusion

These reflections provide a basis for an ethics of belonging that is both critical and practical. It is critical because it challenges the mechanisms that produce identity categories, focusing on radical interconnectedness as a source of healing and lens for re-telling histories of contact. It is practical because it is rooted in memories and lived experiences of violence, oppression, but most importantly, resistance. Witnessing to the senseless violence and suffering of colonial power makes it clear that there is no coherent response to an incoherent system. If power is constituted in multiple ways, if we are existing as multiple selves, then our responses must be multiple, as well. Historical amnesia disconnects people from resources of resistance and survival.<sup>36</sup> Erased histories must be told and remembered for the healing of trauma to

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<sup>36</sup> Surya Nayak, “Location as Method,” *Qualitative Research Journal* 17, no. 3 (January 1, 2017): 202–16.



happen. It can also be a space where one can expand one's own horizons in truly transformative ways, ways that may threaten certain notions of subjectivity that simplify what is actually much more complex. I end with a reflection about how this method may be helpful for institutional transformation.

While I believe that Anzaldúa's method is strong for individuals and communities, I turn to another example to demonstrate how this method could work on an institutional level. María Pía Lara claims that these dialogues need to transform institutions and create new terms for understanding atrocities hidden in the public sphere. I now give an example that enacts one of the main goals of decolonial feminisms: transforming the logic and enactment of racism, militarism, and imperialism. I believe this is an example of the praxis of Anzaldúa's method can work for making institutional changes and challenging us/them conceptions of belonging. I turn to the document "A Vision for Feminist Peace: Building a Movement Driven Foreign Policy" as one concrete example of coalition-building created by three intersectional feminist organizations: Grassroots Global Justice Alliance, MADRE, and Women Cross DMZ.

These three organizations gathered a coalition of 23 women and gender non-conforming people to produce a new vision for foreign policy. Among them were immigrants, veterans, Indigenous organizers, and anti-war activists.<sup>37</sup> They were dismayed by the lack of vision for US policy as the pandemic, global climate change, and an untenable economic system upheld by racism showed the limitations of domestic and foreign policies that touted militarism instead of focusing on shared vulnerability.

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<sup>37</sup> Grassroots Global Justice Alliance, MADRE, and Women Cross DMZ, "A Vision for Feminist Peace: Building a Movement Driven Foreign Policy," 2020, <https://www.feministpeaceinitiative.org/pdf/index/visionfempeace.pdf>.

Intersectional feminist movements in the United States have encouraged a rethinking of the definition of security—*who* is made secure by these borders reinforced by guns, tanks, drones, and surveillance technologies? Activists who have been wounded by ideologies of security, whether in the United States, internationally, or through their families living in the diaspora, have questioned the scope of who is included in these ideologies of national security. They do this through re-narrating histories of connection from their different social locations, centering activists and the people impacted by these traumas who carry the legacies in their bodies, and building coalitions that challenge us them dichotomies, pushing for an activist movement driven policy approach that would put resources toward health and community care instead of policing and militarization.

The document renarrates the interconnections among the ways that their communities have been wounded by US ideologies of security, particularly focusing on the extra burdens women and gender non-conforming people face in these systems. For example, they point to the ways that the US has outsourced its strategies of deterrence to Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras, pouring massive amounts of funding into militarizing more borders, rather than funding resources for survival that precipitate migration in the first place. They point to the ways that the United States funded military regimes in many of these Central American countries, including armed groups that used gender-based violence as tactic of war.<sup>38</sup> These wars propped up neoliberal policies that put immense pressure on women to provide unpaid networks of care as public resources become privatized. And with all of these pressures historically situated, the US has cut protections for survivors fleeing gender-based violence. Domestically, Border Patrol

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<sup>38</sup> A Vision for Feminist Peace, 10.

Units, supposedly designated for national security along the border, were sent to US sanctuary cities to carry out deportations. The Department of Homeland Security doesn't only surveil migrants along the US/Mexico border, but also tracks Muslim and Black communities organizing for their rights within the United States. The document shows how police tactics used against Black Lives Matter protestors and Standing Rock Water protectors in the United States were the same techniques used against Palestinians due to US police officers being trained in Israeli military tactics.<sup>39</sup> They narrate how Indigenous communities in New Mexico dealt with the nuclear health impacts similar to Japanese survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, since the US has dropped 200 nuclear test bombs on Indigenous territories within its own borders.<sup>40</sup> And uranium poisoning was not only a common concern for breastfeeding mothers from these communities, but also for people in Iraq and North Africa due to the use of uranium in US war zones.<sup>41</sup>

The ideologies of security in a post September 11<sup>th</sup> context extend beyond just physical borders of belonging; they contribute to an ideology of surveillance of the entirety of the globe. As Anzaldúa's own life also makes clear, racism can create pockets even within US national borders that treat communities of color as enemy outsiders living within as a threat to national security. If this is the case, it is even more necessary for coalition work to connect domestic and foreign policy, as the wounding itself is global in scope and happening on micro and macro levels.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

This approach brings an explicitly feminist and intersectional lens to both human rights and anti-war agendas, since this policy would be rooted not just in generalized principles of human vulnerability but informed by re-narrated histories of interconnection and the concrete wounding experiences etched onto women and queer people of color's' bodies. Importantly, the people most wounded by these ideologies are involved in creating the policy shifts. Through this framework, asylum rights, conflict prevention, and diplomacy can be seen through a framework of reparations that address the historical and continually bleeding wounds of ideologies of security, especially considering the impacts of colonialism, settler-colonialism, and military intervention. Basic needs and fundamental human rights like housing, childcare, healthcare, access to education, and clean water are a starting point of shared vulnerability; access to these resources is impacted by our differential histories and social positions, though these impacts are interconnected.

Histories of connection challenge the scope of militarized ideologies of security, leading to foreign policy led by the demands of intersectional grassroots anti-war activists fighting for a new vision which they spell out through the feminist principles of “collective care, reparations, right relationship with people and the planet, and accountability.”<sup>42</sup> Instead of funneling billions into military investment, this document calls for diverting these resources toward human rights that would actually create security globally. The US military is the world's largest polluter: care for people and the planet would be significant in slashing these militarized resources.

They suggest institutional policy change by focusing on historical and current day wounds as the starting point for ethical reflection. This document excellently demonstrates a

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 3.

mode of reflection that requires 1) a retelling of histories that highlights historical trauma, mutual influence and responsibility. These histories, rather than just abstract narratives, 2) leave traces on our physical bodies that should be attended to. It also involves honoring the increased sensitivity and epistemological advantage that people who have been wounded by such systems gain through traumatic encounter. Finally, the opening of the wounds can foster spaces of connection amongst people who are situated differently within these histories, enabling coalitions to form that define security beyond overly simplistic nationalist definitions. The coalition would be forged through re-narrated histories of interconnection. And, while acknowledging our differing wounds and vulnerabilities, ensuring true security *must* be actualized together, through collective struggle toward liberation for *all* people.

## CONCLUSION

### TOWARD AN INTEGRAL ETHICS OF BELONGING

In the previous chapters, this book has outlined multiple different ethical frameworks for approaching coloniality, multiplicity, and belonging. How can we gather insights for transforming the wounds of colonial violence through different understandings of belonging? What tools do we have for challenging ways of knowing that uphold the structures of coloniality? And which methods of doing ethics and theology can aid in these necessary transformations?

From these previous chapters, we can see that there are modes of belonging that are harmful. This is usually the case when understandings of belonging are overly simplistic, reinforcing homogeneity and stability at the expense of lived complexities, internal contradictions and contestations. The impetus to sort, categorize, and hierarchically rank may be psychologically comforting for some seeking monological forms of belonging, but the violence of this systematization shown in previous chapters makes this mode of belonging ethically unacceptable. Recent attempts at more dynamic, action-oriented modes of Catholic belonging clashed against more traditional forms of belonging, proving the complexity within this one community of global Catholics. Ultimately, questions of gender and sexuality become the rigid standard on which Catholic identity is built. We can see from these examples the harmful impacts of a belonging that negatively values the difference of the other (rather than valuing the positive aspects of the social group in itself). Even with Pope Francis's attempts to create more

culturally flexible and solidaric forms of Catholic belonging, gender and sex norms remain non-changing and constant in ways. This simplistic understanding of gender and sex obscures his other attempts to analyze interlocking systems of oppression that influence gendered violence, racism, human trafficking, the impacts of climate change, and migration. Vitoria's use of the natural law constructed a form of belonging through assessing criteria for personhood rooted in God's cosmic order of creation, then applying this definition across different contexts (without input from the people whom this theory is getting applied to). But the issue with belonging in this sense is that it is determined by a "community of masters," in this case scholastic educated clerics.

Belonging can be harmful when its criteria becomes sameness. M. Jacqui Alexander cautions against this yearning for sameness while honoring that a yearning for wholeness can be expressed as a yearning for belonging. Her warning is true for both grassroots coalitional movements as well as top-down institutions. The previous chapter fleshes out contributions from narrative feminist ethicists and decolonial queer feminists to spell out guidelines for theorizing more complex modes of belonging. In this chapter, I will sketch some of my ideas for what I am calling an integral ethics of belonging.

I am inspired to talk about integral ethics by Aurora Levins Morales' politics of integrity, which she defines as

“[a] political practice that sacrifices neither the global nor the local, ignores neither the institutional power structures nor their most personal impact on the lives of individual people. That integrates what oppression keeps fracturing. That restores connections, not only in that future we dream of, but right here in the gory, tumultuous, hopeful, messy, and inconsistent present.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Aurora Levins Morales, *Medicine Stories: History, Culture, and the Politics of Integrity* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1998), 1.

For Levins Morales, the practice of restoring connections happens across spatial locations and concerns individuals and structures. Though this quote speaks of the future and the present, her work of constructing “curandera histories” also draws connections from the past. A politics of integrity tends to the fracturing of oppression, leading toward integral wholeness.

However, if we have heard the warnings about this yearning for wholeness, how does an integral ethics not repeat the concerns about wholeness indicating sameness? Sometimes, the word integrity connotes purity, wholeness, and innocence, concepts that would seem to undo the focus on complexity highlighted throughout the other chapters. Anzaldúa’s imagery of Coyolxauhqui being split apart and put back together depicts the process of striving for but never arriving at wholeness. Alexander also uses the language of fracturing and highlights that we need to pay attention to a yearning for wholeness while warning against forms of belonging that mistake sameness for wholeness. Lugones rejects the language of fragmentation altogether, since she claims that it reinforces the monologic of wholeness. It is better to think about multiplicity instead of wholeness, which may reinforce a non-existent “view from nowhere” that might be able to glimpse the totality. Pope Francis’ use of the word for his theory of integral ecology may also draw problematic parallels since his understanding of integral ecology rests on naturalized concepts of binary gender roles and patriarchy.

Nepantla can be a space that opens itself to challenging norms, even ones within countercultural movements.<sup>2</sup> But nepantla can be seen as a space for regaining a sense of ourselves beyond the confines of systemic oppression/monological thinking. As Judith Butler writes, “certain kinds of practices which are designed to handle certain kinds of problems

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<sup>2</sup> Lucie Fremlova, *Queer Roma* (London: Routledge, 2021).



produce, over time, a settled domain of ontology as their consequence, and this ontological domain, in turn, constrains our understanding of what is possible.”<sup>3</sup> Nepantla provides a space for comprehending the limitations of these practices, offering space of imagination and possibility beyond assumed domains of ontological fixity—but can’t the space of nepantla also become solidified into an ontological domain as well? Couldn’t it easily slip into another form of us vs. them categorization, flipping the scripts of oppression and domination?

An integral ethics of belonging honors the yearning to belong while cautioning against what may be lost if we sacrifice integrity for belonging. We yearn for belonging out of survival and love, the two reasons that Lugones gives for participating in world traveling. However, belonging becomes dangerous when we sacrifice integrity, or the complexities of our interconnectedness. When survival relies on alignment with dominance, love becomes obedience. Monological belongings offer protection for some at the expense of others; integral belongings offer participation for all co-striving for survival through love.

An integral ethics of belonging also does not fall into another binary dualism against monological forms of belonging. An integral ethics of belonging holds monological belongings like separatism as a possibility. It understands the yearning for simplistic belonging as rooted in the yearning for survival and love, without staying fixed in its structures that manipulate survival into alignment with dominance and love into obedience. Even if it is seen as an option, an integral ethics of belonging highlights what must be given up to maintain monological belonging: sacrificing integrity, or the reality of our interconnectedness.

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<sup>3</sup> Judith Butler, ““What Is Critique? An Essay on Foucault’s Virtue,”” in *The Political*, ed. David Ingram (Oxford/Malden: Blackwell, 2002), 219.

An integral ethics of belonging can attune to the spaces where alienation and belonging touch. Sometimes, alienation and belonging “touch” as opposites divided. An integral ethics of belonging can hold these meanings simultaneously through an epistemology of integral shifting that is non-binary, connectionist, and continuously changing. Integral shifting necessitates going beyond the in-fighting that often accompanies the demand for singular belonging within an ideological camp. Rather than reinforcing the objective distance needed to comprehend a whole, integral shifting emphasizes movement and the epistemological advantage of traversing what I call multiple proximities.

Claiming a shifting subjectivity challenges singular modes of thinking and belonging. It challenges a system that may classify some into subjects and others into unrelatable objects. Recovering connections with each other and the land necessitate shifting into different modes of perceiving. This is why an epistemology of integral shifting can also challenge the subject/object dichotomy.

### **Issues for Catholic Engagement with the Borderlands of Religious Belonging**

In conclusion, what does this mean for Catholic theological engagement? I argue for a dialogical emphasis rather than a monological one that would encourage participation and cultivation of moral agency, especially for subjects denied this status. Catholic theological engagement needs more sensitivity, comfort with complexity and opacity, and openness to radical transformation of our own sense of history, language, self, and community. Lugones claims that treating one’s interlocuters as real, not as a figment of one’s imagination, nor so wholly foreign as to be unrelatable, is more important than a base line of shared vocabulary. Perhaps Catholic approaches need to find more comfort being in between two laws, a stance that may, ultimately, transform one’s concept of self and community in drastic ways. This openness

may challenge singular religious affiliation and unified notions of belief safeguarded by the institutional Church.

Many “contextual” theologies already incorporate many different religious traditions into one lived practice. The boundary lines that determine what counts as religion and what counts as culture are highly political, especially when placed within the historical and ongoing legacies of colonialism, white supremacy and heteropatriarchy. The power dynamics that have influenced such categories go unchecked when religious walls are not interrogated. These constructions obscure the many ways that the majority of people globally, in the past and the present, are not neatly situated within one religious tradition. It also ignores the ways that colonization and evangelization went hand in hand, spreading a monotheological discourse that could not hold divine multiplicity. The categorization of religions as distinct entities obscures internal multiple influences within the Christian tradition itself while defining religions against each other, covering historical points of connection and influence. It also creates a category of “syncretism” as deviation, even if many African, Asian, Indigenous and many more religious practices persisted in disguised forms as lifelines of resistance for many colonized people. These connections show linkages among state formation and national identity, religion, racialization, and sex and gender norms combine, especially as many of these traditions also challenge heteronormative expectations and go beyond gender binaries.

An integral ethics of belonging would highlight the ways that race, nation, gender and sex have shaped the ways that lines have been drawn between and within religious traditions. This will also imply that the end goals of Catholic theological engagement will need to be less fixed and open to mutual transformation rather than an addition of depoliticized ‘cultural’ elements

that don't disrupt core truths. Necessary openness to transformation and change through encounter will undoubtedly threaten orthodoxy.

### **Conclusion: Mediatrix Methodologies**

I end with a reflection on the possibility of mediatrix methodologies as a Roman Catholic imagery for an integral ethics of belonging by reflecting on previous examples of Roman Catholic modes of belonging as well as Gloria Anzaldúa's concepts of nepantla. The term mediatrix comes from Catholic forms of Mariology, but we can "put history through a sieve," as Anzaldúa says. Mary as Mediatrix has sometimes fortified the colonial power of the institutional Catholic Church, as previous chapters have shown; but Marian devotion and so called "syncretistic" blending has also challenged the consolidation of Church power, affirming ways of knowing like Anzaldúa's *conocimiento* that resensitize and draw strength from the spaces of in betweenness that teem with possibility, even if they were forged through violence. *Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us, now and at the hour of our death*: the Mediatrix is ever-present in the most dire experiences of alienation, holding the paradox of alienation and belonging.

My reading of Mary as Mediatrix challenges neat distinctions between human and divine, between different religions, cultures, races, sexes, and genders. I lean into the ways that Mary as Mediatrix transgresses boundaries to bridge the spiritual and the material, showing the ways that compassionate mediation often requires categorical impurity, particularly as one who witnesses to the brutal suffering of state-imposed violence. I use creative theological interpretation and my own authority to reject the forms of Mariology that encourage sexual purity, submission to coercive hierarchies of worth, suffering for the imperial cause, and obedience to clerical authority. Attending to and being with the wounds that arise from singular, pure, or monological

understandings of belonging will require unflinching embrace of the spaces in between, as the mediatrix knows.

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## VITA

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