The Installation of the Human: Whiteness, Religion, and Racial Capitalism

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THE INSTALLATION OF THE HUMAN:
WHITENESS, RELIGION, AND RACIAL CAPITALISM

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THE INSTALLATION OF THE HUMAN:
WHITENESS, RELIGION, AND RACIAL CAPITALISM

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To all those past and present whose ideas and actions have participated in building a more equitable world, thank you. In solidarity.
The Installation of the Human: Whiteness, Religion, and Racial Capitalism

Advisor: Professor Joerg Rieger

Doctor of Philosophy to be conferred December 15, 2018

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Over the past thirty to forty years, the academic study of religion has brought the category of religion into crisis, unveiling its Christian architecture and its formation as a settler-colonial category of European expansion. While the proliferation of research on the genealogy of religion has opened new and important vantages for study, we remain conflicted about what is at stake. In this dissertation, I argue that the modern-colonial construction of religion is organized by a racial-theological operation that categorically separates people into humans, subhumans, and nonhumans, by which the social, economic, and political inequalities of racial capitalism have been made to seem natural and inevitable. The dissertation brings Black Studies and decolonial theory to bear on critical genealogies of religion, and argues modern discourses of race and religion are rooted in anti-blackness and settler-colonialism. I aim to specify the practice of racial distinction as the force or movement that opens religion’s discursive economy.

Chapter one reviews the state of contemporary criticism of religion, and situates critique of religion in the material crises of the twentieth century. In chapter two, I engage the work of Caribbean theorist Sylvia Wynter to historicize the argument, and show how modern politics became possible by secularizing the theological distinctions or oppositions of medieval
Christendom into the biological enemies or failures of the human species itself. I deploy this framework in chapter three by reading together the work of Lindon Barrett with David Chidester’s *Savage Systems*, and argue that the human is a structure of value in relation to that which can generate value but not be valued in itself. Chapter four engages Silvia Federici’s *Caliban and the Witch*, and turns the argument towards the subjugation of the European peasants in the witch-hunts, as a constitutive relation of settler-colonialism. Finally, chapter five explores the work of Charles Long on the history of religions, with the work of black feminists M. NourbeSe Philip, and Hortense Spillers, to interrogate religion as a modern category around the themes of freedom and racial slavery. In this chapter, I aim more directly at the religious logic of whiteness, especially as whiteness is structured by a grammar of captivity. The conclusion offers constructive reflections on the implications of the argument, and argues a way forward is to study religion in relation to what survives or escapes the installation of the human.

This dissertation is a critique of dominant Christianity and the racial-(post)colonial world made as Western European Christendom secularized itself. But it is a critique that is launched in relation to contemporary theories and methodologies in religious studies. In this way, the project suggests a way of reading contemporary religious studies criticism as moving towards, but being unable to name, the problem of the human as that which houses the current crisis of religion and its resolutions. As a transmutation of the Christian subject, the human names the form of life, global in scope, that (re)produces itself as the *proper* mode of the human through the sociopolitical hierarchical differentiation of the human from the not-quite-human and the nonhuman. I explore the roots of white racial terror as they have been grounded within the figuring of the theological and religious. I argue that anti-blackness is the frame and grammar that has enabled what we see, and how religion has been defined as an object of knowledge. I
show how the violence that encloses people in racial categories, also separates and contains alternative materialities as “religion.” This is to say, what has been studied as religion surfaces ways of living otherwise to the distinctions imposed by white patriarchal capitalism.

This work contributes to conversations within religious studies about Christianity, racialization, and political violence. More specifically, this work contributes to our understanding of the relation between religion and modern forms of power by foregrounding Christian colonization, anti-blackness, indigeneity, and racial slavery. In so doing, I offer a constructive model for interdisciplinary research. For white people like myself, this means highlighting how racial capitalism conscripts white people - especially poorer white people - as its disposable agents. Furthermore, this work interrogates how the politics of the human continue to structure the disciplinary norms and limits of debate within the academy. Both in the academy and formal politics generally, many solutions to contemporary political and economic crises continue to be permutations of the modern liberal subject. This dissertation shows how the meaning of modern religion shores up this subject, and insinuates an anti-black symbolic world. I explore how that which falls under the discursive rubric of religion is a multiplicity of social practices that interpose movements of embodiment, desire, affect, intimacy – of “something better” (Lindon Barrett) - that must be dominated in order for capital to become the privileged form of value. By drawing attention to these other frequencies, this work contributes to public debates about whiteness, racism, and political alternatives for inhabiting human life.
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for Courteny, my wife,
and Cathy and Greg, my parents
INTRODUCTION: RELIGION, RACE, AND THE HUMAN

[It was this construct of race that would enable the now globally expanding West to replace the earlier mortal/immortal, natural/supernatural, human/the ancestors, the gods/God distinction [...] and to reground its secularizing own on a newly projected human/subhuman distinction instead.

-Sylvia Wynter, Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom

Secularism is part of a discourse of power and of institutions that are bent on making us invest 'religion,' making us cathect it [...] Secularism is a name Christianity gave itself when it invented 'religion,' named its other or others as 'religions.'

-Gil Anidjar, Semites

Over the past thirty to forty years, the academic study of religion has brought the category of religion into crisis, unveiling its Christian architecture and its formation as a settler-colonial category of European expansion. While the proliferation of research on the genealogy of religion has opened new and important vantages for study, we remain conflicted about what is at stake. In this dissertation, I argue that the modern-colonial construction of religion is organized by a racial-theological operation that categorically separates people into humans, subhumans, and nonhumans. Through an analysis of contemporary genealogies of the category of religion in relation to critiques of “the human” in Black Studies, I show how the status of a white-Christian subject functions as the ground by which religion is rendered thinkable, as a distinct category in modern thought. I aim to specify the practice of racial distinction as the force or movement that opens religion’s discursive economy. My argument contributes to the study of religion by foregrounding the way whiteness functions as the normative ground for our study, and by raising questions about how the politics of the human continue to structure the disciplinary norms and
limits of debate within the field. In this regard, whiteness is at the center of the study of religion, and the study of religion is at the center of whiteness. From this vantage, I press towards the way contemporary critique of religion is a crisis of Western civilization itself.

This dissertation is a critique of dominant Christianity and the racial-(post)colonial world made as Western European Christendom secularized itself. But it is a critique that is launched in relation to contemporary theories and methodologies in religious studies. In this way, the project suggests a way of reading contemporary religious studies criticism as moving towards, but being unable to name, the problem of the human as that which houses the current crisis of religion and its resolutions. As a transmutation of the Christian subject, the human names the form of life, global in scope, that (re)produces itself as the proper mode of the human through the sociopolitical hierarchical differentiation of the human from the not-quite-human and the nonhuman.

Overview of the Study

In what follows, I interrogate religion in the way Gil Anidjar defines religion: “a discursive device that enables the workings of power […] The device operates in such a way that the key distinctions it produces or participates in producing, whether epistemologically, politically, or legally, are made to disappear and reappear in tune with their strategic usefulness.”¹ I develop a theoretical framework – the installation of the human – to interrogate the racial logic of the modern category of religion, and its discursive role in (re)producing modern capitalist domination, and racially distributed life and death. At the center of this study is how the question of religion is deeply involved in questions of racial capitalist governance - its

¹ Gil Anidjar, Semites: Race, Religion, Literature, Semites: Race, Religion, Literature (Stanford: Stanford
forms of exploitation and expropriation - which constitute and are constituted by its onto-
epistemology.

This dissertation, at the most general, is a response to, and dialogue with, what Cedric
Robinson terms “the black radical tradition.” As an interdisciplinary project, I approach the
problems raised in contemporary debates about the category of religion from the perspectives of
Black studies and decolonial theory. I’m interested in the role religion plays in assembling
whiteness as a symbolic, juridical, economic, and political formation. The point is not just the
specificities of what is said, or done, but the underlying logics of existence that make what is
said and done meaningful. I ask, how is whiteness as the proper mode of the human assembled
through the figure of religion?

Method

In this dissertation I draw from Foucault’s archaeological method, which is concerned
with the “rules of formation” which go unspoken but enable historically specific knowledge
systems to “define the objects proper to their own study, to form their concepts, to build their
theories.” However, the primary method of the dissertation is a form of deconstruction
exemplified by Nahum Chandler’s work in X: The Problem of the Negro as a Problem for
Thought. Chandler argues that “the problem of the Negro” is one of the most exemplary sites for
desedimenting “an originary scene of possibility” for the questions of ontology that have been

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2 See Cedric Robinson, Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition, (Chapel Hill:

3 Michel Foucault, The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences (New York: Vintage
fundamental to Western theological and philosophical thought and practice. There is no simple ground or essence for “the Negro,” because “the Negro” is made in the specific historical matrix of modern power, and can come on scene only by way of its differential relation to an-other. However, Chandler does not counterpose a “non-essentialist” Africanist subject against a transcendent Africanist essence. Rather, Chandler argues that this binary is a theoretical cul-de-sac. The “hidden surface” of the exposed “problem of the Negro” is “a question about the status of a putative European subject (subsequently understood as an omnibus figure of the ‘White’), the presumptive answer to which served as ground, organizing in a hierarchy the schema of this discourses.” It is precisely the status of this White subject that “must be continually desedimented, scrutinized, and re-figured in their relation.” As such, the reference of identity for both terms is always at least double, and both come on scene within the historical, hierarchical instantiation of their difference.

For this reason, the essentialist – non-essentialist opposition is not sufficient for elaborating a counterhegemonic position. “The enunciation of Africanist figures in discourses of the Negro emerge in a hierarchically ordered field in which the question of the so-called Negro is quite indissolubly linked to a presupposition of the homogeneity and purity of the so-called European or its derivatives.” As such, in order to inhabit this “discursive formation” in a “structurally contestatory fashion […] one must displace or attempt to displace the distinction in question.” Therefore, for example, it is not enough to re-assemble the historical data to show the

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7 Chandler, *X: The Problem of the Negro as a Problem for Thought*, 16.
internal heterogeneity of a “White” or “European” subject. Such an approach takes the term “White” as the object of critical discourse, and attempts to unseat the logic of simple essence by counterposing the enormous heterogeneity of all that gets called “White.” The limit of such an approach, following Chandler, is that it leaves the terms of the discourse intact, and cannot move to a radical questioning of the discursive economy. That is, this non-essentialist critical mode does not trouble the ground on which difference itself originates and is elaborated.8

Drawing from Chandler, I adopt a deconstructive method that seeks to desediment how the status of a Christian/European/White subject is the ground of the discursive economy of colonial-modernity, from at least the sixteenth century onward. For this reason, it is not enough to say religions are internally differentiated, or to say that all religions and forms of identification are equal. Neither of these approaches unsettles the originary site or ground by which religion as a universal has been organized, and distinct religions delimited. Behind the question of religion in modernity is the displaced question of a Christian subject, a project of Christian purity that is submerged in the general question concerning the boundaries and meaning of religion. This is one reason why critical discourse gets stuck within religious studies. The object of our discourse, religion, has as its referential condition the hidden “Christian question,” which is displaced in a number of questions about the Heathen, the Pagan, and the racial discourse in which these figures will be subsequently transformed. To move towards another way of posing the question, I ask how a White/Christian political ontology performs itself within the study of religion. How does religion function as a limit category for white thought, and how does the figure of the Slave remain unthought in attempts to decolonize the study of religion?

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8 Chandler, X: The Problem of the Negro as a Problem for Thought, 15-17.
Rationale and Contributions

To be clear, I am not suggesting that no one has written about whiteness and religion. To the contrary, given how frequently whiteness is addressed within the field, one might ask why write something else about whiteness and religion? The 2016 election ought to have at least given us some pause as to what is the role of religious studies in the academy, and in the broader public sphere. The national American Academy of Religion meeting following the election was characterized by considerable confusion, concern, and horror about the election of Donald Trump, and what the election meant. What some at the conference described as a “white liberal freakout” betrayed the ways white liberalism remains normative in our self-understanding as a discipline. If, in general, the discipline has become more critical of power relations and less imperialistic, what might we continue to overlook? The contribution this dissertation makes is to consider both how whiteness continues to function as the unmarked ground of our field, and to intervene in our contemporary political and economic crises by tracking the discursive roots of the white political imaginary in modern discourses concerning religion and theology. What have we missed, and what have our objects of critique put out of view? What remains out of the frame, so to speak, even in some of the more radical interventions in the discursive economy of religion?

I am interested in drawing out the ways whiteness is constituted within, and constitutes the ground of, the discursive economy of the religious and the theological. From at least 1492 on, the status of whiteness, of a White subject, is the displaced originary site and problem organizing the hierarchical economy of the religious. Put somewhat differently, I am after the roots of white racial terror as they have been grounded within the figuring of the theological and religious. I argue that the hegemonic common sense of religion circulates the ideology of whiteness. Not
only must we attend to whiteness as an element of analysis, I argue that whiteness is the frame and grammar that has enabled what we see and how religion has been defined as an object of knowledge. This is not, in other words, an argument about what really happened, but about the production of a hegemonic common sense through the circulation of figures or subjects that populate the discursive field of modern-coloniality. This study focuses on the ways intellectual production and political regulation are mutually reinforcing, with material consequences for everyday life.

**Theoretical Framework and Key Literatures**

This dissertation takes as its primary temporal-spatial framework what Walter Mignolo calls “colonial-modernity.” According to Mignolo, coloniality is the “darker side of modernity.” Coloniality is *constitutive* of modernity. Mignolo situates the origins of modernity within the colonialism of 15th and 16th centuries, and with the geosocial construction of the Americas. It is this construction that make modernity possible. And this geosocial construction, according to Mignolo, is constituted by racial relations of domination and subordination that are “necessary and permanent” apart from their justification of capitalist exploitation. Furthermore, these racial relations of power were theological in origin, originally based on the biological notion of “blood purity” and blood difference between Christians, Jews, and Moors. Thus, the frame of colonial-modernity affords those of us who study religion an important way of conceiving the relation between religion and modernity through coloniality. Mignolo characterizes his own approach as a decolonial approach. He does not seek to merge decolonization and postcolonial thought or
other modes of critique. Instead, he encourages what he calls diversality, a number of diverse modes of refusing and critiquing the coloniality of power.9

**Contemporary Debates on the Politics of Religion**

The discipline’s role in (re)producing the hegemony of Western relations of knowledge-power has been exposed. How the discipline deals with that exposure remains an actively open question. In order to situate this dissertation within the field of religious studies, I will briefly review two recent articles that exemplify some of the major debates about the politics of the category of religion (a more extended engagement with critical genealogies of religion can be found in chapter one).10 This conversation is organized by a distinction between what the authors call “critical religion,” and “critical theory of religion.” In this conversation, I situate my own argument in a close relation to what Timothy Fitzgerald defines as “critical religion”:

‘Critical religion’ is the critique of the categories that determine ‘modern’ consciousness. Critique as I understand it means bringing into consciousness the categories of the understanding that operate largely below consciousness, as though they are instinctive or normal, and which, by organizing our experience and knowledge, form and even determine our apprehensions of the world. Religion and political economy are two of these.11

Critical religion, then, interrogates the discursive economy in which religion functions.

Discursively, religion functions to name the limits of, and other to, secular knowledge about

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reality. The very possibility of marking the domain of liberal politics depends on the discursive function of religion, as the border concept that enables the distinction.

The point, then, is not only that these distinct categories are inseparable and continually interact; it is that the categorical distinction itself is an enabling condition of communicability. Even when we deploy the terms (the political and the religious) to demonstrate the ongoing inseparability or porousness of the political and the religious, our deployment of the categories reify the terms. This is why Fitzgerald opts for a deconstructive approach to the discursive economy of the category of religion “and related categories.”

Fitzgerald argues that the function of the discursive play between the two is especially effective at serving the interests of political liberalism, and capitalist class ownership of private property. More polemically, Fitzgerald argues that religious studies is an agent of the secular liberal nation-state, and capitalist relations of production. As an agent for this state, one of religious studies’ important functions is to define “what is and is not a genuine ‘religion.’” 12 Whether it is a preference for a Christian U.S., or secular progressive West, the distinction between politics and religion is assumed. The question, instead, is how the terms govern each other; but the presumption that they refer to categorically distinct objects of knowledge (ideas, practices, institutions) remains essential to the framing of the conflict.

From the seventeenth century on, the belief in, and right to, ownership of private property has been essential to the conception of liberty enshrined within secular liberalism. Although this conception of freedom was specific to the interests of white male property owners, it has been generalized as the natural, common sense meaning of liberty, and a “significant component” of

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liberal political society. Secular liberalism is the form of government that was forged to represent “these private property interests.”

Nevertheless, Fitzgerald points out, “liberal and neoliberal economics is taught as an objective science based on facts about the real world, rather than as a will to assert a vision as to how the world ought to be.” In this way, “[t]he modern invention of religion as the backward past has served to deflect our attention from the irrational faith postulates of liberalism and its science of political economy.” In chapter three, I develop Fitzgerald’s argument that religion is used to refer to a domain categorically sealed off from, and unable to challenge, the values and practices of capitalist markets.

Drawing on John Locke’s Treatises, Fitzgerald points out that the common sense meaning of “politics” that saturates the everyday meaning of the term in the West was specifically formulated to represent the interests of the emerging bourgeoisie against the interests of the “Christian Commonwealth.” “His business was to offer an alternative myth, his own version of ‘man in the state of nature,’ and advocate a new concept of government elected to


15 “Markets are thought to be natural phenomena, and belief in the eventual emergence of a global system of free markets as the condition for the emancipation of the world—or at least for the elect—is being pursued with a fanaticism usually reserved for the so-called ‘religious extremists.’” Fitzgerald, “Critical Religion and Critical Research on Religion: Religion and Politics as Modern Fictions,” 309.

16 Fitzgerald writes, “Nobody has ever seen a self-regulating market, or a nation state, or a world of politics, yet, like the workings of the Holy Ghost, and the power of holy relics for previous generations, they constitute the everyday, common sense ‘reality’ as well the hope of salvation.” Fitzgerald, “Critical Religion and Critical Research on Religion: Religion and Politics as Modern Fictions,” 310.

represent the natural rights of (male) private property.” In other words, the taken-for-granted distinction of politics and religion reproduces the hegemonic common sense of the interests of the ruling capitalist class.

In their critique of Fitzgerald’s “overly deconstructive method,” Goldstein et al argue for an approach they term “critical theory of religion.” While acknowledging the contributions of critical genealogies of the category of religion, they see the term “religion” as a useful heuristic for grouping and comparing specific phenomena. According to the authors, the problems addressed by scholars in the vein of “Nietzsche, Foucault, and Talal Asad” can be attended to by “a more social scientific construction of the category of religion. This category can draw on western as well as non-western traditions and be employed in a more self-critical, if not strictly ‘value-neutral’ manner. It need not have one agreed upon universal definition, since we think such a definition is impossible, but may contain multiple definitions.” For the authors, an approach like this can also alleviate concerns about aggravating the already precarious position of religious studies scholars, who risk seeing their object of study vanish.

According to the authors, the “problem is not in the category of religion but in the ways in which it can be used (including in its application to capitalism).”

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19 According to Fitzgerald, “We might call this dominant configuration liberal modernity, liberal capitalism, or liberal secularism, but it is important to bear in mind that the terms ‘secular,’ ‘liberal,’ ‘modern,’ and ‘capital’ are part of our critical problem. All of these terms are themselves historically generated constituents of today’s dominant and globalizing ideology. We are caught in a totalizing and self-sustaining circularity.” Fitzgerald, “Critical Religion and Critical Research on Religion: Religion and Politics as Modern Fictions,” 314.


When Fitzgerald argues that “secular liberal ideology” is no less “imaginary” than what is termed “religious belief,” the authors retort, “It is a provocative claim, and yet here we aver—as we imagine Fitzgerald must likewise—a continuing adherence to methods of argumentation, verification, and potential falsifiability commonly called ‘scientific’ which are, implicitly if not necessarily, secular.” However, the idea that the “weighing of evidence” is a uniquely modern, scientific form of reason is a surprisingly unscientific claim. This somewhat strained argument from the authors evinces a lingering commitment to the secular liberal political framework at the center of Fitzgerald’s critique. They seem to want to expose Fitzgerald as remaining committed to the very values he is criticizing, or perhaps more polemically, his argument relies on the secular values he argues against. But this is a misunderstanding of Fitzgerald’s argument (as summarized above and attended to further below).

The authors are more persuasive when they acknowledge that “evidence is ordered and structured in ways that can never be neutral.” Thus, by reintroducing values and social location to the study of religion, our use of the category can support “our larger commitments to equality and justice.” Deconstruction, according to the authors, is not enough, and the authors see values and ideals as necessary grounds for constructing something better. Thus, we might say that given most people do take for granted a distinction between religion and the non-religious, the more useful approach to intervening in the power relations which this distinction naturalizes is to specify “the role that religious systems play in either reinforcing dominant power structures or as operating as vehicles for progressive social change.”

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This is a compelling proposal. However, recall that Fitzgerald’s argument is not that “the
category of religion is used to broadly,” but that it functions rhetorically to erect boundaries
between “religion” and “political-economy” so as to safeguard the practices, institutions, and
beliefs of the capitalist class as categorically different than “religion.” By showing the deep
similarities between what Fitzgerald terms neoliberal dogmas and beliefs, and what is typically
identified as something else, that is “religion,” Fitzgerald’s point is that the distinction is not
rooted in some essential difference between the two domains but is contingently produced in the
interests of the power of specific actors and institutions (specifically for Fitzgerald, neoliberal
capitalism). The fact that the term religion can be quite easily applied to the domains marked as
non-religious is not to argue the category is useless because it is too broad; it is, for Fitzgerald, to
ask why we designate certain domains as “religious” and others as “non-religious” when the
difference is so clearly artificial. That is to say, what are the effects of naming specific practices,
institutions, and beliefs as religious, and whose interests does this serve?

Perhaps we can pursue this question from another vantage. That is, why has the
disciplinary crisis of religious studies not generated a similar disciplinary crisis for political
science, or economics? If the category of religion is a differential concept, and functions to
distinguish the specific territory of the political and the economic, why has the
deterritorialization of religion not produced a state of emergency for political scientists? Or, why
has our identity crisis not spilled over into a similar identity crisis for economists; why does
political science remain an essential department for any credible university, while departments of
religious studies shut down? Indeed, why, in something of a strange inversion given the
argument above, does the continued existence of religious studies in the university depend on its
utility for economics and political science; for negotiating business deals, and strategizing military occupations?

If we are to answer questions like these, Fitzgerald may be onto something when he remarks, “there is no way to study ‘religion’ as though it exists independently of these other discursive imaginaries, the possessive individual, a natural right to the endless privatization of our shared organic environment, the myths of nation states, and salvation through markets. To understand ‘religion’ today we must understand belief, bordering on the fanatical, in the superior rationality of capitalism.” However, Fitzgerald does not racialize the possessive individual. That is, although Fitzgerald goes a long way towards denaturalizing the regime of private property, whiteness, racism, and anti-blackness remain out of frame.

This is somewhat surprising, given that in Fitzgerald’s own description of secular liberalism, religion is governed *as a racialized category*. Fitzgerald argues that within secular liberalism, religion is attended to as a “potent force that has historically had a propensity to stand in the way of secular liberal progress.” Religion, so it goes, tends towards irrational, fanatical, “barbarism.” “Religion has consequently required *disciplining* and *taming* to *conform* to the civility of liberal values (my emphasis).” In other words, as I will argue throughout the dissertation, the construction of religion is bound up with the racializing practices by which modern nation-states govern their subjects, and define the boundaries of belonging.

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Anti-blackness and Black Studies

This study thinks with the frameworks developed within Black studies. In particular, I draw from these thinkers a concern with the structural paradigm of modern dispossession, and the subject positions instituted by the antagonism between the White/Human/Master and the Slave/Black. Frank Wilderson and Jared Sexton emphasize anti-blackness, rather than whiteness or white supremacy, as the matrix of modern power. Wilderson argues that the position of the Slave/Black is unrepresentable within the semantic field of subjective capacity. Structurally, there is no way to represent the (non)-existence of the Slave within the hegemonic common sense of the Human community. The Slave position is defined by gratuitous violence, structured by the grammar of fungibility and accumulation. These are the modes of Black suffering, the sources of Black dispossession, that define the position of Blackness in an antagonistic relation to civil society. Indeed, the civility and stability of civil society depends on Black “social death.”

Which is to say, civil society is produced through the repetitive violence against the Black non-subject or object. Wilderson argues that the “grammar of suffering” for the White/Human position is structured by the rubric of exploitation and alienation. A grammar, Wilderson reminds us, “is the structure through which the labor of speech is possible.” Similarly, “the grammar of political ethics – the grammar of assumptions regarding the ontology of suffering,” constitutes the underlying conditions of intelligibility for political discourse. That is, “what does it mean to suffer?” always subtends the question, “what does it mean to be free?,” and operates as the unspoken political ontology that enables an identification of the cause of

suffering and thereby its redress. But what of the “sentient creature” whose relation to the world, to civil society, is structured by way of gratuitous violence? Whose suffering is an effect of being positioned as an object of accumulation and fungibility; who has no place in the world to stage subjectivity, and thus no subjectivity to be recuperated?

Relatedly, according to Wilderson, the Native/Savage figures a liminal position: on the one hand an object of genocidal violence and as such terrorized by the Human community; on the other hand, a subject of territorial dispossession, with recourse to the language of sovereignty. It is access to the grammar of sovereignty that positions the Native/Savage within the terrain of the Human community, as a position with which negotiations (however farcical) can occur by access to the language of sovereignty: that is, a right to the land, and a basis for marking one’s existence as a community that can be represented within the grammar of Human being (e.g., as peoples with national existence, subjects of loss and alienation, and a means of recuperating that loss: “give back the land”).

Because the position of the Slave is, on the contrary, defined by accumulation and fungibility - by ontological incapacity, that is, to quote Hortense Spillers “being for the captor” - Blackness cannot be “recognized nor incorporated into Human civil society.” Black people exist “[n]ot as subjects, but as Slaves in relation to the rest of the world.” Michael J. Dumas and kihana miraya ross summarize,

Antiblackness is endemic to, and is central to how all of us make sense of the social, economic, historical, and cultural dimensions of human life. But, antiblackness is not

29 Wilderson, Red, White, and Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms, xii
30 Wilderson, Red, White, and Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms,
simply racism against Black people. Rather, antiblackness refers to a broader antagonistic relationship between blackness and (the possibility of) humanity […] Afro-pessimism posits that Black people exist in the social imagination as (still) Slave, a thing to be possessed as property, and therefore with little right to live for herself, to move and breathe for himself (Gordon, 1997; Hartman, 1997, 2007; Sexton, 2008; Wilderson, 2010). In fact, there is no Black Self that is not already suspect, that is not already targeted for death, in the literal sense and in terms of what Orlando Patterson (1982) calls “social death,” in which the participation of Black people in civic life, as citizens, is made unintelligible by the continual reinscribing and re-justification of violence on and against Black bodies […] Black people are living in what Saidiya Hartman (2007) calls “the afterlife of slavery,” in which Black humanity and human possibility are threatened and disdained “by a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago” (p. 6).35

Saidiya Hartman’s concept of “the afterlife of slavery” is another fundamental building block for the argument made in this dissertation. As described in the quotation above, Hartman has argued that the meaning and conceptualization of Blackness is constituted through slavery and its afterlives. Through an analysis of a variety of historical documents written during and immediately after American slavery, Hartman casts doubt on any real disjuncture between conceptualizations of “the Black slave” and the Black citizen endowed with rights and humanity post-emancipation.34 As Christina Sharpe puts it, to live “in the wake of slavery” is to live within “the history and present of terror, from slavery to the present, as the ground of our everyday Black existence.”35

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34 See Saidiya Hartman, Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997),12. “One must contend with the enormity of emancipation as both a breach with slavery and a point of transition to what looks more like the reorganization of the plantation system than self-possession, citizenship, or liberty for the ‘freed.’”

**Whiteness**

Because I aim to draw out the structural relations of whiteness’ patterns of signification, in this dissertation I emphasize the specific function anti-blackness plays as the fundamental other to the White political imaginary. This is one of the reasons why I emphasize a White/Black distinction throughout the dissertation. White and Black do not name two distinct identities, but instead name structural relations or positions. Drawing on Fanon, Wilderson argues that the dividing line between White/Human and Black/Slave constitutes a “species division,” or a “Manichean” conflict between antagonistic positions. Or, as Sylvia Wynter puts it, Blackness functions as symbolic death, by which symbolic life is normatively grounded in whiteness. My intervention takes place at the level of social structure, or the economy of modernity’s social meanings and categorizations.

In this dissertation, I consider whiteness to be constituted by both anti-blackness and settler-colonialism. I follow Patrick Wolfe’s description of settler-colonialism as “a structure not an event.” Wolfe writes,

> The logic of elimination not only refers to the summary liquidation of Indigenous people, though it includes that […] Negatively, [settler-colonialism] strives for the dissolution of native societies. Positively, it erects a new colonial society on the expropriated land base—as I put it, settler colonizers come to stay: invasion is a structure not an event. In its positive aspect, elimination is an organizing principal of settler-colonial society rather than a one-off (and superseded) occurrence.  

I interpret whiteness as structured also by the logic of settler-colonialism. Patrick Wolfe argues that as an “eliminatory structure,” not event, settler-colonialism replaces indigenous forms of property relations. As such, “[r]ather than replacing one owner with another, settlers seek to replace an entire system of ownership with another. The settler/Native confrontation, in other

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words, is not between claims to ownership but between frameworks for allocating ownerships.”

As a system of ownership, and also a form of property, whiteness is structured by this logic of elimination.  

Within critical whiteness studies, whiteness is foregrounded as a structure of power, not an identity. For example, according to David Roediger, whiteness is “nothing but false and oppressive.” Noel Ignatiev argues that as a system of power and domination, whiteness cannot be redeemed but must be abolished. Ignatiev makes a distinction between the phenotype marked as “white,” and whiteness. “White people” are made by a social system of domination that attaches significance to particular bodily characteristics – especially skin color - by which those practices of domination are given meaning as expressions of “race.” While my argument is largely in step with Ignatiev’s claim that “treason to whiteness is loyalty to humanity,” I am less clear on how he proposes the abolition of whiteness is supposed to take place.  

Inasmuch as we take seriously that “real life” is constituted by the overall conditions of social and cultural reproduction, the reproduction of whiteness - what Steve Martinot terms “the intermediary control stratum” - is foundational to the structure of U.S. power, and its global avatars. Martinot makes a similar argument to what I make in the dissertation. Specifically, we both consider whiteness a material mode of producing and reproducing the social relations of racial capitalism. As it formed in the Virginia colony whiteness’ constituent elements, according

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to Martinot, are (1) “mandatory” allegiance to colonial society and “to the violence and dehumanizing enslavement of other people it required to maintain itself;” (2) “a sense of paranoia engendered by that violence as a fear of rebellion, resistance, or autonomy on the part of those enslaved, in the name of which its dehumanizing violence against them was rationalized.” And (3) “a sense of ‘social’ solidarity against this self-generated threat which concretized the paranoia and legitimized the violence.”

As a social class formed by the fear of the movement of racialized persons, as a regulatory community, the non-white racial other is at the heart of whiteness and white identity. There is no white identity apart from the practices of racialization, by which whiteness makes itself “white” by racializing non-white people.

In his study of the formation of whiteness in Virginia colonial society, Martinot argues that racism/whiteness was the ground on which the class structure of the U.S. was constructed. Racialization “involved every level of society.” Martinot calls whiteness an “intermediary control stratum,” “the policing apparatus upon which the plantation economy depended for its class stability (to keep its black working class in place).” The white workers who were the core of this “policing apparatus” constituted the thin (blue) line between the “black working class” and “white society.” To actively participate in this policing function was, and remains, to actively participate in the construction and maintenance of the social order.

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42 Martinot, *The Rule of Racialization: Class, Identity, Governance*, 186. This will be further explored in the body of the dissertation.

43 Martinot, *The Rule of Racialization: Class, Identity, Governance*, 76.

44 Martinot, *The Rule of Racialization: Class, Identity, Governance*, 76.

45 Martinot, *The Rule of Racialization: Class, Identity, Governance*, 76.
As class relations unfolded within this racialized structure, whiteness would function not only as the ground of relatedness for all white people, but also as the power to control the boundary of belonging. According to Martinot, “the control stratum became a social domain of conjunction for white working people, an interface between classes with a middle-class sense of belonging.” In this way, Martinot points to the limitations of Marxist analyses of race that theorize racism as displaced class anxiety, or a divide and rule tactic of the capitalist class. The idea that “race” can be used ideologically “assumes that race has real (natural) existence, that it does not originate in an historical system of social categorizations.” Contrary to Roediger, for example, who considers whiteness to be an ideology, Martinot points out the internal limit of this analysis for the left. In contrast, Martinot argues that racism is not simply “an ideological tactic in a class struggle; it is a fundamental cultural structure in the United States, to the extent that racialization grounds the construction of class relations.” Or, as Nahum Chandler puts it, the “idea of America” is produced through the force of racial distinction.

In his reading of Martinot and Sexton’s, “The Avant-gard of White Supremacy,” Wilderson puts a fine point on the matter: “in short, White people are not simply ‘protected’ by the police, they are the police.” And whiteness must “be understood as a formation of ‘contemporaries’ who do not magnetize bullets.” It is this “species division” between the Black who does magnetize bullets, and the White/Human who does not, which constitutes the “civic

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46 Martinot, The Rule of Racialization: Class, Identity, Governance, 76.
47 Martinot, The Rule of Racialization: Class, Identity, Governance, 77.
48 Martinot, The Rule of Racialization: Class, Identity, Governance, 77.
49 Wilderson, Red, White, and Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms, 82.
50 Wilderson, Red, White, and Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms, 82.
stability” of civil society.\textsuperscript{51} Again, the dividing line between the two positions is the forms of violence by which the positions are constructed; that is, for the White/Human position violence is contingent on transgressing the “symbolic integrity” of civil society, whereas the position of the Black/Slave is defined by “open vulnerability” to violence.

For these thinkers, as a system of social categorizations and meanings, whiteness is nothing but its violent practices of racialization. Martinot and Sexton write,

White supremacy is nothing more than what we perceive of it; there is nothing beyond it to give it legitimacy, nothing beneath it nor outside of it to give it justification. The structure of its banality is the surface on which it operates. Whatever mythic content it pretends to claim is a priori empty. Its secret is that it has no depth. There is no dark corner that, once brought to the light of reason, will unravel its system. In each instance of repetition, “what is repeated is the emptiness of repetition,” an articulation that “does not speak and yet has always been said” (Foucault 54). In other words, its truth lies in the rituals that sustain its circuitous contentless logic; it is, in fact, nothing but its very practices.\textsuperscript{52}

If the truth of whiteness/white supremacy “lies in the rituals that sustain its circuitous contentless logic,” then whiteness is this ritualized violence. This is one of the proposals this dissertation makes: policing the racial subaltern is white people’s religion; it is what literally creates white being and belonging, \textit{ex nihilo}.

\textbf{Racial Capitalism}

In addition to whiteness, the other theoretical concept with which my study works is \textit{racial capitalism}. The appellation is developed by Cedric Robinson in his book \textit{Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition}. In brief, Robinson argues that capitalism took shape through the racialism that already saturated European civilization and its hierarchies. Robin D.G. Wilderson, \textit{Red, White, and Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms}, 83.\textsuperscript{51}

\textsuperscript{51} Martinot and Sexton, “The Avant-garde of White Supremacy,” in \textit{Afro-pessimism: An Introduction} (Minneapolis: Racked and Dispatched, 2017), 58.\textsuperscript{52}
Kelly explains that at the birth of capitalism, “the first European proletarians were racial subjects (Irish, Jews, Roma or Gypsies, Slavs, etc.) and they were victims of dispossession (enclosure), colonialism, and slavery within Europe.” Racism was not an effect of capitalism, nor was it invented to divide the exploited class of waged workers. Rather, race permeated the formation of class hierarchies within Europe, and structures the global division of labor. Anibal Quijano similarly argues that with the advent of Spanish colonialism “new historical identities produced around the foundation of the idea of race in the new global structure of the control of labor were associated with social roles and geohistorical places. In this way, both race and the division of labor remained structurally linked and mutually reinforcing.” Specifically, waged labor was reserved for Spanish and Portuguese “whites,” while the “inferior races” were incorporated through unwaged labor.53 As Robinson puts it, capitalism’s tendency was to “exaggerate regional, subcultural, dialectical differences into ‘racial’ ones.”54 In this way, Robinson argues capitalism did not simply homogenize the exploited classes into a universal proletariat subject.

However, the framework I deploy in this dissertation agrees with those readers of Robinson who see both the tendency of capitalism to homogenize the exploited classes through wage labor, and its tendency to differentiate, as co-constitutive of racial capitalism. Jackie Wang explains, if “the exploitation axis is characterized by the homogenizing wage relation (insofar as it produces workers-subjects who have nothing to sell but their labor-power), then the axis of expropriation relies on a logic of differentiation that reproduces racialized (as well as gendered)


In this regard, I also work to theorize how the racialization of the religious is central to racial capitalism’s forms of exploitation and expropriation.

**Structure of the Argument**

In chapter one, I situate contemporary critique of religion within the material crises of the twentieth century. In order to orient the argument of the dissertation, I review the basic themes and arguments of critical genealogies of religion. The chapter works constructively with the literature to argue that race and religion are co-constitutive of colonial-modernity, and to interrogate the stakes of contemporary critique. Chapter two engages Sylvia Wynter’s critique of Man in order to develop the argument’s primary theoretical framework: the installation of the human. I argue that modern political-economy secularizes the theological distinctions or oppositions of medieval Christendom, as the biological enemies or failures of the human species itself. In chapter three, I read together Lindon Barrett and David Chidester’s *Savage Systems*, as a case study for the framework developed in chapter two. The chapter elaborates settler-colonialism as a practice of installing the Human, under the shadow of religion. The focus of the argument is on how the Human is a structure of value in relation to that which can generate value but not be valued in itself. Chapter four engages Silvia Federici’s *Caliban and the Witch*, in order to turn the argument towards the subjugation of the European peasants in the witch-hunts, as a constitutive relation of settler-colonialism. The aim of this chapter is to think the installation of the human, under the shadow of religion, as that practice is imposed on Europeans who will be granted a supraordinate status within the human. Finally, chapter five pairs the work of Charles Long on the history of religions, with the work of black feminists M. NourbeSe Philip, and

55 Jackie Wang, *Carceral Capitalism* (South Pasadena: Semiotext(e), 2018), 101.
Hortense Spillers, to interrogate religion as a modern category around the themes of freedom and racial slavery. In this chapter, I aim more directly at the religious logic of whiteness, especially as whiteness is structured by a grammar of captivity. The conclusion summarizes the contributions of the argument, and offers constructive suggestions for future studies, and for the discipline of religious studies.
CHAPTER ONE
CRITICAL GENEALOGIES OF RELIGION: TOWARDS
A CRITIQUE OF THE HUMAN

We are tired of living under this tyranny.
We cannot endure that our women and children are taken away
And dealt with by the white savages.
We shall make war...
We know that we shall die, but we want to die.
We want to die.
-Congolese song, 1894

In 1885, King Leopold of Belgium was officially granted colonial control of much of the
territory around the Congo river. In a relatively short period of time, Belgian colonial officials
drastically maimed the peoples living there, the land, and the ecological rhythms. The land was
partitioned by rail and waterways for the extraction and transport of rubber, and the peoples were
displaced to chain gangs, and subject to the disciplining power of industrial rubber and its
investors. The Belgian king of the new État Indépendant du Congo, the Congo Free State, ruled
over his private property from afar without every stepping foot in the land.

An extension of his own sovereignty, Leopold initially amassed wealth from the Congo
primarily through the ivory industry. Despite his humanitarian guise, Leopold’s Congo was a
brutal nightmare for the indigenous peoples. He established military bases along the Congo river
for the extraction and transportation of material resources from the Congo. Villagers were tricked
into treaties that stripped them of their land, conscripted into forced labor, and held as prisoners.

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Indigenous women were raped and held as concubines by state officials until treaties were granted, or quotas met. Here, in Leopold’s new colony, the gravest “crimes against humanity” were carried out with efficiency and gratuitous violence.\(^57\)

Particularly pernicious was the rubber industry. In 1890 the Dunlop Company started making rubber bicycle tires. This coincided with the emergence of the global automobile industry and as a consequence the rubber industry exploded. By the late 1890s the rubber industry far surpassed the ivory industry that sustained Leopold’s profits from the Congo. Villagers would, of course, be forced to extract the rubber. The work of gathering rubber was dangerous and painful, requiring laborers to climb up the tall rain forest trees to knife open vines that sometimes wrapped hundreds of feet through and around tree limbs. Failure to meet quotas meant the loss of limb or life.\(^58\)

Like other European colonial catastrophes, Christian missionaries accompanied the capital venture, providing both its humanitarian rationalization and tactical disciplinary agents. The proclamation of the Christian Gospel was announced in word and deed, in the cultivation of liberal bourgeois morality, in the cutting of trees and the cutting of limbs. It would be insufficient to identify Christianity as merely the justifying rationale for colonial practices. It would be far too forgiving to cleanse the hands of Christianity from this historically specific theological-political ensemble that drove European colonialism from its inception. Christianity cannot be protected as an ideology separable from the steamboats and guns, the chains and whips.

But we already see a critique of colonial Christianity, the possibility of thinking Christianity against itself, in the flight of villagers from approaching steamboats. We see a

\(^{57}\) Hochschild, *King Leopold’s Ghost*, 110-111.

\(^{58}\) Hochschild, *King Leopold’s Ghost*, 161.
rhythm of discernment in this flight, a practice of discerning and refusing the theo-political
horizon announced by the smoke rising in the distance. In the flight through the trees, in the
movements of escape, the enclosures of Christian civilization are outpaced.

Missionaries arrived in the land as ambiguous figures, cultivators of “Victorian morality,”
but soon “the rubber trouble meant that missionaries had trouble finding bodies to clothe or souls
to save.”59 Repeatedly, Africans asked the missionaries, “‘Has the Savior you tells us of any
power to save us from the rubber trouble?’”60 Here, in this simple question, the entanglements of
colonial modernity are exposed - redemption, capital, and their racialized forms of belonging.61

Long before the advent of contemporary critique of the category of religion, this question
is announced from one of the many material sites of “the critique of religion.” Our academic
excavations are induced by this material crisis, and many more like it. Here, under the pressure
of the threat of death, the question is posed: does the God who comes with you, go against you?
Is your Jesus anti-Christian? And to pose this question is to pose the question of the “end of the
world.”62


60 Hochschild, *King Leopold’s Ghost*, 172.

61 My usage of the phrase “colonial modernity” reflects what Walter Mignolo calls modern/coloniality; in
particular, that coloniality is constitutive of modernity. “Coloniality names the underlying logic of the foundation
and unfolding of Western civilization from the Renaissance to today of which historical colonialisms have been a
constitutive, although downplayed, dimension.” See Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity:*

1.1. Religion in Crisis

Contemporary critique of religion has its material basis in the global crises of whiteness that unfolded in the twentieth century. With the onset of neoliberal globalization in the 1980s, the aftermath of decolonial wars abroad, and the repression of revolutionary movements in the Americas, the global “color line” was exposed and refashioned in the politics of multiculturalism. The critical theorizing in the academy reflected this broader crisis in the global politics of the human, and the new sense of the global that followed in the wake of these crises. To contain the crisis, the regime of the human was refashioned. This has meant reconfigurations of capitalist domination in neo-colonial strategies of control, particularly through the rise of transnational corporations, the disciplining of labor within the former European world empires, the rise of the security state, and international institutions for disciplining former colonial satellites.

Throughout the twentieth century global conflicts continuously unsettled the prevailing world order. The European scramble for colonies reached its apogee in the First World War. Within Europe, the contradictions of capitalism generated the possibility of communist revolution, as well as the reactionary fascism of the defenders of bourgeois law and order. In a scathing diagnosis of European humanism, Aimé Césaire writes,

And then one fine day the bourgeoisie is awakened by a terrific reverse shock: the gestapos are busy, the prisons fill up, the torturers around the racks invent, refine, discuss. People are surprised, they become indignant. They say: “How strange! But never mind-it’s Nazism, it will pass!” And they wait, and they hope; and they hide the truth from themselves, that it is barbarism, but the supreme barbarism, the crowning barbarism that sums up all the daily barbarisms; that it is Nazism, yes, but that before they were its victims, they were its accomplices; that they tolerated that Nazism before it was inflicted on them, that they absolved it, shut their eyes to it, legitimized it, because, until then, it had been applied only to non-European peoples; […] at bottom, what [the distinguished, humanistic, Christian bourgeois] cannot forgive Hitler for is not the crime in itself, the crime against man, it is not the humiliation of man as such, it is the crime against the white man, the humiliation of the white man, and the fact that he applied to Europe
colonialist procedures which until then had been reserved exclusively for the Arabs of Algeria, the coolies of India, and the blacks of Africa. And that is the great thing I hold against pseudo-humanism: that for too long it has diminished the rights of man, that its concept of those rights has been - and still is - narrow and fragmentary, incomplete and biased and, all things considered, sordidly racist.

Césaire interprets the horror of World War II as Europe’s colonial genocide returning home, and the devastation of the war precipitated a reconfiguration of the global order of whiteness. The old colonial order centered in Europe and European expansion gave way to the era of American hegemony.

The resulting order was grounded on a new, international cosmopolitan ethos. The threat of communism to capitalist rule was real, and the anti-colonial revolutions taking shape in Latin America, Africa, and Asia, meant the old colonial powers might lose the basis of their wealth and power. The disaggregation of the former “world order,” was contained by its reconstitution in new “international” forms of racialized control of the division of labor and accumulation of capital. Institutions like the United Nations emerged as the political coalition tasked with ensuring global order. The World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund, developed as the neocolonial mechanism for refashioning capitalist domination of the former colonies. These financial institutions impose neo-imperial control through strategies of debt and “structural adjustment.”

Within the United States, black radical politics were repressed by the creation of COINTELPRO, and the CIA was formed to destabilize, impede, or overthrow socialist


revolutions in Latin America. These new institutions of state violence were rationalized in the doctrine of “national security.”

This doctrine always already justified the political violence of the U.S. abroad, and at home, in the name of national security. At the close of the twentieth century, the nineteen-eighties saw the rise of the neoliberal regime and mass incarceration. This capitalist project disciplined labor through austerity measures, aggressively attacked union power, and refashioned racial domination through the expansion of carceral state violence. Through deregulation, and the privatization of public goods, wealth was, and continues to be, transferred from the poorest to the wealthiest elites. The loss of labor power has resulted in an increase of contingent labor, the gutting of social welfare, and tighter controls on the movements of migrants displaced by global patterns of financialization. Finally, with the “global war on terror,” the signifier, “radical Islam,” has been deployed to increase military budgets, launch invasions of the resource rich Middle East, and move Western politics to the far right. To the extent to which it traffics in visual and sonic markers of dangerous bodies, I read “radical Islam” as a racial signifier; as the signification of Islam as the enemy of the Human itself.

This signification works to expand the military industrial complex of the West, for the sake of multicultural, pluralist globalization. The emerging global multicultural politics turned the hierarchical taxonomy of religion on its side. Similar to the way the radical movements of the sixties and seventies were pacified through incorporation into the existing power structure, in its hegemonic form multiculturalism as a political rhetoric recaptured “religious difference” as a

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mode of “cultural difference,” a marker of a bustling, global market of exchange. In this horizon, religion functions within the limits of liberal political-economy. My argument intervenes here, at the limits of liberalism to face our current political and economic crisis.

Daniel Dubuisson argues that religion is architectonic for Western identity and self-construction. It is around and through religion that the contingent and historical production of the West can be interrogated. Indeed, the shifting and contested meaning of religion is one critical site for tracing the emergence of the horizon of modernity and its constellation of material subjects, objects, and epistemologies. Even more, religion is a particularly intractable anchor of secular modernity because it is around, against, and through the constitution of “religion” that secular modernity produces itself. The hinge of the modern world itself, religion is the trace of the history of violence that founds the hegemonic institutions and politics of our secular world. Through and around the shifting and contested meaning of religion the West was born as a people; a Christian people, a racial people, a world-historical people. If contemporary critique of religion emerges from and names a crisis for the West, the question is what practice is unleashed in crisis: to contain the crisis, to redirect it, or to rehabilitate “the World” beyond its crises - has this been the task of scholars in religion and theology? Or, can our task be to press into this crisis, to dismantle the institutions of power that produce misery for the many, for the sake of the few?

1.2. Critical Theories of Religion

Throughout the last few decades, the academic study of religion has been particularly concerned with the colonial and imperial legacy of the very object of its study. Universal

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definitions of religion have been called into question, and religious scholars have had to adjudicate how and to what ends they seek to rehabilitate or discard the category altogether. I am particularly interested in how the imperial deployment of religion enabled the translation of indigenous ways of life into an imperial episteme of global European (Western) sovereignty, anchored by the figure of the European imperial God-man.

As aforementioned, in his book, *The Western Construction of Religion*, Daniel Dubuisson joins the chorus of scholars who argue that the concept of religion is an invention of the imperial West. That is, according to Dubuisson, the concept of religion was forged in the relations of European colonialism and in the construction of Western civilization. But Dubuisson not only argues that religion is an imperial concept of the West, he argues that the concept lies at the heart of Western civilization. According to Dubuisson, the concept of religion is at the center of Western identity and self-formation. The concept of religion allowed the West to define itself as an imperial power over against the non-European world. What Dubuisson presses us towards is the link between the construction of the secular West and the construction of a religious non-West. His conclusion is that the language of religion is irrevocably imperial and needs to be discarded. However, what I find to be most helpful is Dubuisson’s insistence that religion and Western identity are bound together. It is precisely this bind that Talal Asad clarifies.

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69 To replace “religion,” Dubuisson elaborates the alternative concept of “cosmographic formations.” That is, Dubuisson bypasses the universalization of religion by universalizing the process of constructing worlds in which we live. In so doing, he retains a clear distinction between “natural science” and “processes of world-constructing,” which is to say he leaves intact one of the critical sites that “religion” helps secure: natural sciences as objective, corresponding to reality, in contrast to the human activities of world-making (religion, which is an aspect of that broader world-making process). As will be demonstrated below Wnyuter, in contrast, shows how the “secular natural sciences” is constitutive of the human. For Dubuisson, cosmographic formations mediate “factual existence” to particular contexts (18). These formations operate as the “principle of order” (18). This is Dubuisson’s lingering commitment to “the human,” to “simple factual existence.”

What is interesting here as well is the retention of Western, secular, bio-centric conceptions of “the
According to Asad, secularism and religion are twins born in the process of creating modernity. In order to understand this claim we need to understand Asad’s own genealogy of the concept of religion. Asad’s critique of all transcultural definitions of religion centers on the definition formulated by Clifford Geertz. Geertz’s definition of religion brings religious studies into the realm of cultural studies by emphasizing religion as a system of semiotics that has material effect on the “moods and motivations” of humans. For Geertz, the power of religion lies in its capacity to anchor a symbolic order in a transcendent ground. Although Asad’s criticism of Geertz extends to Geertz’s definition itself, Asad is particularly concerned to show how Geertz’s allegedly transcultural definition of religion is instead a definition culled from a particular form of Protestant Christianity. Asad argues that the definition of religion as a set of interiorized beliefs was forged in the various historical and political transformations of the European Reformation and Enlightenment. The problem, however, is not simply that Geertz’ definition remains too Christian, but that Geertz’ definition is inattentive to the forms of power by which particular discourses are authorized as religious. In order to bring attention to power, Asad interrogates the formation of the secular as a hegemonic discourse.

In his book, *Formations of the Secular*, Asad returns the anthropological gaze to the West and its hegemonic concept of the secular. He is interested in examining the secular not only as a political arrangement by which the public domain is made distinct from the private, but in how political,” anchored in notions of order, and the maintenance of order. Cedric Robinson critiques this conception of the political, and, broadly, this notion of order does not track with the “world-making” of enslaved Africans in the hold, or in fugitive maroonage; order and authority are not the governing paradigms. See Cedric Robinson, *The Terms of Order: Political Science and the Myth of Leadership* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016).


the secular is constituted by new definitions of “ethics,” “politics,” “economics,” and “religion.” Thus, for Asad the secular is mode of power that organizes particular sensibilities, practices, concepts, and modes of government. So, for example, in elaborating the secular Asad’s book ranges over the concepts of myth, the sacred, agency, pain, torture, and human rights. Through this “indirect approach” to the secular Asad is able to make visible the secular as a coherent way of life, a mode of existence particular to modernity. In this way, Asad politicizes the secular/religion binary. In contrast to the common sense self-representation of the secular, secularism is not defined over and against the alleged violence of religion; rather the secular relocates sovereignty and authority over violence to the state and the rule of law. Asad writes, “[t]he concept of the secular cannot do without the idea of religion. True, the ‘proper domain of religion’ is distinguished from and separated by the state in modern secular constitutions. But formal constitutions never give the whole story.”\textsuperscript{72} Those practices, beliefs, and signifiers regulated as religion, Asad reminds us, “cannot be confined within the exclusive space of what secularists name ‘religion.’” But, the nation-state needs clear boundaries to “classify and regulate: religion, education, health, leisure, work, income, justice, and war.”\textsuperscript{73} For this reason, “[t]he space that religion may properly occupy in society has to be continually redefined by the law because the reproduction of secular life within and beyond the nation-state continually affects the discursive clarity of that space.”\textsuperscript{74} Such efforts to define and regulate the secular/religion distinction, frequently revolve around the paradox modern nation-states propose between the sovereign (free) individual and the sovereign state. Within this frame, as we know,

\textsuperscript{72} Asad, \textit{Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity}, 200-201.

\textsuperscript{73} Asad, \textit{Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity}, 201.

\textsuperscript{74} Asad, \textit{Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity}, 201.
agency is construed as freedom to actualize one’s own sovereignty as long as it does not violate the freedom (rights) of other citizens. The rule of law authorizes the limits of this paradoxical relation, grounded on the basis of universal reason.

What we begin to see in Asad’s work is that the secular is bound up with the struggles to define and institute the global hegemony of “Western civilization.” For this reason, the questions he proposes to interrogate secularism provide guidelines for the arguments I am making:

I do not deny that religion, in the vernacular sense of that word, is and historically has been important for national politics in Euro-America as well as in the rest of the world […] But there are questions that need to be addressed beyond this obvious fact. How, when, and by whom are the categories of religion and the secular defined? What assumptions are presupposed in the acts that define them? Does the shift from a religious political order to one that is governed by a secular state simply involve the setting aside of divine authority in favor of human law?75

These questions are given historical texture in Tomoko Masuzawa’s book, The Invention of World Religions.76 Masuzawa tracks the collapse of the predominant taxonomy of religion consolidated in the nineteenth century. Organized by the three Abrahamic religions - Judaism, Islam, Christianity - this common sense way of categorizing religion gave way. In its wake, the discourse of World Religions emerged. The central argument of Masuzawa’s text is that the alleged superiority of Christianity and Christian Europe was preserved and transmuted in the World Religions discourse. According to Masuzawa, the language of pluralism and tolerance does not signal a retreat or overcoming of European hegemony, but are its new signifiers of European universality. The struggle to define a particular list of World Religions is part of Europe’s own internal struggle about its future with or apart from Christianity. These debates over what religion is, and what can be counted as a religion, displace an internal Euro-American

75 Asad, Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity, 201.

76 Masuzawa, The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).
debate about the status of “Western identity,” for which World Religions are the raw materials of this construction.

Masuzawa’s work helps to explain the fraternity between secularism and Christianity. She shows how this fraternity is rooted in historical challenges to the legitimacy of Christendom’s forms of power, even as Christianity retains a privileged place in the secular identity of the West. As the list of World Religions began to sediment into its current form, Christian Europe’s global dominance has been legitimated by the emergence of Europe (and the West more broadly) as religionless and raceless, thus truly universal. This universal entity actualizes itself in post-enlightenment politics, the modern nation-state. But in order to extend this argument I need to first locate the coincidence of religion as an object of knowledge with race as the central political signifier of modernity.

Both Asad and Masuzawa expose the secular as a historical and contingent mode of power that is oriented towards the (re)production of a hegemonic mode of human existence. Yet in order to understand how race anchors this mode of life we need to locate the emergence of the concept of religion even earlier than Asad does, beyond the originary moments of European coloniality. In this sense, it is helpful to recall Walter Mignolo’s insistence that modernity is “Janus-faced,” that is, that coloniality is constitutive of modernity. The modern/colonial coupling insists that the present of modernity is an unfolding of relations of power established and refined in European colonialism. The idea of the coloniality of power, which Mignolo develops, is derived from Aníbal Quijano. According to Quijano, the coloniality of power refers to the two fundamental axes of the colonial matrix of power:

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77 Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*, 2-3.
One was the codification of the differences between conquerors and conquered in the idea of “race,” a supposedly different biological structure that placed some in a natural situation of inferiority to the others. The conquistadors assumed this idea as the constitutive, founding element of the relations of domination that the conquest imposed […] The other process was the constitution of a new structure of control of labor and its resources and products. This new structure was an articulation of all historically known previous structures of control of labor, slavery, serfdom, small independent commodity production and reciprocity, together around and upon the basis of capital and the world market.78

For Quijano, these two distinct but co-dependent axes constitute the underlying logic of colonialism. By subordinating all “previously known” structures of labor control to capital, a new world order was possible, that is, “world capitalism.”79 And, as Quijano explains, “the new historical identities produced around the foundation of the idea of race in the new global structure of the control of labor were associated with social roles and geohistorical places. In this way, both race and the division of labor remained structurally linked and mutually reinforcing, in spite of the fact that neither of them were necessarily dependent on the other in order to exist or change.”80 In this way, Quijano provides a framework for analyzing the underlying logic by which modern forms of global power are constituted, without subsuming the structure of race/racism to the logic of capital, but by insisting on their mutual fraternity.81

Originally grounded in the medieval Christian conception of social order, colonial power was gradually delinked from this ground and regrounded on Nature and Reason. In so doing,

81 As will be touched on below, and addressed in the next chapter, Quijano’s paradigm has been critiqued by some historians of slavery, who argue “race” was a material force that drove the trans-Atlantic conquest, and not only an effect of it. Part of the concern here is the way we have insufficiently understood the structural irrationality of anti-blackness, by making it analogous with other forms of racialization. See, for example, Saidiya Hartman, Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008); Stephanie E. Smallwood, Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).
Asad argues that the secular is naturalized as the truth of existence itself. This occurs in two important ways: first, the secular is the transcendental mediation of collective identity in relation to the state, transcending the particularities of class, gender, and religion by anchoring collective life in secular reason, which is expressed in the law of the nation-state. In this sense, these particularities are modes of “false-consciousness” insofar as they relate to a universal bond of citizenship. Second, the secular is constituted as the truth of existence by shifting the boundaries of the illusory and the real. In his engagement with the concepts of myth and the sacred, Asad demonstrates that what enables the universalizing of the “sacred right to property” and the “sacredness of conscience” is the secularization of these concepts, severing their authority from the church, and relocating it to the laws of the state, as the embodiment of universal reason. Yet, as I have been arguing, Asad’s work on the secular presses up against its limit concept without explicitly articulating it: race. But in identifying the shifting boundaries of the illusory and the real, Asad identifies the formation of the secular as a mode of power that is keenly interested in instituting the social/material conditions necessary for the (re)production of what Sylvia Wynter calls “the overrepresentation of Man” (this will be the focus of chapter two).

Asad’s primary purpose is not to unveil the Protestant framework that structures the category of religion, rather he is primarily concerned with the historical processes by which religion is authorized and normalized. That is, the pressure of Asad’s critique is put on the power struggles and the contestations over what is proper religion. His point is not that we have failed to sufficiently de-Christianize the study of religion, a point that may lead us to assume we merely have to be more secular and scientifically objective. Rather, Asad calls into the question the

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entire process surrounding the reification of religion and its academic study. This includes the emergence of the secular West and its epistemology. The secular West constituted itself through its ability to define and distance itself from its religious other.

Brent Nongbri attempts to take Asad’s critique seriously in his book *Before Religion*.\(^8^4\) Nongbri argues that religion is a modern, novel concept. Contrary to popular opinion, religion for Nongbri is not self-evident and self-referential. Rather, the category of religion was invented and the common sense usage of the concept mystifies the imperial process by which religion was born. Nongbri’s work emphasizes the linguistic transformation of the term religion. He traces its linguistic origin to the Latin term *religio*. According to Nongbri, prior to Christianity *religio* functioned as a reference to ancestral tradition. The term emphasized adherence to one’s own ancestral tradition, and therefore was analogous to how we think about culture. In this usage, the question of the “truth” of religion was unintelligible. Nongbri suggests that asking whether *religio* was true would be akin to asking whether the Spanish language is true. The point for Nongbri is that *religio* only began to take on the definitional framework of religion as we know it when it was translated by the early Christian writers. In these Christian hands *religio* was circumscribed to “true religion,” as distinguished from paganism and idolatry. In this way the question of the truth of religion was introduced, as well as concern for the truth of religious belief and doctrine.

In this way, Nongbri links the concept of religion to the process by which *religio* was Christianized, a process that took on another redefinition in the Protestant Reformation. According to Nongbri, the Reformation and the religious wars in Europe were the impetus for

the privatization of religion in the Enlightenment. The concept of religion was further redefined when it was transplanted from European soil to the colonies. Nongbri points out that in the colonies the category of religion was used to evaluate whether indigenous “religion” could be reformed through conversion, or whether it was too pagan and had to be eradicated. In this way Nonbri helps us see the imperial contours of the concept of religion: that is, how religion translated certain aspects of indigenous ways of life into “religion” and “religious systems,” systems that could be plotted as coordinates on a global religious taxonomy. Nongbri wants us to reconsider the idea of religion in a way similar to its pre-Christian usage, that is, as adherence to one’s ancestral tradition. To an extent, then, Nongbri’s argument suggests we need to consider de-Christianizing the term religion. In light of religion’s imperial baggage, he recommends that scholars of religion should study the processes by which is religion is defined and authorized. That is, what is at stake for Nongbri in the definition of religion is why religion is defined in certain ways and who is doing the work of definition.

While this recommendation may seem to align with Asad’s critique, I find it a somewhat modest proposal. Given its constitutive role in Western imperialism, I not only want to produce better descriptions of the process of defining religion, I want to position religious studies in a way that may counter Western hegemony. What Asad, Nongbri, and others press towards in their work is that modern forms of global capitalist domination, white supremacy, and neocolonial power are constituted around making religion an object of knowledge. Recall that Masuzawa sees a close relation between the world religions discourse of the twentieth century, and the preceding history of comparative theology.85 In the history of comparative theology, scholars

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were concerned to demonstrate the superiority of Christianity in relation to the multiplicities of “discovered” religious ways of life. Christian superiority in a pagan world gradually transformed into Christian superiority in a world teeming with different “religions.” Christianity was narrated as the apotheosis of an allegedly transcultural element present in most colonized societies in some form or another. Although eventually Christianity was re-written as one of many religions, Christianity was still generally considered the most developed form of religion. Christian superiority was self-evident in the fact that European social and cultural civilization emerged from this theological cradle.

To repeat: Masuzawa’s overall claim is that there is no disjuncture between the narrative of Christian Europe’s religious superiority and secular Europe’s allegedly neutral, objective, and pluralistic scientific knowledge predicated on its World Religions discourse. According to Masuzawa, the neutrality and pluralism of this discourse is precisely the way that European universalism was preserved, as her subtitle so aptly puts it. Therefore, what Masuzawa helps us see is how the transformation of Europe’s Christian identity into its secular scientific identity enabled the reformulation of Western sovereignty. It is in this way that I want to utilize Asad’s claim about the twin birth of secularism and religion in modernity. What is significant about this claim for my purposes is the way it gestures towards the theological architecture of the modern world-system, a theological architecture that is principally about Euro-American (Western) sovereignty in the colonial world and the modern capitalist world birthed from it.

1.3. The Theo-logic of Whiteness

Both Walter Mignolo and Johannes Fabian, among many others, argue that the modern capitalist world-system is a theological order. That is, at the heart of modernity is a theological
logic that operated by conversion/assimilation to Western civilization and that today operates in the language of development (and its various avatars). Walter Mignolo reminds us that “the historical foundation of the colonial matrix was theological: it was Christian theology that located the distinction between Christians, Moors, and Jews in the ‘blood.’” In this way the racial logic of coloniality (to recall Quijano) draw on a theological discourse of “blood” difference, and a theological logic would continue to structure the relations of power enunciated by the racial.

In Fabian’s *Time and the Other* he seeks to articulate what he considers to be a defect at the heart of anthropology’s reason. According to Fabian, anthropological reason has been central to the formation of Western civilization set against “the rest.” Fabian calls this defect the “denial of coevalness.” Essentially, Fabian’s claim is that anthropological reason works through an understanding of Time that denies that the anthropologist and the object of anthropology occupy the same time. Fabian remarks that although anthropology works through direct interpersonal observation, the theoretical works of anthropology perform a “conjuring trick” whereby the objects of research always stand at a temporal distance.

Fabian argues that a rupture occurred between “sacred time” and “secular time” that facilitated the consolidation of anthropology’s Time. Fabian’s point is not to essentialize either but to make a point about the logic of Time. He argues that in sacred time, time indicated the unfolding of God’s providential rule. This version of time is tied up with certain events in which

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God’s purposes are made known. But in secular time, time is universalized to include the whole of human history. As such, Time became the stage for a singular process of humanity’s self-realization. In anthropology’s Time, European civilization is the apotheosis of this self-realization. In this way, a global taxonomy of time emerges in which place indicates \textit{temporal distance} from European Time. Non-European societies, rather than being pagan, are signified as primitive, undeveloped, or developing, and so on. But the key to the process is that although the anthropologist and the anthropologist’s object occupy the same space, \textit{they do not occupy the same time}. This is what Fabian means by the phrase “the denial of coevalness.” The entire world is in this way folded into a universal process of human becoming in which the West functions as the normative goal of progress. If we place Masuzawa’s argument alongside Fabian’s we can see how the World Religions discourse articulates this world historical process, a process in which the West’s sovereignty is secured by its temporal and religious difference from the non-West. Western civilization is able to universalize itself precisely through its capacity to render itself \textit{religion-less}, and thereby preserve its hegemony through the language of scientific neutrality.

Recall that, in Anidjar’s critical formulation, religion is a “discursive device that enables the workings of power.”\footnote{Anidjar, \textit{Semites: Race, Religion, Literature}, 52.} As such a device, religion is deployed to produce distinctions as a strategy of power. To quote Anidjar at length,

One key distinction is, of course, the distinction between religious and secular (as in ‘we’ are secular, ‘they’ are religious). Another is that between nationalism and religion. Underscoring or advocating for one term means ‘forgetting’ or indeed masking the other. (Is it possible not to notice [...] that American foreign policy, like its British, French, and other seasoned and enduring fellow travelers, has long been intent on strategically playing Islam against Arab nationalism, ethnicity against religion, and local nationalism against religious unity? Is it possible not to notice that religion and nationalism are strategically divided and must therefore be considered in their joined operations?) Hence, the secularization of religion, for someone like Ernest Renan, who was ‘determined to be as
Christian as he once was, only now without Christianity and with what he called *la science laïque* (the secular science), is the condition for the rise of nationalism. The separation, the transcending of particularity, whether race or religion, is done in the name of a new universal, namely, the nation.90

There is, however, another key aspect to this process, and that is the convergence and distinction of religious and *racial* difference in the constitution of the modern world-system. Anidjar points to this critical distinction in Renan who “subsumed under the nation” the distinction between “race and religion.”91 For Renan, “with the rise of secular science, ‘race, color, origin, temperament, character, and types overwhelmed the distinction between Christians and everyone else’ (my emphasis).”92 For this reason, while Asad and Nongbri locate the emergence of the concept of religion in the historical processes of the reformation, I insist we think these processes together with the constellation of transatlantic authority, economy, and epistemology of coloniality in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

In his book, *The Christian Imagination*, Willie Jennings points us towards several critical transformations that occurred in the colonial moment.93 Although Jennings’ book is focused on certain transformations of and within Christian theology, it helpfully accounts for the way religion is produced as an object of colonial desire and control. According to Jennings, European colonialism induced an epistemological crisis for “Europeans.”94 The people, lands, and animals of the New World overwhelmed their epistemological frames. In order to navigate this crisis,


94 I use quotation marks here to remind us that “Europe” as a geo-social identity was invented through coloniality, and did not exist in the same way prior to the fifteenth century project of global expansion. See Aníbal Quijano, “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America,” in *Nepantla: Views from South* 1.3 (2000).
Christian theologians were called upon to explain how the New fit into the knowledges of the Old. Jennings draws on the work of José de Acosta, a Jesuit theologian rigorously schooled in the tradition. What Jennings shows is how Acosta grafted the inner coherence of Christian doctrine to the logic of European colonialism. That is, Jennings shows how Christian theology would come to articulate Spanish authority over space in the internal coherence of its doctrine of creation.

Acosta recognized that the New World challenged the geographical frames of European epistemologies. Upon traveling to the New World Acosta writes, “I shall tell you what happened to me when I went to the Indies […] I laughed and jeered at Aristotle’s meteorological theories and his philosophy, seeing that in the very place where, according to his rules, everything must be burning and on fire, I and all my companions were cold.”95 Yet for Acosta, this did not mean that the authority of theological and philosophical texts was to be relinquished, but instead could be relocated. Acosta argued that authorities like Aristotle and Aquinas, though inaccurate in their geographical knowledge, were nonetheless authoritative in questions of doctrine. That is, Acosta distinguished between the geographical authority of these figures and the truth of their doctrinal logics. Acosta worked to rehabilitate a theological authority in crisis by dislocating theology from its connection to land and space, preserving its coherence and authority. I am interested in the implications of Acosta’s attempt to save theology by relinquishing its authority over space. As theological authority receded from the land, it became possible and necessary that other modes of colonial authority already being articulated would grow. This is what Jennings means by secular space:

The new worlds were transformed into land—raw, untamed land [...] Everything—from peoples and their bodies to plants and animals, from the ground and the sky—was subject to change, subjects for change, subjected to change. The significance of this transformation cannot be overstated. The earth itself was barred from being a constant signifier of identity. Europeans defined Africans and all others apart from the earth even as they separated them from their lands. The central effect of the loss of the earth as an identity signifier was that native identities, tribal, communal, familial, and spatial, were constricted to simply their bodies, leaving behind the very ground that enables and facilitates the articulation of identity.96

What Jennings helps us see is that the secularization of space in European colonialism precedes and makes possible the secularization of thought in the Enlightenment. For example, Jennings points out that Acosta’s Natural and Moral History of the Indies “was translated into multiple European languages, reprinted for centuries, and served as a crucial resource in the development of Enlightenment science.”97 In this way, I suggest that the creativity of the Enlightenment, and the violence of the religious wars in Europe, were the “birth pangs” of the secular; the effect of secularizing space in the New World circulating back to the Old. What is interesting about the secular in relation to religious violence is not the absence of violence in the consolidation of the secular, but the shifts in how violence is defined as legitimate. The legitimation of violence in secularity is bound to the transformation of space and identity in the coloniality of power: land to be developed for capital, and inferior races to be (saved, civilized, developed).

For the sake of clarity, the violence at issue here is bound up with the power differentials of colonialism. In this regard, Joerg Rieger’s distinction between “soft” and “hard” colonial power acknowledges the historically specific ways different colonialisms operated.98 For example, as an extension of the Reconquista, the initial phases of Spanish colonialism were

characterized by open war and conquest. It was against this mode of Spanish colonialism that Bartolomé de Las Casas distinguished the “Way of Christ,” and sought to bring to an end the “atrocities of the conquest.” While theologians like Juan Ginés Sepulveda advocated for war and the subjugation of indigenous peoples, Las Casas argued that the spread of the Church’s dominion (and thus of Christ’s) would be best achieved through benevolent rule. The Spanish, according to Las Casas, should “model” the Way of Christ for indigenous Americans. As the putatively superior people, the influence of the Spanish would inevitably be assimilated by the Natives, who would be rendered willing subjects of Spanish rule. As Rieger summarizes, “Christians [for Las Casas] are to Amerindians as angels to humankind, as the spiritual to the material. This superiority makes their acceptance natural.” Nevertheless, Rieger argues, Las Casas’ “gentler way” obscures the power differentials on which the colonial relation is based. As such, even Las Casas’ rejection of the more violent forms of colonialism maintained the logic of colonial power, and relied on Spanish power over indigenous peoples. In this way, “despite a world of difference between [Las Casas’ and Friedrich Schleiermacher’s] theological positions, they have a similar feel because they operate from positions of self-confidence and power.”

Within their theology both Las Casas and Schleiermacher drew on and reproduced the power differentials of colonialism.

Both Rieger and Jennings point to how the specific forms colonial rule was to take over indigenous peoples was explicitly and implicitly premised on colonial authority over land and

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99 Rieger, Christ and Empire: From Paul to Postcolonial Times, 159.
100 Rieger, Christ and Empire: From Paul to Postcolonial Times, 172.
101 Rieger, Christ and Empire: From Paul to Postcolonial Times, 174.
102 Rieger, Christ and Empire: From Paul to Postcolonial Times, 173.
space. What Jennings identifies as a retreat of theology from space was coordinated with the increasing authority of emerging capitalist rationalizations of space as private property; as secular space to be taken and owned. It is in relation to secular space that Jennings situates the origins of race, and as I am arguing, religion as an object of colonial knowledge. Indigenous identities in the Americas, and ways of life that would come to be translated as “religion,” were articulated in relation to the land and animals that were in the process of being taken. European colonialism laid waste to these geographical markers of identity, and in transforming the land European colonialists “pierced the skin” of its inhabitants.

As land was transformed into secular, private property capable of being owned, the concept of race grew as the central marker of identity in the colonies. That is to say, Jennings reminds us that the expropriation of Andean lands occurred simultaneously with the introduction of new peoples and new frameworks for organizing identities apart from the land. From the beginning of Spanish colonialism, the Spanish “brought their slaves, the Africans.”103 These black slaves “were peoples stripped of land and identity, joined at the hip to the Spanish, and charged with the articulation of Spanish desire. These were new people not only in the sense of being geographically new to these lands, but also in the sense of being recently constructed as black and African and, most important, slave.”104 The material and symbolic effects of this history would rest heavily on the ensuing forms racialization would take in the Andes, and the Americas more generally. In this way, Jennings comes upon an important historical point that requires us to be careful with the way Quijano’s coloniality of power, for example, apprehends race. That is, the frames and material practices of racial distinction took root in the colonized


Andes with the importation of the “black” African slave, tethered to the “white” Spanish conquistador. The arrival of a new racial ideology in the Andes was from the beginning organized around the attachments of racial blackness to slavery, to the slave non-subject position within a field of power (i.e. property of an owner). This foundational anti-blackness formed the ground on which colonial relations of power would take shape, and on which indigenous peoples stripped of land would be given new, racial identities. As instructional objects of racial power, black African slaves were “the negative anchor at the bottom of the racial aesthetic, [whereby] as ‘blackness,’ they illumined the awesome majesty of the top, Iberian ‘white-ness.’”¹⁰⁵ For these reasons, the colonial racial taxonomies into which indigenous peoples were conscripted pivoted “on the possibility of being identified as white, of becoming white.”¹⁰⁶ Or, racial consciousness would pivot on being identified as not black.¹⁰⁷

The power of the racial gaze grew both as an attempt of Europeans to understand those they were looking at, but also as those over whom Europeans had the power of life and death. The power of the racial optic resides in this power to perform displacement and dislocation in a discourse of connection; peoples separated by oceans, lands, continents, now could be connected through the discourse of race. This way of connecting geographies also introduced a new point of stability for the emerging world order. With the discourse of race, land was displaced as the anchor of identity, and the figure of the European masculine takes its place. This figure is the


¹⁰⁷ I am mindful here of Frank B. Wilderson III’s arguments about the specificity, and structural irrationality, of anti-blackness, which is foundational to the racial hierarchies established and globalized in European colonialism. I will continue to return to this concern, not to affirm or refute Wilderson’s argument, but to see how it might effect our attempts to think the racial logic of the category of religion. See, for example, Frank B. Wilderson III, Red, White, and Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).
point of stability in the emerging colonial order. The New World is mediated by this figure, who has the power to invite the world into this racialized way of seeing bodies. Indigenous bodies are transformed into racial bodies whose capacities and potentialities can be evaluated through a global racial optic. In this operation, indigenous ways of life are translated as “pagan” or “idolatrous,” a transformation that is obscured by the eventual reformulation of paganism in the discourse of World Religions.

The point here is that race gains its coherence by separating, and enclosing, aspects of indigenous living as “religion.” As land is transformed into private property - spliced by imagined grids overlaying a territory - the lands, mountains, lakes, and animals no longer have the capacity to coordinate collective, ante-human identity. Instead, the enclosures of the grid bear the truth of one’s relation to land and announce colonial authority over space. In colonial discourse, religion signifies specific indigenous materialities enclosed by the grid. The grid functions as public truth, and as such it designates the space in which identity and citizenship are marked in relation to state authority. As will be the subject of chapter four, these forms of colonial land expropriation will also inform the techniques of state power that will subjugate the European peasants. Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the land is enclosed, and the peasants are violently displaced and made dependent on the gendered division of wage-labor. This expropriation of peasant lands would enable the ruling classes of mercantile political economies to conscript Europe’s poor into national and racial identities that are also inscribed on the enclosed, individuated body, separated from the land. At its most general, then, with the loss of the land indigenous identities are fractured, and “religion” translates beliefs and practices disconnected from their prior existence. In this way, the privatization of religion characteristic of
commonplace perspectives on modernity and secularism is, for the colonized, the expropriation of indigenous land and an assault on indigenous life.

1.4. What Does Critique Desire

…to be a critical academic in the university is to be against the university, and to be against the university is always to recognize it and be recognized by it, and to institute the negligence of that internal outside, that unassimilated underground, a negligence of it that is precisely, we must insist, the basis of the professions.

-Fred Moten

The critiques rehearsed above overlap and offer multiple vantages on the unique, historically contingent invention of religion as an object of study. To the extent that contemporary criticism can be understood as a coherent project, we can ask, what do critics want? What kind of project is “critique of religion?” What do critics want? And, what kind of practice does critique unleash? What forms of practical consciousness does it generate? Is critique the announcement of a problem to be solved? What work does the desire to be less imperialist do, especially if that desire must be “non-normative;” must be uncommitted, realized in neglect of the “refusal to be a subject” for the university and its disciplinary professionalization? Is critique invested in being auto-encyclopedic, in enlightenment as totality? That is, is critique about the accumulation of knowledge, in its completion, in which critical knowledge is a necessary self-correction? Of what is critique negligent, what undercommons, what “ghostly labor” does critique neglect in order to advance itself as knowledge, as recognizable and recognizing an object of critique?

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108 Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study (New York: Minor Compositions, 2013), 31.
Or with critique does “negligence” slip, does the “refusal to be a subject” open, the disciplinary cuts of the university transgressed? Can critique become “affected writing - writing that is always already other, with an other.” “[T]o be a critical academic in the university is to be against the university, and to be against the university is always to recognize it and be recognized by it.” As I have argued, contemporary critique of religion is unleashed by the material crises of the twentieth century, and has induced a crisis in the academy. My engagement with critique is not interested in rehabilitating the discipline, but in moving against the enclosure of the otherwise, the attempts to secure the social from the threat of the wild outside.

Within religious studies, the disciplinary desire to be scientific aggravates a distinction from theology that is destabilized in critical genealogies of religion. As a critique of whiteness, this dissertation remains within this instability to draw the secular/religion binary out of its categories of settler enclosure, and to argue that this binary is itself part of a theological apparatus. In the colonial archive, a theological imagination creates religion as the conceptual translation of material practices of the colonized. As such, theology and religion are discourses about community, about establishing “peoples” that can be related, governed, but that cannot be conjoined. Historically this relates to a “going out” movement that constitutes any identifiable sense of a “Christian people.” This “going out” has no guarantee that it will not materialize in the capacity, desire, and ability to define life itself, to define life/living/liveability/dead/death/dying

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109 Stefano Harvey and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study*, 31-32.

110 Denise Ferreira da Silva, back cover of Stefano Harvey and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study*.

111 Stefano Harvey and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study*, 31.

112 Stefano Harvey and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study*, 17-20.
in a way that manages, controls, and regulates the unsettling movement of “going out.” There is a deeply unsettling quality to this “going out,” that is indeed a real threat to hierarchies and asymmetries of power. But this “going out” is not necessarily a movement of joining but – as the critical accounts above demonstrate - can be a movement of empire, of domination, of the establishment of control rather than its undoing.

Many of the problems theorized in contemporary critique of religion push up against the problem of establishing community, or the problem of sovereignty: of belonging, and control over belonging to the community of the human. These critiques give us a critical vantage on how the secular functions to naturalize (1) the sovereign, self-determined individual and (2) the modern sovereign State as grounded in the rational conditions necessary for the sovereign, self-determined individual to realize (his) freedom. Thus, critical work on religion can demystify how the secular, and its liberal political subject, is structured by a logic of emancipation which beguiles and constrains even radical projects. Freedom, in liberal political philosophy, is structured by slavery. It is the slave-condition that liberal conceptions of freedom require for the material and symbolic possibility of articulating emancipation.\footnote{113} Attempts to double down on an inclusive (Western) humanism continue to ignore the ways this humanism has been interrupted and refused. Framed through liberal humanism, religion is a discourse of splitting, enclosing, and individuating. Religion indexes the presence or lack of political existence, and therefore the presence or lack of human being. The liberal politics of the human are grounded in the sovereign rights of the self-possessed individual; this liberal subject cannot be realized in “primitive social organizations,” that is, social forms that have not arisen to political existence (the separation of civil society and political society). In this way, bourgeois political societies are rationalized as

\footnote{113}{This relationship will be a theme throughout the dissertation.}
the result of a history of struggle. The rational subject overcomes the sensual, by pulling itself up out of its natural state and taking responsibility for itself as an agent, actor, or mover of history. The liberal, bourgeois subject, is a subject in separation. This subject severs connection, formalized in the juridical object/subject of rights. Within the constraints of racial capitalist power over the (re)production of the overall conditions of life, religion is also a discourse of separation, enclosed by cultural difference. The modern state attends to religious difference as the management of separation, which forecloses the possibility of unknown futures.

1.5. The End of Religion, Towards the End of the World

Gil Anidjar has posed the problem as follows: either Christianity is a religion, and it is the only one or there are religions, and Christianity is something else entirely.\textsuperscript{114} That “something else” is the trace that haunts both critics of religion(s), and those who have refashioned religion in the wake of its crisis. That “something else” can be traced as the history of murder, or murder as history, that inaugurates a “new humanity;” that refashions “the difference between innocence and guilt as the basis of human society, the difference across humanity, between old and guilty (humans) and the new and innocent (Christians).\textsuperscript{115}” According to Anidjar, it is Christianity that is the paradox that all (the universal) are guilty, but some (the particular) are innocent; because We (the some) know we are guilty. The determinative force of this Christianization of “the human” is, for Anidjar, the element of blood; the element that coagulates in the State, that true and rational sphere of human existence that is both arrival and end; the liberal modern state that defines the horizon of human existence because it is the arrival of human being - of human

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history - at the point of transparency and freedom. The modern state is the Christian state, according to Anidjar, not simply because it emerges genealogically from Christendom, but because it sediments the juridical universality of freedom and equality that rationalizes the theological distinction “all are guilty, but some are innocent.”

The West, as Anidjar formulates it, is the history of the shedding of blood, forgiven by the shedding of blood; the history of murder, forgiven by murder; the history of genocide, because “all are guilty” and to kill the guilty is not really to murder at all.116 The human, as the ontological referent of the West, is a concept specific to Western Christendom. Critique of religion opens up a critique of this hegemonic horizon. Whether as the highest expression of its religious genius or as the limit beyond which secular reason emancipates itself, Western civilization articulates itself in relation to its theological foundation. Christianity is transcended in religion (a religion among religions), and religion in the secular (the end of history, the coincidence of knowledge and the real). Schematically, Christianity transmutates from (1) the one true religion opposed to superstition, unbelief, and paganism; to (2) Christianity is the superior religion among many religions (which are national/racial/local); to (3) the secular is true, universal, and religion (including Christianity) at its best aids in the cultivation of moral, liberal-economic subjects.

As a total mode of life, Western Christendom globalizes itself, biologizing/racializing itself, and producing itself as secular. The secular/religion distinction upholds this Christian architecture. The (Christian) West is produced through this distinction. What was Christian (and this opposed to Jew, Mohemmadan, and the rest [heathen, pagan]) becomes non-religious (secular), and what was non-Christian becomes “religion.” Religion enables the workings of

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secularism, sustains it, and all the while concealing its Christian architecture. Thus, to put this polemically, as Anidjar does, the modern secular world – the world made by Orientalism – is Christian.\textsuperscript{117} To be against this world, is to be against Christianity in its modern, secular, racial form: the bio-evolutionary, bourgeois horizon of the human.

As I will argue in the next chapter, to be human in this racialized schema is to properly rule the material excesses captured in the idea of “religion.” To be ruled by religion is to lack the self-determination which signifies Western human being. The bourgeois subject represents itself as emancipated from submission to external forces or authority. As Foucault elaborates the biopolitical, the “life/living” that is produced as the object of power relations can be understood as spread out across the institutions that define modern society.\textsuperscript{118} This highly disciplined “living” is defined by containing the excesses of biopolitical life.

Religion was imposed through a theological imaginary of private property, of imagining “the human” in separation from ecological connection. To say that the Human is a theo-ontological relation is to identify how the Human trims “messiness,” the material excesses not conducive to capitalist accumulation. This does not necessarily mean the elimination of that excess, but its sequestering to “religion” as a distinct aspect of human living. Chapter three will explore how one of the many barriers faced by mercantile capitalist exchange was the existing social ecologies of exchange practiced by indigenous peoples in the Americas.\textsuperscript{119} Thus, for the agents of Western (neo)colonialism, whether religion ought to be eliminated entirely, or whether

\textsuperscript{117} Gil Anidjar reads Said’s Orientalism as a critique of Western Christianity, secularized, in, Semites: Race, Religion, Literature, 39-63.


\textsuperscript{119} See Lindon Barrett, Racial Blackness and the Discontinuity of Western Modernity (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2014), 1-43. This argument will be extended in chapter 2.
it is a sui generis aspect of human living is not the point. The point is in what ways do these aspects of life interrupt or impede the flow of capital.

What material threat(s) does excess signify? Not simply or primarily the threat of being subjected to the rule of another, but to the threat of the masses. Étienne Balibar has argued that the bourgeoisie react in anticipation of resistance to the disintegrating effect of bourgeois rule on existing social relations. Étienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (New York: Verso, 1991), 4.

120 The self-determination that is at stake colonial discourse about religion is the freedom of the bourgeois, the freedom of capital and the holders of property, against the threat posed by the European masses, the Native, or the animalistic Black. As Moten writes, this is the threat of the surround, which is met with enclosure as a response to the otherwise, the foreclosure of the unbounded.

121 Colonial discourse on religion is bound up with questions about who belongs to the community of the Human, who is the enemy, and who is the non-human. Gil Anidjar argues that within the concept of the enemy the structural distinctions of the theologico-political emerge.

122 For Anidjar, the figures of the Jew and the Muslim are differential figures that enable the articulation of a Christian subject. But this difference is articulated as a conflict, or a divide within humanity. In contrast, the structural positions of the Native and Slave establish the limits of humanity. For Anidjar, the enemy is not animal. It is always already permissible to kill the Native and the Slave because they lack social formations that would require you to be responsible to them. Following Frank B. Wilderson III, the Black Slave is an antagonism that

enables the inter-human conflict which constitutes the theologico-political distinction.\textsuperscript{124} And in contrast to conflict, an antagonism is “an irreconcilable struggle between entities, or positions, the resolution of which is not dialectical but entails the obliteration of one of the positions.”\textsuperscript{125} The Slave does so by being figured as the bestial - the void of human being - with respect to which the question of enmity and charity does not arise.

For the Native and the Slave, the question of religion corresponds to their distance from the theologico-political. Even when granted “religion,” this possession for the Native or Slave may be “culture,” but never politics. As such, the secular/religion split has never made sense of black struggle or indigenous struggles, struggles that exceed this split, and cannot be thought by it. Indeed, as I will continue to argue, the entire secular/religion split takes place materially and conceptually through the disavowal of blackness. This disavowal holds the split in place.

Blackness is the underground upon which this ‘play of Reason’ is staged, the undercommons upon which the World of the Human is built.\textsuperscript{126}

Some have insisted that regardless of its origins, “religion” has been unleashed in the world and does not belong to academics. Religion, as it goes, constitutes a real object of study because it has real materiality.\textsuperscript{127} Yet, so long as this recommendation is confined to the descriptive, I worry even this move doubles down on the “power that forms/subjugates,” on the paradigm of “religion” because it has the power to determine the horizon of life. The insistence that religion


\textsuperscript{126} See Denise Ferreira da Silva, \textit{Toward a Global Idea of Race} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

is diffused in the world confirms Anidjar’s thesis that we are all “covered in the blood,” that the liquidation of Christendom - which is not the same thing as its overcoming - is accomplishing itself, deterritorializing and reterritorializing.

What is the effect of continuing to circumscribe certain practices as “religion,” rather than, say, alternative ways of life (in their full materiality)? What does religion, as a discursive device, do, and what does the expansion of its limits accomplish? Reaction to critique has induced among some religious studies scholars a commitment to innocence, to innocent objectivity, or objectivity as innocence. Anxious over the liquidation of our own territory, of the dissolution of our sacred (or is it profane?) possession, we look towards the horizon of religion’s death; an end that has always served as a site of renewal and generativity, an end that has unleashed the proliferation of discourse on - or perhaps in, for is not religion a space, a place, a site of embodiment and differential identity, capable of occupying and being occupied - the twilight of religion. Yet like Foucault’s “end of Man” the “end of religion” - or are they the same? - has found new life, renewed life, in His confrontation with death, with the announcement of His death. If we must critique religion it is because we must critique Christianity; and not for the sake of transcending religion in the secular, which as it ought to be clear by now is merely another name for being “covered in the blood.”¹²⁸

To summarize and repeat: in what follows, I approach religion in the way Anidjar defines its utility, “a discursive device that enables the workings of power […] The device operates in such a way that the key distinctions it produces or participates in producing, whether epistemologically, politically, or legally, are made to disappear and reappear in tune with their

¹²⁸ Anidjar, Blood: A Critique of Christianity.
strategic usefulness.” Thus, I develop a theoretical framework – the installation of the human – to interrogate the racial logic of the modern category of religion, and its discursive role in (re)producing modern capitalist domination, and racially distributed life and death. At the center of this study is how the question of religion is deeply involved in questions of racial capitalist governance - its forms of exploitation and expropriation - which constitute and are constituted by its onto-epistemology. That is, religion centers on the question of who people are, and what can be done to and with them. It is, from the beginning of colonialism, constitutive of the subjects involved in the transatlantic circuits of dispossession, accumulation, and domination. How one is recognized or named within this imperial network will increasingly come to determine their relation to power, and the strategic possibilities for refusing its refusals.

129 Anidjar, Semites: Race, Religion, Literature, 52-53.
CHAPTER TWO

THE INSTALLATION OF THE HUMAN: SYLVIA WYNTER AND RELIGION

Nevertheless, while these lay humanist intellectuals had indeed effected a redescriptive statement by means of which they secularized human existence, detaching it from the supernatural agency of the divine realm, they had done so only by opening the pathway that would eventually lead, with Darwin, to a new descriptive statement, itself reanchored in the no less extrahuman agency of Evolution, thereby reducing the human within the terms of a biocentric “human sciences” paradigm to being a “mere mechanism” driven in its behavior by its genetic programs – and, as such, subject to the processes of natural causation, rather than to the ontogeny/sociogeny or nature-culture modality of causation, which alone could enable the reflexively self-aversive behavior of many westernized Black peoples, made into the Other to our present ethnoclass norm of being human, to repress the genetic instinctual narcissism defining of all modes of purely organic life.

-Sylvia Wynter

In a letter to Joseph Bloch, Friedrich Engels wrote: “[a]ccording to the materialist conception of history, the ultimately determining element in history is the production and reproduction of real life.” Engels’ concern was to clarify that historical materialism did not mean a vulgar economism. One way of pursing Engel’s concern is to take stock of how essential the “idea of race” is to the “global structure of the control of labor;” how essential whiteness and its racializing assemblages are to “real life” and its reproduction. Because the systems of domination under which we labor were co-constituted by the White political

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imaginary, the maintenance and reproduction of whiteness *is* central to the reproduction of “real life.”

In the U.S., and I would argue this can be extended to the (neo)colonial partitioning of the globe, there exists what Steve Martinot refers to as a “dual class structure.” That is, one characterized by capitalist class rule in civil society, and by white class rule over those racialized as non-white.\(^{132}\) For these reasons, I aim to move into and through the hegemony of the White political imaginary. The fibers of whiteness are fundamental to social relations in the West, and its diverse but grammatically connected forms of practical consciousness. Whiteness stalks us, and seeks to enclosure us; it is more akin to the atmospheric conditions of unliveability in which life nevertheless insists itself, than it is to a personal prejudice to be overcome, or a cloak for others forms of power to which it could be subsumed. Even more, what it would mean to put an end to whiteness, to let it die, can have no simple answer because whiteness has no simple ground; no simple and singular referent. Whiteness materializes always by way of an-other, in the movement of naming an-other to whiteness. So, as Nahum Chandler formulates Du Bois’ position, a white subject position is “configured as such by way of [its] being with reference to the Negro in America.”\(^{133}\) Whiteness is configured by questioning the being of “the Negro,” by questioning the being of those more generally racialized as non-white, by which a white position can be figured. White being is the practice of racial distinction which puts into question the being of those figured as non-white, by which the being of whiteness itself is always at least double.

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In this regard, Chandler sees Du Bois’ study of John Brown as “exemplary,” for “what Du Bois has accomplished here is the study of the production and dissolution of ‘whiteness’ by way of an account of the history of the position of the Negro as a problem in America. Du Bois delivers John Brown to us, and to the future, by situating the meaning of John Brown as a figure arising within or through the meaning of the Negro, the African, in the history of America and, by implication, the modern world.”134 Because the meaning of whiteness is given “through the meaning of the Negro,” its dissolution too can only be figured “within or through the meaning of the Negro.”

Constructively, then, my argument aims towards what Raymond Williams terms “creative practice” as the “active struggle for new consciousness through new relationships that is the ineradicable emphasis of the Marxist sense of self-creation.”135 The forms this can take, according to Williams, are varied and not simply identifiable in advance. What I attempt to undertake in what follows derives from what Williams calls, “the long and difficult remaking of an inherited (determined) practical consciousness: […] in practice a struggle at the roots of the mind – not casting off an ideology, or learning phrases about it, but confronting a hegemony in the fibres of the self and in the hard practical substance of effective and continuing relationships.”136 It is with this task in mind that I aim to “root out” the paradigm of whiteness, as it has both constituted, and been constituted by, the grammar of theology and religion.

By a paradigmatic analysis, I mean something similar to how Wilderson defines it: “a paradigmatic analysis asks, What are the constituent elements of, and the assumptive logic

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134 Chandler, X: The Problem of the Negro as a Problem for Thought 127.
136 Williams, Marxism and Literature 212.
regarding, dispossession which underwrite theoretical claims about political and libidinal economy; and how are those elements and assumptions manifest in [...] political common sense?"  

So, for example, such an approach allows Frank B. Wilderson III to argue “that ‘Savage,’ Human, and Slave should be theorized in the way we theorize worker and capitalist as positions first and as identities second, or as we theorize capitalism as a paradigm rather than as an experience.” One of the disadvantages of this approach is that history is always more complicated, specific, and diverse than a paradigmatic analysis can convey. But the advantage is that we may get a better grip on the underlying grammar that organizes relations of power, and thereby better oppose them. Thus, I turn to Wynter’s critique of Man in the effort to think paradigmatically about the racialized nature of religion in the modern world, and the subject positions instituted in the deployment of religion as a discursive device.

2.1. Mapping the Racial Logic of Religion

Through an engagement with Syvlia Wynter’s critical genealogy of race and the human, this chapter builds a theoretical basis for analyzing the racialized nature of secular colonial-modernity and religion. By doing so, I suggest that the category of religion, as an object of knowledge, is constitutive of whiteness. This violent form of social belonging structures global relations of domination, around and for the sake of the accumulation of wealth. It remains that spectral power, the spectacular violence that encloses our efforts to think or represent it, to move against it, and to live beyond it. First, the chapter rehearses Sylvia Wynter’s theoretical and historical framework for apprehending the emergence of “the human” through the idea of race.

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Wynter’s framework offers a way of giving theoretical depth to the claim that religion is a racial category. For Wynter, race shadows the formation and installation of “the human.” Wynter shows how the theological oppositions/distinctions of Christendom were transubstantiated in the idea of race as enemies or others to the “human itself.” What Wynter has her finger on is how the production of a religion-secular distinction in coloniality installs a mode of power that is directed towards (re)producing the European “genre” of human being as the human itself, over and against its myriad subhuman colonial subjects.

The argument makes a contribution in at least two ways: first, I theorize how the expansion of the usage of religion is at the same time the expansion of European racialism. Second, I draw attention to how these transformations occur around relations of exchange and labor. In short, racializing is constitutive of Western modernity, and constitutive of the secularization or humanization of medieval Christendom. To Christianize, in the colonies, meant to subjugate or discipline the Native out of heathen or pagan practices, and into labor regimes organized for the sake of mercantilist accumulation. Wynter tracks these transformations around shifts in Europe’s normative conception of human being.

Colonization targets the other-wise, the material ontologies of colonized peoples. This was not simply the ideological justification of an otherwise rational, even if terrible, violence of conquest. “To kill the gods” is an imperative that ties together the evisceration of indigenous spiritualities, and the installation of regimes of wealth extraction and labor. “To kill the gods” has as its co-constitutive aim the production of property, and exploitative relations of production for the extraction of resources from the colonies. Some of the earliest colonialist reports enacted

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this death discursively in the form of denial, that indigenous peoples in the Caribbean had “no knowledge of God.” This lack was evident in their lack of European social, political, and economic traits. Religion occupied a central place in colonial ethnography in part because the alleged lack of “knowledge of God” meant that colonized people were not, like Christian Europe, “God’s people.” Which is to say, the lack of “knowledge of God” works to confirm European ethnocentrism anchored in the belief that Europe is God’s chosen people.

Having “no knowledge of God” also worked to designate colonized peoples within enclosed boundaries of being. Subsumed as lesser variations of the “local, hegemonic self-conception” of fifteenth century Europe, colonized peoples in the Caribbean were dealt with not as different peoples, with their own cultural practices and meanings, but as lesser versions of Christian Europe’s self-conception; that is, figures of Lack, who thereby have no claim to their own land, because they do not transform the land through labor.140 The ontological question, who, is bound up with the epistemological question of how these colonized lands were to be known. And the question of how is constituted around the presence of “knowledge of God” as fundamental to the categorization of, and empirical practices of colonizing, the “New World.”

It is helpful, then, if we think of colonial Christianity as a technology of power which constitutes labor, exchange, freedom, and captivity through the racializing and gendering of the religious. In this sense, there can be no pure or absolute referent for religion or the religious. In coloniality, the naming of the religious occurs within sites of contested power. This naming of the religious it not neutral, but cites the horizon of a conflict, of a problem for colonizers to name

and thereby oppose to themselves. At the same time, the religious is a site of indigenous resistance to colonization, for example, as the affirmation of indigenous ontologies, or strategic repetition in difference of the terms of colonial power.

2.2. The Secular as the Territory of Man

In her critique of Western humanisms, Sylvia Wynter argues that modern liberal humanism is constituted by the idea of race or racial history. To summarize her argument, I will briefly examine how Wynter argues we arrived at our hegemonic biocentric conception of the human. According to Wynter, the uniqueness of this conception is that it delinked Europe’s cultural order of consciousness from supernatural entities. Wynter locates the reason for this rupture in the counter-sociogenic conception heralded by the Renaissance humanists. The medieval Church’s life/death logic was anchored in its Heaven/Earth distinction, in which fallen creatures were confined to the dregs of the Earth. Heaven and Earth were in this episteme nonhomogenous spaces.

According to Wynter, it was “the Renaissance humanists’ revalorization of the ‘natural fallen man’ of the Christian schema, and its invention of Man as homo politicus,” that enabled the “division of Christian and Man into two conceptually and institutionally separable notions, and with the latter identity, that of Man, coming to take primacy as the political subject of the modern European state that was itself in the process of initiating what was to be its successful

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141 This will be addressed further in chapter 3, in particular vis-à-vis David Chidester, Savage Systems: Colonialism and Comparative Religion in Southern Africa (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1996).

challenge to, and displacement/replacement of, the hegemony of the Church.”\textsuperscript{143} It is this descriptive statement of Man as \textit{homo politicus} that redirects the aims of “salvation” to “this-worldly ends,” principally to maintain the stability, order, and territorial expansion of the State.\textit{But the revalorization of the world and “fallen man” rendered the “human” itself the carrier of the Heaven/Earth distinction.} Nonhomogeneity would now be located within the conception of the rational human, sustained against its irrational Others. That is, what Wynter calls the first partial phase of Man’s secularization transubstantiates the god-terms of transcendence and degradation into the human itself, such that those formerly characterized as “Enemies of Christ” are re-figured as “the Lack of ‘true humanness,’ allegedly because of their lack of Western European order of rationality (over-represented as rationality in general).”\textsuperscript{144} In this way, the secularization of “Christian” to “Man” relocates the space of absolute difference to the categorical distinctions of race.

\textit{Homo politicus} was to be fully secularized as it was re-written and re-signified in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as \textit{homo oeconomicus}. The figure of \textit{homo oeconomicus}, which Wynter names Man\textsuperscript{2}, would be anchored in the extrahuman force of Evolution and natural selection.\textsuperscript{145} In this way, the racialized conception of Man\textsuperscript{1} – \textit{homo politicus} - was re-conceived in the life/death code of the naturally selected/dysselected. In this way, the capitalist breadwinner would be represented as the proper form of the human because \textit{naturally selected} to be so, and all those many on Man’s underside as naturally dysselected. From within Man\textsuperscript{2}’s order of

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{143} Wynter, “On How We Mistook the Map for the Territory, and Re-Imprisoned Ourselves in Our Unbearable Wrongness of Being, of Désertre,” 137.

\textsuperscript{144} Wynter, “On How We Mistook the Map for the Territory, and Re-Imprisoned Ourselves in Our Unbearable Wrongness of Being, of Désertre,” 140.

\end{footnotesize}
consciousness all the horrors, dispossessions, and brutalities of global capitalism are naturalized as the unfortunate, but necessary, outcome of the extrahumanly directed process of natural selection/dysselection.

Thus, the global installation of the biocentric conception of *homo oeconomicus* depends on splitting Man from all His figures of lack/dysselection, which it is the work of the racial and the cultural to signify. For “the poor, the homeless, the ‘underdeveloped,’” the “unbearable wrongness of being” is made to seem a condition of their own failure to live up to the imperatives of human being.\(^\text{146}\) In this process of secularization, Christianity is transformed into a signifier of European anthropological genius, the expression of its superiority and civilization. Even after the figure of Man has been “degodded,” Christianity continues to be a marker of Europe’s superior genre of the human.

### 2.3. Writing Human Being in the Flesh

Through her reading of Fanon’s concept of sociogeny, Wynter argues that the history of class struggle (Marx) needs to be thought in its relation to the conflicts/struggle over competing conceptions of the human, conceptions that are themselves incarnated/instituted in the social divisions of each ethno-specific genre of the human.\(^\text{147}\) For Wynter, the human is not a noun but is instead apprehended as praxis. The human is not a true essence but can instead be thought as *homo narrans*, the praxeological coming to be of multiple genre specific enactments of the

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\(^{146}\) Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, its Overrepresentation – An Argument,” 325.

human. In this way, Wynter thinks the human similarly to Judith Butler’s notion of identity as performativity, identity as the ongoing work of improvisation.

Another way of putting this is that humans are fundamentally storytellers, who are distinguished from other beings precisely in their capacity to narrate who they are, and to socially institute that story. We are, for Wynter, the stories we tell about ourselves. But these stories are not ideological layers on an otherwise pure biological substance that could be called “the human.” Rather, drawing on Frantz Fanon’s elaboration of sociogeny, Wynter argues that these stories are neurochemically enfolded, such that we experience ourselves subjectively as members of a recognizable kin, with respective desire and aversion. Human beings are distinguished precisely by our constitution as bios/mythos.

Wynter argues that the human is actualized through its hybrid “set of instructions.” In this regard, to engage in what she terms a “science of the word” would mean the “study of an agency that functions according to the laws of nature and its genetically programmed ‘first set of instructions’ (biological genetic codes) whose role in this bios/mythoi hybrid context is to neurochemically implement the ‘second set of instructions’ (nongenetically chartered origin stories and myths).”¹⁴⁸ It is precisely this implementation that makes it possible for us to experience ourselves subjectively in “genre specific terms,” that is, as able to recognize ourselves and other subjects as part of a “referent-we.”¹⁴⁹ Wynter speculates that the dynamic of these two sets of instructions works as follows:

as inter-altruistic kin-recognizing member subjects of the same referent-we and its imagined community. As such, kin-recognizing member subjects law-likely and


performatively enact themselves/ourselves as ‘good men and women’ of their/our kind according to a nongenetically determined, origin-mythically chartered symbolically encoded and semantically enacted set of symbolic/death instructions. At the same time, at the level of bio/the brain, the above second set of instructions are genetically (neurochemically) implemented. This implementation occurs according to the ‘laws of nature’ first set of instructions, with the second set of instructions, thereby, being alchemically made flesh.150

In other words, the study of the Word is the study of the Word (second set of instructions) becoming flesh. Understood in this way, the subjective experience of the normal and abnormal arise from the neurochemical implementation of genre specific origin stories, symbolic life/death codes, and their behavior-regulatory matrix. Our contemporary hegemonic conception of the human as purely biological is precisely, according to Wynter, the ethno-specific symbolic of white-bourgeois Man (homo oeconomicus).151 This purely secular, purely biological conception of the human naturalizes the contingency of bourgeois rule as the outcome of the extrahuman authority of Nature. What is in fact an ethno-specific conception of the human, one in which the masculine capitalist breadwinner is cast as the image of the proper/fit subject, is overrepresented as isomorphic with the human itself. Or, as Wynter puts it, as Absolute Being, as the human without remainder.

Recent critical genealogies have historicized religion as an imperial/colonial category, a central classificatory object of knowledge for the regulation and evaluation of colonial space.152


As shown above, central to Wynter’s thesis is that human life is constituted not only at the level of biology, but also linguistically. The behavior of human beings, according to Wynter, is governed not only by biological-genetic codes, but by cultural-linguistic codes. Humans are humans by narrating themselves into collective existence. Wynter theorizes material culture as the enfleshment of specific orders of consciousness, by which humans are able to subjectively experience themselves as kin in relation to others or enemies. In this way, we can understand how, as Christendom’s conception of the human was “degodded,” the practices of the colonized were rewritten not as expressions of another (false) religious reasoning but as an expression of their essential (irrational) subhumanity. That is, indigenous bodies were redescribed as figures of lack in relation to Europe’s normative conception of human being.

This lack was a racial and religious lack. For example, Wynter cites the debate between Bartolomé de Las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda. Las Casas argued for the humane treatment of the Amerindian on the basis of a theological logic that the Amerindian could be “Christianized.” According to Las Casas, the human sacrifices of the Amerindian were indicative of a religious reasoning that was incorrect in its premises. As such, it could be corrected. But Sepúlveda argued within the logic of the descriptive statement of the Rational/Irrational. According to Sepúlveda, human sacrifice was a violation of the natural order, and thus was an indication of the irrationality (subhumanity) of the Amerindian. By making this argument, Sepúlveda legitimated European rule and authority over indigenous territories because European rule instituted and defended the natural order in its rule of law. The inhabitants of the land had no right to the land because their practice of human sacrifice gave evidence of their subhumanity, and only those who are human have a right to the land. Wynter argues,

The clash between Las Casas and Sepúlveda was a clash over this issue—the clash as to whether the primary generic identity should continue to be that of Las Casas’s theocentric
Christian, or that of the newly invented Man of the humanists, as the rational (or ratiocentric) political subject of the state (the latter as the “descriptive statement” in whose terms Sepúlveda spoke). [...] In this transumed reformulation, while the “significant ill” of mankind’s enslavement was no longer projected as being to the negative legacy of Adamic Original Sin, the concept of enslavement was carried over and redescribed as being, now, to the irrational aspects of mankind’s human nature. This redescription had, in turn, enabled the new behavior-motivating “plan of salvation” to be secularized in the political terms of the this-worldly goals of the state.¹⁵³

The difference between the two was not the issue of Spanish rule, but on what basis it should rest, and what practices should follow from that basis. The disagreement hinges not so much on the legitimacy of the colonial mission, but on which “descriptive statement” of the human that legitimacy rested.

2.4. Material Redemption and the Religiosity of Whiteness

[T]he West’s epochal shift was to be based on the transfer of the central behavior-regulating ‘redemptive process’ formerly centralized in the church under the direction of the celibate clergy. [...] In contrast, the new behavior-orienting goal of the state, that of the civitas saecularis, was conceptualized as a transumed this-worldly variant of the original feudal-Christian goal. [...] Instead it was in terms of mankind’s alleged enslavement to the irrational or sensory aspects of its human nature, that the earlier supraordinate goal of spiritual redemption and eternal salvation of the feudal order was replaced by that of rational redemption, through the state as intermediary. This new goal was to be achieved primarily through the individual’s action, as a rational citizen, in ensuring the stability, growth, and competitive expansion of the state. [...] Because of the specific terms on which the state transferred to its new, essentially mercantilist-political goal [...] all non-Christian peoples and cultures became perceivable only in terms of their usefulness to the European states in securing their this-worldly goal of power and wealth.¹⁵⁴

-Sylvia Wynter

Following Wynter’s reading of race as the answer to the new conception of human being being induced by the colonial encounter, we can summarize what happens to Christianity as


follows: under Man\(^1\) (roughly sixteenth through seventeenth centuries), Christianity is oriented around the question of the church-state relation, and grounds its organizing principle on Nature or natural law. The basis for doing so, as Wynter points out, is that God has created Nature for the benefit of “humankind.” The major questions that colonial administrators, missionaries, and intellectuals will confront are labor, civil society, and property. The mercantile colonial circulation is subordinated to the interests of Spanish and Portuguese statal economies. Relations between subjects of these statal economies are transformed as peasant lands are enclosed, and the state becomes the mediator of collective belonging.

Man\(^2\) (roughly eighteenth through twentieth centuries), what Wynter terms our present bio-economic answer to who and what we are, is grounded on the genetic or biological. This answer will also be co-constitutive of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries industrial labor regimes, which inform, and are informed by, evolutionary science. Under the episteme of Man\(^2\), the question of religion is answered by the development of a “science of religion,” which takes up the task of studying the role of religion in human evolutionary development. It is this bio-economic conception of the human that is filled out by the various evolutionary taxonomies of religion in the nineteenth century, which refigure the former civilized/heathen structure.\(^{155}\)

In both versions of Man, Wynter sees “redemption” as an ongoing structure organizing the symbolic representation of life and death. For Man\(^1\), this redemptive dialectic is structured by re-writing sin as “irrationality.” Which is to say, the sixteenth century articulation of *homo politicus* is constituted by categorizing the colonized peoples of the Caribbean, and the

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\(^{155}\) See Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* and Long, *Significations: Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion*. 

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enslaveable African, as figures of irrationality, thereby also figuring them as the “source of evil.”

Wynter generally cites 1492 as initiating a major transfer of European hegemony from Church to state. In this transfer,

the new polities of the post-Columbus Caribbean were eventually to be grounded on a new juridical premise. This premise was that of “natural” difference of degree between the rational natures of Christian Europeans and indigenes (Pagden 38-9) which legitimated, in statal rather than papal terms, expropriation of the latter and their territory by successive European states. The new Caribbean worlds were thereby instituted as the first secular answer to the question of the source of evil (to the unde malum) as soon as not theology but firstly natural history/law and secondly biology/evolution became the new ground of knowledge.

The discursive formation Wynter elaborates has a category for sin, a method for overcoming sin, and opens the way for situating the whole drama within the limits of “the natural world.” In the subsequent, bio-economic reformulation of Christian Europe’s onto-epistemology, history will be made the stage of the progressive, self-improvement or unfolding of its evolutionary success. But the point here is that the secularized ontology of human being actualized in the empirical destructions of settler-colonialism and slavery, is structured dialectically over against the Native as subhuman, and the Black African as the ultimate conceptual other to the human itself. It is around this new conception of the human that religion, as a category, gets defined.

Wynter’s own characterization of the new organizing principle of sixteenth century colonialism draws attention to the transmutation of a fifteenth century European theological grammar. She does so by describing that principle as “material redemption,” in distinction from

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156 Wynter, “‘A Different Kind of Creature’: Caribbean Literature, the Cyclops Factor and the Second Poetics of the Propter Nos,” 156.

157 Wynter, “‘A Different Kind of Creature’: Caribbean Literature, the Cyclops Factor and the Second Poetics of the Propter Nos,” 156.

158 See, for example, Denise Ferreira da Silva, Toward a Global Idea of Race (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).
“spiritual redemption,” on which the authority of the medieval church’s hierarchy was premised. Critical theorist Stuart Hall has also identified elements of medieval Christian Europe that contributed to the historical character of European colonialism. Among these, Hall points to the “drive for self-improvement” that animates the theological thinking and being of medieval Christendom, and its technologies of regulating behavior.\textsuperscript{159} Central to Christianity’s role in European expansion and conquest is what he calls European \textit{restlessness}, shaped by a Christian organization of social relations around the \textit{imperatives of moral and social improvement}.\textsuperscript{160}

Hall also points to how Christianity provided a social imagination for Europe, a degree of social connection and integration that helped these distinct “European” societies form a sense of collective identity. Given how deep intramural conflicts ran between what would become distinct European nations, Hall may overstate the role Christianity played to integrate the disparate European peoples. Hall’s point, however, has more to do with how the idea of Europe was consolidated by its formal identification with Christendom (Pius III, 1458).\textsuperscript{161} It does seem to be the case that even in the midst of intense conflict, war, and competition - all of which characterized the formation of European nations throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and arguably still do today - Christianity continued to play a central role in adjudicating an essential European identity; a shared interest in a broader civilizational project, for which each intramural member jockeyed for priority.

Hall points out that there are two other figures that were crucial to the development of a sense of European collective identity, or something called “the West:” the Jew as an internal


\textsuperscript{160} Hall, “The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power,” 197-201.

\textsuperscript{161} Hall, “The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power,” 197.
Other, and the Muslim as external other/enemy. Europe, or “the West,” constructed its own identity by constituting both the Jew and Muslim as not belonging to “the West,” to Europe. More than simply not belonging, the Jew was constituted as an internal threat, and the Muslim as an external threat.\footnote{Hall, “The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power,” 188.} As is now well known, the discourse Hall talks about becomes a racial discourse, and the Jew is biologized as a racial other, marked as an-other by their non-Christian blood. In other words, while Christianity provided the broad if loose social fabric for uniting Europe as Europe, what it meant to be Christian in this moment undergoes a transformation as well: to be Christian is to have Christian blood. Slowly, whiteness emerges as the organizing center of this new Christian belonging.\footnote{See in particular J. Kameron Carter, \textit{Race: A Theological Account}; and Willie J. Jennings, \textit{The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race}.}

What both Wynter and Hall demystify is the dialectical movement at the center of colonial political theologies. To be identifiable as a Christian being, one must be set in a relation of enmity with one-self. To be set against sin is to be set against one-self and one’s proclivity to sin, in order to overcome the founding enmity between one-self and God.\footnote{Gil Anidjar has a brilliant reading of the concept of the enemy in Augustine and Aquinas in, \textit{The Jew, the Arab: A History of the Enemy} (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).} The founding “enmity between God and (man)” cascades in a series of displacements, by which that founding dialectic is staged against the figures of evil and sin - the passions, sensuality, idolatry, and so on. It is also this dialectic that will be increasingly rationalized in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as the imperative of mercantile capitalism. Mercantile market expansion is organized towards this goal of inter-state competition.
In the Franco-British colonial era, the imperatives of material redemption are directed less towards the state than towards the enrichment of members of the national bourgeoisie, and the reconfiguration of the state as the administrator of private accumulation. If in the first phase of colonialism the enrichment of the emerging bourgeoisie served the primary interests of the State (as a political structure still distinct in some important ways from bourgeois rule), in the next phase the nation-state was to serve the interests of the bourgeois: this is the bourgeois nation-state form that Marx talks about.

### 2.5. Rational Religion

Charles Long has insightfully described how the symbol “civilization” contains within itself the meaning of “primitive.” The meaning of the primitive structures the meaning of civilization. Relatedly, the colonial discursive production of “religion” remains structured by the “Christian/heathen” binary. The religious, in this sense, is generative of the libidinal economies which cut back and forth across the Atlantic. The desire to fashion the world, to Christianize the world, is not reducible to an economic calculus. Clearly, there is an economic drive at work in the desire to Christianize the world, which will be increasingly rationalized in

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168 Jason Josephson-Storm has been at the center of recent efforts in the cultural study of religion to rethink the religion/secular binary as constituted by the often elided third term: superstition. It is only by means of the category of the superstitious that the difference between the secular and religion can be maintained, and as I argue, it is the category of the superstitious that occupies a central role in the production of secular nation-states as always already racialized. See Jason Å. Josephson-Storm, “The Superstition, Secularism, and Religion Trinary: Or Re-Theorizing Secularism,” in *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*, vol. 30, 1, 2018.
the nineteenth century as the natural, bio-evolutionary drive to master natural scarcity. But my point is that this material economic imperative is more helpfully thought as deeply entangled with the other affective economies formative of, and formed by, the practices of coloniality. Basically, to Christianize or civilize is a material force of expansion and conquest. These are not simply the ideological justifications that ride on top of the basic imperatives of accumulation. They, in many ways, signify the racial determination of social structures, which structure the flows of capital. To be clear, class interests here are not reducible to racial determination, but they are co-constitutive with the modern-colonial forms of collective belonging.

For example, René Descartes, in the mid-seventeenth century, argued the “human subject” was representable as a “material agency” over against “the natural.” Lindon Barrett points out that his re-writing of the human and subjectivity occurred in the same “period of the annexation of the Americas and the policies governing the opportunities to raise and traffic enormous quantities of goods in the new arena of the Atlantic economies, which transform the significance of the premodern axes of long-distance trade.” These transatlantic circuits will, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, be “formalized” as “the enormous trade circuit termed the triangular trade.” In the flows of this triangular circulation, “European manufactured objects are disposed of on the African coast in trade for slaves, who are shipped across the Atlantic as the requisite labor force for the massive production of the cash crops that in the final segment of the circuit are traded under the nationally protectionist policies of the European metropoles to serve the re-articulated desires of mass populations.”

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that the modern micro- and macro-political identities and psychic positions are forged.\textsuperscript{172}

It is in these circuits that we find the material determinants of the newly developing racial identities and subjects. As Barrett puts it, “the conceptual obfuscation, or upshot, is that the economic boon secured and re-secured by Europe and its outposts at each node of the Atlantic system of trade, the boon radically augmenting European diets, shipping, and markets, massively introduces sub-Saharan Africans and their descendants into the European ‘New World’ or, differently put, into the newest mechanism of European viability and, as forcefully, into individual and collective European imaginations.”\textsuperscript{173} The material modes by which Africans were conscripted into the triangular circuit would construct racial blackness as unable to inhabit the collective and individual subject positions emerging for Europeans, while also being the antithesis by which these new subjects would form themselves.

A similar dynamic cuts through the various colonial deployments of religion to designate subordinate and supraordinate positions in the transatlantic circuits. As an object of knowledge, religion is made coherent by the empirical practices of racializing and gendering colonized subjects designated as pagan or heathen. Under the episteme of \textit{homo politicus}, the religious is racialized as the irrational, and under \textit{homo oeconomicus}, as the superstitious. The imposition of colonial Christianity “rationalizes” in a double sense: first, in the attempt to systematize (to order logically or rationally) non-Western traditions as discrete religions after the mold of Christianity, and second, by writing colonized or enslaved peoples outside the semantic range of the Rational; that is, as the material expressions of the irrational - the fantastical or mystical - that must be

\textsuperscript{172} Barrett, \textit{Racial Blackness and the Discontinuity of Western Modernity}, 8.

\textsuperscript{173} Barrett, \textit{Racial Blackness and the Discontinuity of Western Modernity}, 6.
repressed and contained. And this racializing and gendering structures the organization of labor both in the colonies and within the boundaries of emerging European nations.¹⁷⁴

“Heathen” and “pagan” name bodies and material practices through discursive regimes of exploitation and expropriation. It is through these representations of the colonized that the expropriation of indigenous lands is negotiated, and political sovereignty is adjudicated. Which is to say, as the meaning of heathen is coming to articulate different, and differently valued, kinds of human beings, it is also elaborating regimes of expropriation and labor. When Spanish colonial domination in the latter sixteenth century shifts from plunder to settlement, and to the encomiendas, the category of “the heathen” will be called upon to articulate the labor regimes by which the “New World” is to be governed.¹⁷⁵

As Wynter points out, historians have shown that medieval Islam also developed categories for peoples in sub-Saharan Africa, which made Africans like the Zanj and Habasha legitimately enslaveable.¹⁷⁶ Not unlike the medieval Christian model of being, medieval Islam circulated “stereotyped images” of these sub-Saharan Africans “as the extreme term that embodied the absolute lack of the optimal criterion of being as well as of rationality that defined the medieval Islamic way of life.”¹⁷⁷ Wynter’s admittedly too monolithic deployment of “medieval Islam” notwithstanding, she insightfully pinpoints the logic by which these anti-black categories functioned: “a binary opposition between (as the extreme ends of a triadic model) people who traded like Muslims and peoples who - unlike either the Muslims or the intermediate

¹⁷⁴ This argument will be the focus of chapters three and four.


category of other peoples who traded in a rudimentary manner - did not trade at all and necessarily lived like ‘beasts,’ that is, conceptually other peoples like the Zanj, the Habasha.”

For my purposes, I want to draw attention to the broader role that trade or exchange plays here for putting certain African peoples outside the bounds of moral obligation. In the next chapter, we will see this logic at the center of naming “African/Black religions” in colonial comparative religion.

### 2.6. Blackness and Radical Alterity

Blackness, in Wynter’s project, is something like a radical insurgency. If the degradation of blackness functions to valorize the human, as the negative or symbolic death necessary to the integrity of Same, then black insurgency is not an incorporative praxis, but a portal to the worlds within the World. It is on the basis of representing the criminalized Black, the jobless Poor, as the Lack of human being, that human being is normatively made White, middle-class, and property-owning. Wynter’s proposal is that we can only break open this political ontology by thinking with the position of “radical alterity,” marrying our thought to the problems and well-being of the jobless Poor, the criminalized Black, the global ghettos - those who, within the terms of our hegemonic conception of the human, can only be perceived as the natural or necessary costs for realizing the well-being of the Middle-class, job-holders, and property owners.

This is especially critical given that Wynter insists “the central ideology strategy” of the Western Imaginary is to represent itself as supracultural, as if it is the Real itself, rather than a

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contingent, local cultural form of life. Wynter writes, “Caribbean slums, Brazilian favelas, inner
city ghettos of the US, all now reoccupy the place of the slave ships, quarters of new barracoons
no less cramped, where the Cyclops, physically unchained, is as firmly fixed to the place
assigned it by the narrative necessity of the text of our present Imaginary as were its
ancestors.” To repeat: if the degradation of the Native and the Black slave is a function of
valorizing the human, then to re-valorinze blackness is to already be imagining with-out or
beyond the genre of the human. This is worlds apart from attempting to valorize blackness by
making black persons appear human.

Wynter cites this difference as the critical difference between Creolism and Négritude.
Creolism attempted to represent Caribbean identity within the terms of the human, as a variation
of the human. In contrast, Wynter sees the position of Négritude as thinking and living from
“radical alterity.” She also sees this as the strategy the lay humanists took when they re-wrote
their own “place” in the empirical feudal hierarchy, by returning to the “stigmatized” Greco-
Roman heritage and claiming ownership of it. They invented themselves as the new and proper
mode of human being in this way. Their lay humanist “poetics” revalorized “natural fallen man.”
In so doing, they prepared the way for the “epochally new, because secular or increasingly
degodded, poesis of being and its sixteenth century invention of Man (in the reoccupied place of
Christian).”

180 Wynter, “‘Different Kind of Creature’: Caribbean Literature, the Cyclops Factor and the Second Poetics
of the Propter Nos,” 154.

181 Jared Sexton has referred to this incorporative gesture as anti-black black visibility. See Jared Sexton,

182 Wynter, “‘Different Kind of Creature’: Caribbean Literature, the Cyclops Factor and the Second Poetics
of the Propter Nos,” 155.
The Western strategy to not see itself as a culture is similar to the way that Marx thinks about capitalism as having a religious form: the separation of capitalism from human generation - to be the Real itself, not something a specific culture has created. Western culture installed its local culture globally, thus globalizing its Imaginary and local imperatives (behavior orienting codes). Because Wynter generally conceives of religion as ideology, she collapses what Wendy Brown argues are two distinct forms of power in Marx’s thought: ideology and religion.\(^\text{183}\)

According to Brown,

Marx embraced Feuerbach’s fundamental conviction that religion is an inherent emanation of all alienated and unfree social conditions. This emanation differs in its source and sustenance from ideology, which is a cloak for power generated by power itself. By contrast, religious consciousness expresses the separation of humans from the effects of their own generative capacities and the subordination of humans by powers (whether in nature or modes of production) larger than their aggregated selves (emphasis mine).\(^\text{184}\)

Following Brown’s distinction, one way its absence affects Wynter’s account is that Wynter is able to theorize how race and gender constitute labor, but not how religion constitutes labor; nor how religion constitutes, and is constituted by, gender, and race.

Wynter’s desire to inhabit a “secular poetics” limits her capacity to think the secular in the non-dialectical way her project moves. Her non-dialectical secular poetics remains, in some important ways, a project of overcoming our “hitherto” lack of autonomy in human world-making. Thus, Wynter looks past a crucial transmutation within her genealogy: how the meaning of religion has been defined for the sake of the naturalization of the bio-economic mode of the human as the truth of human being, which paradoxically obscures naturalization itself as a religious mode of power. I am arguing that the lay humanist revalorization of “natural fallen

\(^\text{183}\) Wendy Brown, “Is Marx (Capital) Secular?” in Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences, Volume 23, Number 1, Fall/Winter 2014, pp. 109-124

man” as rational political Man does not replace or even displace the hegemonic place of Christian as an identifier. It, instead, radically transforms the meaning of Christianity. It wrests the hegemony of Christianity from the authority of the clergy and the Church, and grants it to “the people” (Protestant Reformation), and in so doing participates in revalorizing European human-ness as rational, political Man. Rational, political Man is not the displacement of Christianity’s hegemony, but Christian hegemony’s new lease on life.

The meaning of Christian is in this moment being oriented by, or subordinated to, this hegemonic re-invention rather than replaced. And as a bio- and necro-political technology, Christianity remains central to suppressing and regulating alternatives, and re-forming “the communes” for the sake of the bio-economic vision of bourgeois accumulation and acquisition. The question of Christianity, and eventually of religions, is at the center of rational, political Man whose organizing principle is Nature or Natural Law, which institutes the Indios and the Black Slave as the source of evil - ensnared by irrationality, lacking political (rational) existence. This new meaning of European-ness will be constructed around and through a theological arithmetic: pagan = irrational, heathen = irrational. And this “epochal rupture” maintains the rational against the irrational by violently suppressing “pagan folklore” among European peasants, or indigenous practices that are marked as heathen or pagan by the colonizers. These repressive practices presume that there is a demonic power or influence at work, that “magic” or witchcraft does tap into some kind of power which is to be feared and opposed.\footnote{185}

Wynter herself is not unaware of this transmutation of Christianity. But I wonder if leaving religion un-problematized contributes to what Denise da Silva critiques as Wynter’s over-valuation of the scientific, which is itself one of the nineteenth century tools for instituting

\footnote{185 This will be the subject of interest in chapter four.}
the truth of race and our bio-economic genre of the human. Nevertheless, Wynter does point towards the centrality of a theological colonial grammar for producing the rational, political subject, and His right to expropriate the land and resources of the “New World.” She shows that to write the Caribbean historically, inside the cultural re-formations of European humanism - in which the Caribbean is the source of “human evil,” or waywardness; of Natives who are slaves to irrationality - heathenism is frequently represented as the ultimate expression of indigenous irrationality.

Irrationality, then, is worked out around improper beliefs, or beliefs in other materialities than Christendom’s belief structure. As the referent of indigenous practices, irrational means not Christian; which is to say, Christianity is being re-written as the condition for rationality (for political existence, or existence as homo politicus). Thus, killing the indigenous gods was imperative to installing homo politicus as the proper mode of human being. Wynter makes this point insistently, that empirical practices of destruction are the condition for establishing and enacting the hegemony of the Western Imaginary. Wynter writes, “[s]uch repression was the condition both of the flowering of the hegemonic Imaginary and of the enactment of the Western bourgeois poesis of being, Man, in the reinvented terms of its second conception as a genetically selected Self: eugenic rather than, as before, rational.” Such repression is not, then, something that can be made ancillary to Western Man and the global installation of the human, but is its condition of possibility.

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187 Wynter, “‘Different Kind of Creature’: Caribbean Literature, the Cyclops Factor and the Second Poetics of the Propter Nos,” 159.
This suppression, however, means that Christianity as a technology of *homo politicus* is preceded by anterior forms of life. Colonial Christianizing is a *response* to the a priori life and living that exposes the incoherence and instability of *homo politicus* as the proper mode of human being itself. In her comments on whether Creole is neo-European or neo-African (because constituted between French and West African languages), Wynter writes, “the frontier between them remains indecisive.” This indecision cuts across the entire colonial project, in its various phases and distinct geographies. That is to say, in order for whiteness to emerge and enact itself as the ideal of the human - to enact itself (positively, as the Real, Man) - it must continually reiterate and instate (violently) the frontier, whose indecision requires its repetition to give it the appearance of truth. Exploitation and expropriation are the practices by which the human is constituted, and thus are essential to its installation.

### 2.7. Beyond Bio-economic Man

Before moving towards a close, I want to reposition the emphasis to the bio-economic ontology of the human, which Wynter argues is the hegemonic conception we inhabit, and in relation to which blackness is always already queer. According to Wynter, the present world system and “its nation-state sub-units” are hierarchically organized on the basis of the conception of the human as purely organic, organized by genetic status (selected/dysselected). That is, global hierarchy is “based on evolutionarily pre-selected degrees of *biological value*, as iconized

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188 Wynter, “‘Different Kind of Creature’: Caribbean Literature, the Cyclops Factor and the Second Poetics of the Propter Nos,” 167.

189 Wynter, “‘Different Kind of Creature’: Caribbean Literature, the Cyclops Factor and the Second Poetics of the Propter Nos,” 167.
in the White/Black invariant differential.”\textsuperscript{190} Our hegemonic perceptual grid attaches value differentially to White/Black as the structural distinction by way of which degrees of evolutionary selection and value can be figured. Value, in this grid, is not ordained by God but by genetics: by Natural Selection or Evolution.

Wynter points out that the White/Black invariant also enables the \textit{analogical} differentiation of middle-class from under-class, as genetically superior. The genetic or biological is represented as the basis for hierarchy, and for the classifications to which the genetic gives rise (selected/dysselected). Which is to say, anti-blackness also informs the differentiation of those internal to the valorization of whiteness; anti-blackness offers a model for elaborating different eugenic degrees of value enacted in the relations of class domination. Thus, the degradations that materialize whiteness, kill “white people” too. Wynter points out that especially in the U.S., the degradation of blackness has played a fundamental function in verifying the hegemonic truth of the bio-economic model of Man. It functions to enable, “a U.S. bourgeoisie, rapidly growing more affluent, to dampen class conflict by inducing their own working class to see themselves, even where not selected by Evolution in class terms, as being compulsorily, altruistically bonded with their dominant middle classes by the fact of their having all been selected by Evolution in terms of race.”\textsuperscript{191} In the same way as the theological order of knowledge served to verify the truth of the empirical social hierarchies of feudalism, Wynter proposes that the Humanities and Social Sciences serve to verify the truth of “the human” as purely biological, and to naturalize our present global hierarchies (of race and class) as expressions of “evolutionary pre-selected degrees of eugenic ‘worth’” between human

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{190} Wynter, “No Humans Involved-An Open Letter to My Colleagues,” 50.
\item \textsuperscript{191} Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, its Overrepresentation – An Argument,” 323.
\end{itemize}
groups.” This is one reason why the theme of the human must be made a subject of these disciplines, in order to challenge how bio-economic Man operates as the normative conception of human being.

For the order of Man, evolution functions as the extra-human ground or principle of variation or inequity. The meaning of the human, in this frame, can only be ascertained in the developmental stages of evolution. The classificatory logic of the modern episteme apprehends this development through the separations and divisions of “classification.” Just as in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the Christian mission “to the world” was materialized in the imperative to increase the wealth and power of the state, the “material redemption” of our bio-economic political imaginary directs the imperatives of our behavior towards the well-being of the bourgeois state, and the bourgeois class. Wynter argues,

[I]n the wake of the West’s second wave of imperial expansion, pari passu with its reinvention of in Man now purely biologized terms, it was to be the peoples of Black African descent who would be constructed as the ultimate referent of the “racially inferior” Human Other, with the range of other colonized dark-skinned peoples, all classified as “natives,” now being assimilated to its category--all of these as the ostensible embodiment of the non-evolved backward Others--if to varying degrees and, as such, the negation of the generic “normal humanness,” ostensibly expressed by and embodied in the peoples of the West.

In formulating the matter this way, Wynter positions anti-blackness as foundational to the social structures by which the bourgeois mode of production is naturalized as the “proper” mode of human being. As the evolutionary “missing link,” the “Black African” is the constitutive outside by which the human can be thought as a historical, and progressive movement. It is within the

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194 Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, its Overrepresentation – An Argument,” 266.
terms of this bio-economic conception of human being that the empirical marks of poverty, idleness, and so on, can be perceived as “forms of [biological] defectiveness.”

This biological conception of Man (in pure continuity with organic life) is the economic conception of Man, as oriented by the imperatives of natural scarcity, and selection: to survive, to compete, to win. It is represented as the answer to what form of the species is best capable of surviving and flourishing. Basically, it is the hegemonic conception that governs the bio-economical well-being of the nation-state writ large, and therefore of the people (as a body) who constitute it. In this way, the “health” of the species is organized by the conditions necessary to the accumulation regimes of the bourgeoisie. That is, bourgeois interests are over-represented as the interests of the nation (and by extension the world) in general.

It is under the hegemony of this bio-economic ontology that redemption structures biological development, in the form of the progress of the human species (mastering natural scarcity). I am arguing that the modern-colonial conception of religion is oriented by what Wynter identifies as this racialized, biocentric conception; that the question of religion is oriented by what promotes the overall flourishing of Western civilization, of what contributes to its evolutionary progress or development. This bio-economic conception also organizes how the boundaries of religion get drawn up - where religion is divided from the non-religious. That is, the bio-economic norm not only organizes which religions are promoted (where they are classified and ranked hierarchically) but what religion is (given that the biocentric conception is an origin story, is a Master narrative). The biocentric Human as a noun, governs the meaning of “religion” and its sub-units. Which is to say, colonial Christianity makes itself identical with this

195 Wynter, “‘Different Kind of Creature’: Caribbean Literature, the Cyclops Factor and the Second Poetics of the Propter Nos,” 160.
extra-human civilizational imperative, and then re-writes its colonized others as having a
religion. The biocentric conception is installed by carving up indigenous social life, and re-
naming some aspects as “religion.”

We can trace the contours of Man in the formal political theory of these moments. For example, the kind of national, political mediation theorized by people like John Locke (1632-
1704), shaped the past meaning of religion in relation to the dreams and desires for a purely
political form of collective association. According to Locke, political society is distinguished
from Man’s condition in the state of nature. By nature, man is

free, equal, and independent, no one can be put out of this estate, and subjected to the
political power of another, without his own consent. The only way whereby any one
divests himself of his natural liberty and puts on the bonds of civil society is by agreeing
with other men to join and unite into a community for their comfortable, safe, and
peacable living one amongst another, in a secure enjoyment of their properties, and a
greater security against any that are not of it […] When any number of men have so
consented to make one community or government, they are thereby presently
incorporated, and make one body politic, wherein the majority have a right to act and
conclude the rest.196

Which is to say, it is not simply that the political mediation of collective identity replaces and
assumes the function formerly performed by “religion.” Rather, “religion” in the discourses of
the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is being defined in such a way that the political can be
clearly distinguished from it.

In other words, our common sense notions about what religion does - is the social glue
that binds together a people, and mediates their collective identity to each member of the group -
is the mirror image of the political ideal to which Enlightenment thinkers aspired. Such common
sense orients religion around enclosed, bounded identities. Given the critical genealogies of

196 John Locke, The Second Treatise of Government and a Letter Concerning Toleration (Mineola, New
religion elaborated in the previous chapter, this seems to me to be a projected function of religion, so that the political can be aspired to as the “natural” form - the emancipated form - of religion.

2.8. “The Religion of Whiteness on the Shores of Our Times”

If modern-colonial Christianity is indeed a racializing technology, it engineers space and bodies in order to make the world habitable for the human. Columbus’ cross-Atlantic mission transformed the organizing principle of future Spanish colonial ventures. Columbus’ voyage broke from the medieval map of the world by proving there was land - habitable land - where nothing was suppose to exist. The ensuing shift in Europe’s self-conception would begin to be governed by the desire, and imperative, to create heaven on earth. In the context of early European colonialism, whiteness begins to take shape as the aspiration to a certain kind of heaven on earth.

This aspiration is conditioned by relocating heaven as that which Europeans were in the process of reclaiming, or in some way realizing, on earth. In this regard, Carolyn Merchant tracks how narratives of the Garden of Eden have shaped the material expansion of European colonialism, and contemporary U.S. capitalist logics of development. She writes, “the Garden of Eden story has shaped Western culture since earliest times and the American world since the 1600s. We have tried to reclaim a lost Eden by reinventing the entire earth as a garden. […] From Christopher Columbus’ voyages, to the search for the fountain of youth, to John Steinbeck’s East of Eden, visions of finding a lost paradise have motivated global exploration,

settlement, and hope for a better life.”\(^{198}\) The project to reclaim Eden expresses the religiosity of whiteness, grounded in a claim to a fictive biological inheritance, as a claim upon the earth itself. The religiosity of whiteness is upheld by this secularity: its claim to the universe itself.

Thus, the religiosity of whiteness is materialized in its racializing and gendering practices which disenchant other forms of kinship and moral obligation, and enchant whiteness as the sovereign community with the power to decide inclusion and exclusion: who belongs, and who does not. By “appropriating eternity,” whiteness’ own religiosity is about maintaining control of the power structures by which life and death are over-determined.\(^{199}\) Critical praxis aimed at expanding the boundaries of the human - a more inclusive Western humanism - reproduces the sovereign, religious power of whiteness as the Subject, or community of subjects, who control the borders of belonging.

In contrast, Wynter’s critical interventions draw out how the degodded figure of Homo politicus is degodded by appropriating eternity. This is to say, what Wynter theorizes as degodding is the colonial split from a divine anchor to human existence, by re-grounding the structures of divinity within the now temporally extended (infinitely developing) human. Which, is to say, the degodded figure is degodded not by doing away with the structures of medieval Christian theology, but by re-writing them within the subsequent versions of the human (i.e. Man\(^1\) and Man\(^2\)). This appropriation of eternity is the religious core or anthropology that animates and structures Homo politicus and Homo oeconomicus. Both are articulated vis-à-vis religion or the religious, not only in the way they continue to ground or anchor themselves in an


extra-human force (Nature or Evolution, as Wynter argues), but in their internal structure and contradictions.

The historical shift from Spanish and Portuguese colonialism, to British and French dominated colonialism, marks a more complete transition from whiteness as belief not in the divine right of kings to rule, but on the belief in money. Belief in money requires belief in its guarantors. Whiteness, in this way, operates as both a kind of property, and as the guarantor of property relations.\(^\text{200}\) Faith in money is backed by the economic and political institutions of the bourgeois state. All other forms of faith are subordinated to, and distinguished from, the centrality of money. If economists are indeed the priests of our times, as Wynter puts it, then perhaps financial institutions are our temples. Marx saw clearly how the entire money economy depends on the belief in money, on its constitution by forms of credit and debt.\(^\text{201}\) As Christianity granted the legitimacy of “religion” to its others, it did so as it was tying the meaning of religion to the progressive improvement of the human species, culminating in Western political and economic domination of the world; thereby tying the meaning of religion to the needs of capital accumulation. This “gift” of religion does not elevate Europe’s others, but profanes them: “religion” indicates the bounded, specific practices of a community, or their cultural capacity for the transcendent. Such practices are made profane or worldly by being known as “a religion,”

\(^{200}\) In her seminal essay, Cheryl I. Harris tracks legal cases by which “the set of assumptions, privileges, and benefits that accompany the status of being white have become a valuable asset that whites sought to protect […] Whiteness and property share a common premise – a conceptual nucleus – of a right to exclude.” See Harris, “Whiteness as Property,” in *Harvard Law Review*, Volume 106, Number 8 (June 1993), 1707-1791.

while whiteness’ belief in money, in history, and progress is figured as sacred, transcendent, and inviolable.\footnote{202 See Asad, 
*Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*, 23.}

Medieval Christendom splits itself into “church” and “state” by re-creating itself as that which it had originally denied to its others: a religion. What Wynter calls the “material redemption” of Man achieves a partial emancipation from the symbolic order of the church by re-figuring the terms of the sacred. Man’s truth is grounded on, and grounds, the claims of capital in extra-human authority, on history and science. As the ideal of the human, whiteness develops by gendering and racializing the shifting terrain of hierarchical relations, especially as those hierarchies were being transformed from feudal society to the bourgeois state.

David Theo Goldberg’s provocative thesis gets at aspects of these dynamics. Goldberg proposes,

What struck me was the ways in which race became […] a civic religion. Modernity’s progressive self-secularization opened other forms of theological commitment and expression. Race is key among them, a secularization of the theological. Race increasingly configured that which the theological had served to do in political and sociological terms under earlier regimes of conception, order, and arrangement, but adding and elaborating over time specific forms of what Foucault later would call biopower. So race was conceived to operate in much the way that theology does: as belief commitments or convictions, as a regime of truth, as defining what could and could not be thought, said, and done, how and what to believe, what bodies count, what behavior to promote or restrict, who belongs to the community and who not. Like religion, race embeds claims of both origin and kinship. In short, what is at issue are beliefs, bodies, and behavior, culture and character.\footnote{203 David Theo Goldberg, 
*Sites of Race: Conversations with Susan Searls Giroux* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014), 49.}

To say race functions as a “modern civic religion” is to say something similar to the function of religion in the genealogy Wynter tracks, but it is also to invoke the specificity of Protestant Christianity. Asad traces this configuration of religion, and its authorizing powers, to the
Protestant Reformation. The Reformation repurposed a church structure in crisis, and unleashed its productive, disciplinary power in the fragmented, individuated forms of voluntary Protestant associations.²⁰⁴ For Luther, the emancipation of the individual Christian from the authority of the Church hierarchy is exchanged for reactionary allegiance to political authority, as the moral responsibility attendant to individual freedom in matters of faith.²⁰⁵

Goldberg points out that in the seventeenth century, polygenesis was increasingly compelling to account for differences in embodiment itself (e.g., skin color, facial features, noses, different social arrangements, language and so on).²⁰⁶ In this way, Goldberg points to the biopolitical theodicy of whiteness, or its biodicy: the knowledge of the source and origin of evil (evil now rationalized as backwards or lacking proper human development) is afforded by the analytics of race. Race is made the explanatory principle for evil in the world. As such, its logic can also be the guiding principle for uncovering the sources of “degeneracy” within whiteness itself. Whiteness, that is, does not homogenize “white people.” Rather, it is imposed on “white people” through highly differentiated, unequal relations of power.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁴ Kathi Weeks has pointed to the double-edged sword of this Christian liberty. On the one hand, it was taken up by the German peasants in their militant resistance to the nobility. On the other hand, it internalized self-discipline, by which the exploited classes could willingly submit to their own subordination. See Kathi Weeks, The Problem With Work (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 58.


²⁰⁶ Goldberg, Sites of Race: Conversations with Susan Searls Giroux, 51.

²⁰⁷ Fordism was a re-organization of the relations of production, and it was a social organization. It was explicitly a project designed to regulate the behavior and morals of social reproduction broadly. The locus of this project was the production of the moral individual and the moral family. The bourgeois organization of labor is responsive to eugenic theories of degeneracy. Fordism, in this sense, is a racial theory: it organizes industrial production and the domestic reproduction of the worker to discipline and regulate the degenerative tendencies of workers. Workers, the theory goes, belong to a lower racial stock than the bourgeois. This distinction is made internal to whiteness. But this distinction is made precisely to order the coherence of whiteness, to rationalize the maintenance of social hierarchies produced by, yet simultaneously threatened in, the class relations of industrial capitalism (Étienne Balibar). Race fixes in place the class hierarchies of industrial capitalism, as the material-cultural structure that forms social solidarity through allegiance to the national form. See, for example, Simon
The key point is that whiteness’ claim to the universe is constituted by re-locating the source of sin or evil to the body. Bodies are differentiated through the practices of racial distinction, and those differences made meaningful as the expression of degrees of value or degradation. Wynter’s point is that these different degrees of degradation are represented in the episteme of Man as effects of the extrahuman evolutionary force, that is, as effects of Evolution’s “design.” The colonial practices of dispossession and exploitation, by which the colonizer/colonized relation is constituted, are represented discursively as effects of Nature. Sociologist Bernard McGrane tracks how the figure of “the savage” in the nascent forms of Enlightenment is figured in relation to the problem of “God’s design.”

“Demonic” difference is “consciously humanized. It is intended, seen and affirmed as human difference, and simultaneously that human difference is experienced on the horizon of a Christian moral theodicy.” In Foucault’s modern episteme, “‘God’s design’ would drop away and the diversity of these other ways of life would be understood ‘scientifically’ in relation to the history and progress, or evolution, of civilization, to a different kind of theodicy.” In the nineteenth century, the scientific mode of knowledge would take up this question of design in relation to the historical and spatial. The theological figurations of the demonic, the savage, the manifestations of absolute evil or its influence - are biologized in the formation and consolidation of capitalist societies and labor relations.

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209 McGrane, Beyond Anthropology: Society and the Other, 46.

210 McGrane, Beyond Anthropology: Society and the Other, 46.
2.9. Conclusion

What I have begun to develop in this chapter is a method and theoretical model for tracking how religion has been the site of racial violence, of refusal, and thus also the site of living in excess of this violence. Schematically, this violence which distinguishes Man’s subhuman racial others shifts from the register of “No knowledge of God,” to the bio-economic register, in which nineteenth century taxonomies of religion consistently mark blackness as animalistic - the bestial mode of religion. It is in, around, and through religion that it has been determined who the others of the human are, and what can be done to them. As will become clear, these questions are also productive of the internal settler-colonial violence by which European nations subjected Europeans to exploitation and violence. This is to say, the practices of communal violence by which whiteness constructs itself in distinction from its racial others, also differentiate in and among “white people,” along axes of lesser and greater value. Colonialism forms the networks by which European nations defined their borders, privatized land, and re-made the world and its peoples for the sake of control over capitalist regimes of labor, accumulation, and acquisition.

By situating the formation of what Foucault terms the modern episteme in coloniality, Wynter theorizes how race subsequently anchors the question of who and what human beings are. The violent project of whiteness, in other words, renders the limits, presence, and possibilities of the human knowable. Whiteness does not constructs itself as a fait accompli; it is not a given, but is the organizing principle of the modern political imaginary, the organizing principle of the racial scale, and its metonyms of distinction: including, but not limited to, underdeveloped/developed, citizen/alien, law-abiding/criminal, hard-working/lazy. Whiteness functions as a goal and imperative. Blackness, in this regime, names the fundamental point of
non-being, and enables the cuts and divisions internal to the human.\textsuperscript{211} In the bio-economic onto-epistemology of modernity, blackness is the “missing link” between ape and Man.\textsuperscript{212} As such, the internal divisions of the human, and the conflicts internal to whiteness itself, are bound up with the material and discursive thingification of whiteness’ racial others.

Naturalization, we might say, is a kind of disenchanted sacralization; a way of marking the inviolable. To render racial capitalism natural and powerful has always involved processes of mystification, of misrepresentation or misrecognition. To point to these processes is to point to how racial capitalism operates religiously. This is Wynter’s point too, that the secularization of Christendom is accomplished by re-fashioning the terms of religion. Racial capitalist modernity’s own religiosity - its power, naturalness, and universal history - is constituted as a claim upon religiosity proper, upheld by whiteness as the sovereign community of the naturally selected.

What constitutes this naturalization - which is to say, divination - of whiteness’ political-economy is its constitutive outside. Whiteness becomes owner of the earth - or ‘sovereign’ - by separating itself material and symbolically from the Native and the enslaveable African. Africa has been “the fetish” by which the community of the human has defined its borders, boundaries, obligations and fantasies. Lindon Barrett puts it this way:

The modern civic proposition of self-coherence granting national identity as its most hyperbolic form proceeds from the conscription of sub-Saharan Africans and their descendants into the severest routines of the Atlantic commercial cycles […] Both actually and figuratively ‘the people’ and the nation, historically and paradigmatically, depend on the massive production and movement of the cash crops cocoa, coffee, indigo, rum, sugar,
and tobacco that elicits the international competition over the economic values of the Caribbean basin, competition sponsoring and orienting the first modern national formations. The reason in question forcefully determines racial blackness as the ideal, adamant recognition of African-derived peoples as if exploitable, indispensable, fully account quantities. The disposition of racial blackness is the impossible point of human conception in the enterprise – foreclosed as the unnamed violence of human visibility (my emphasis).\textsuperscript{213}

In the formation of the transatlantic circuits, and their macro- and micro-political subjects, there is the foreclosure of the African from the economy of value, who is paradoxically at its center as an object of accumulation and production; the figure of no-value by which the valuable is generated. At “the door of no return” is a theological practice of naming, of capture, which produces architectures of death for the global dispossessed, in order that the providentially chosen few may thrive.\textsuperscript{214}

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\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{213} Barrett, Racial Blackness and the Discontinuity of Western Modernity, 43.
\item \textsuperscript{214} This phrase is Dionne Brand’s. See Brand, A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 2001).
\end{itemize}
CHAPTER THREE

SETTLER-COLONIALISM: THE INSTALLATION OF THE HUMAN UNDER THE SHADOW OF RELIGION

In a recent conversation on the Black Lives Matter movement, Fred Moten apprehends contemporary modes of policing as the ongoing project of settler-colonialism. Moten comments, “settlers always think they are defending themselves.”

Settlers build forts, Moten and Harney remind us, to protect themselves from their surroundings. The settler imaginary depends for its existence on that which it disavows as a threat to itself - the surround, the common, the general conditions of possibility. Generativity is that which is simultaneously the settler’s condition of possibility, and that which the settler fears and attempts to regulate. Regulation, though, always gives up the lie to which regulation must be committed. Regulation presumes the other-wise, is meaningless apart from the possibility to be other, which the regulatory kicks into motion to clip.

For example, when the Connecticut Missionary Society issued a pamphlet in 1817, chairman Timothy Dwight highlighted the “‘moral dangers’ of the American frontier.” From Dwight’s settler perspective, “the frontier emigrants were surrounded by dangerous influences, none more worrisome than the wilderness itself.”

But for Moten and Harney, the point is not only the perverse “inversion” of aggression and self-defense in such accounts. Rather, “the


217 Amy DeRogatis, Moral Geography: Maps, Missionaries, and the American Frontier, 2.
image of a surrounded fort is not false. Instead, the false image is what emerges when a critique of militarised life is predicated on the forgetting of the life that surrounds it. The fort really was surrounded, is besieged by what still surrounds it, the common beyond and beneath – before and before – enclosure. Enclosures, and the forts or police departments constructed to defend this armed incursion, are false images - idols - which represent themselves as the Real. Settler modernity’s claim to being the Real, its claim to the earth and cosmos, constitutes its religiosity. But, the surround “antagonises the laager.”

Such an approach reframes critique, and reframes that which threatens critique. “Our task,” according to Moten and Harney, “is the self-defense of the surround in the face of repeated, targeted disposessions through the settler’s armed incursion. And while acquisitive violence occasions this self-defense, it is recourse to self-possession in the face of dispossession (recourse, in other words, to politics) that represents the real danger. Politics is an ongoing attack on the common – the general and generative antagonism – from within the surround.” Politics is, in this sense, anti-social. It rests on self-possession, a turn away from the commons and toward the representation of subjects capable of recognition by the state. Such a “recourse to self-possession in the face of dispossession” tempts us to grant the false image of enclosure the authority of truth. The “hard materiality of the unreal” fixes our gaze. We come to register the assault on the common as the condition for civil society, which is never anything but the denial of the social life of the surround.

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218 Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study (New York: Minor Compositions, 2013), 17.

219 Harney and Moten, The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study, 17.
The missionizing or civilizing engine of modern settler-colonialism historicizes an “aspiration to be everywhere,” which Lindon Barrett refers to as an effect of a syntax of value.

Moten and Harney caution us,

Uncut devotion to the critique of this illusion makes us delusional. In the trick of politics we are insufficient, scarce, waiting in pockets of resistance, in stairwells, in alleys, in vain. The false image and its critique threaten the common with democracy, which is only ever to come, so that one day, which is only never to come, we will be more than what we are. But we already are. We’re already here, moving. We’ve been around. We’re more than politics, more than settled, more than democratic. We surround democracy’s false image in order to unsettle it. Every time it tries to enclose us in a decision, we’re undecided.  

Settlement, then, aims past the enclosure of lands, at the sociality of connection - of the surround. Hedges enact separations, hard materialities that are illusory. Gates create the illusion of a gated community, “claiming to defend what it cannot enclose.”

In this chapter, I elaborate settler-colonialism as a practice of installing the Human, under the shadow of religion. The aim is to put into focus how the Human is a structure of value in relation to that which can generate value but not be valued in itself. Thus, I put into clearer focus how the Human is shadowed not only by religion, but by capital. Perhaps most simply, capital value is generated in what Alexander Weheliye terms racializing assemblages, by which peoples and places are differentially valued as human, sub-human, and non-human. The empirical destructions and expropriations of settler-colonialism are the means by which the world is claimed by and for racial capitalism. That is, settler-colonialism is the practice of the God-like sovereignty of Western political ontology.

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220 Harney and Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study*, 18.

221 Harney and Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study*, 18.

Through an examination of comparative religion in colonial South Africa, David Chidester’s work situates the history of comparative religion at the nexus of these procedures. Religion, as it was invented in European colonialism, becomes inseparable from the question of whether, and to what extent, certain peoples and places are occupied by “the human.” The discursive production of religion by colonialists functions to establish the limit of human being itself, of the quality of humanity, to enact the divisions and boundaries by which the human recognizes itself. Religion is one site (sight) at which the bourgeois possessive individual, the subject of capital, is made “essential humanity” by establishing the dominance of capitalist relations of production and exchange through the violence that denies indigenous African humanity. The hegemony of bourgeois subjectivity is worked out in part through the distinctions and descriptions of African “religion,” which were, as Chidester argues, “thoroughly and completely a European invention.” This does not mean that the practices Europeans designated as “religion” did not exist, but that they did not exist in the aggregated and degraded form by which they were defined by the settlers.

My use of the term “religion” in this chapter is limited to this work of invention, in its material-discursive aspects. Relatively, my use of the term “Christianity” refers to how the term is deployed by the agents of colonialism to name and subjugate indigenous peoples as inferior humans. As such, I aim to draw out the features of the hegemonic white-bourgeois-masculine subject that is, through such deployments, valorized in the shadows. First, I connect the racial distinctions constitutive of the human to the modern category of religion. I then focus on David Chidester, Savage Systems: Colonialism and Comparative Religion in Southern Africa (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1996), 71.
Chidester’s genealogy as a case study for the argument, before concluding with some brief reflections on what escapes the enclosures signified in the category of religion.

3.1. Religion and The Human as a Structure of Value

Recall that for Gil Anidjar, the limits of colonial Christianity cannot be circumscribed to the formal category of religion in modernity. Instead, Anidjar argues that the secular/religion division was the means by which Christendom divided itself, so as to re-write its difference and superiority vis-à-vis its colonized Others.\(^{224}\) I have argued that the means by which Christendom secularized itself was the biologization of itself and its enemies through the tools of the racial. In this sense, the ongoing colonial practices of racial distinction are the trace of Christendom. Wherever the question of race or racialization is involved, there is the specter of imperial-colonial Christianity. For example, in his book on racialization in colonial Virginia, Steve Martinot points out that before the racialization of English identity as “white,” English identity was structured by the “Christian/heathen” distinction.\(^{225}\) In *Black Marxism*, Cedric Robinson talks about the proximity of Christianity and European racialism. Sylvia Wynter, obviously, places Christianity at the center of race-making. And Anidjar, again, talks about Europe being an idea forged in relation to “the Jew, the Arab.”\(^{226}\) That is, Anidjar desediments the idea of Europe in the movement between the Jew, the Arab.

Anidjar will also point to the way Christendom slowly grants its own socio-historical formations and institutions to those upon whom it imposes itself; religion, he argues, being chief


In an engagement with Edward Said’s seminal work *Orientalism*, Anidjar argues that the same discourses and institutions of power/knowledge that produce something called the West by producing something called the Orient are the discourses and institutions that produce the West as secular. Anidjar argues,

> the religious and the secular are terms that, hopelessly codependent, continue to inform each other and have persisted historically, institutionally, in masking (to invoke Asad’s term) the one pertinent religion, the one and diverse Christianity and Western Christendom in the transformations and reincarnations, producing the love (or hate) of religion (all scare quotes dropped). Like that unmarked race, which, in the related discourse of racism, became invisible or ‘white,’ Christianity invented the distinction between religious and secular, and thus it *made* religion. It made religion the problem – rather than itself. And it made it an object of criticism that needed to be no less than transcended.²²⁸

All of this is to say, the secular is not an absolute rupture from global Western Christian imperialism. Rather, it is the rebranding of that imperial project by which the West (formally) forgives itself not of imperialism and colonialism, but of doing so under the banner of “true religion.” The point, for Anidjar, is the continuity of the project that goes by the name Western secular democracy and Christian imperialism. The distinction between secular/religion is strategically deployed by Western ruling elites to carry on what is, in fact, a global imperial project that is mostly continuous with the imperial project articulated through the discourse of Christendom. It is not that the differences do not matter, but the more interesting question is what do the differences do, given that contemporary discourses of national security and international development produce the ongoing global domination of peoples and places subjugated by


Christian imperialism. The alleged opposition (between secular and religion) puts the focus of the problem on one term or the other, rather than exploitation and inequality.\textsuperscript{229}

These very different historical and theoretical analyses of race point to the contiguity between racialization and Christianization. Even internal to the structure of whiteness, the racialization of inferior Europeans (e.g. Irish and Italians) occurs through religion: their religion and language are the material expressions of, and vehicle for, their racialization as non-white.\textsuperscript{230} This is where Cedric Robinson’s critique in \textit{Terms of Order} is helpful. Robinson surveys the foundational texts of Western political philosophy to argue that the paradigm of “the political” is premised on conceptions of order, authority, and leadership that are taken for granted. That is, the coordination of these concepts constitutes what Robinson calls the “metaphysics” of Western political theory. The privileging of “order,” and the political as the form of social organization that exists for the sake of maintain order, constitute a tautology. As such, the equation of “the political” with “order” crowds out radical critiques of, and alternatives to, the paradigm of the political.\textsuperscript{231} In particular, because the paradigm is premised on “order” as the goal and reason for the existence of the political, the designation of disorder or the disorderly mark the points at which the political springs into action to bring into submission. Racialization traffics in marking subjects as “disorderly,” inherently so, and such designations have also been deployed to design

\textsuperscript{229} Anidjar, \textit{Semites: Race, Religion, Literature}


\textsuperscript{231} See Cedric Robinson, \textit{The Terms of Order: Political Science and the Myth of Leadership} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016). Robinson historicizes the paradigm of “the political,” in order to demonstrate that the presumptions on which it rests, namely order and leadership over against disorder, are its metaphysical legs. The Western paradigm of the political cannot demonstrate the truth of the concepts on which it relies, but must at every moment assume them to be natural and ahistorical.
techniques of labor control over white workers.\textsuperscript{232} The “irrational,” or superstitious, plays a critical role in fueling the processes of racialization by marking the boundaries of civilization, order, and market society generally. Superstition or the irrational is the threat against which order generates itself.

If, generally, the medieval conception of otherness was organized by a theological order of knowledge, then the new order of knowledge does not so much do away with theological-philosophical boundaries that mark “Europe” from its other; rather, these boundaries are reterritorialized in the grammar of “the Human.” The “concept of the enemy,” articulated by medieval theologians is naturalized and biologized in the always already racial concept of the human, and the destructions that come in the wake of living out this figure.\textsuperscript{233} Race carries the concept of the (theological) enemy, re-written in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as the dysselected racial subaltern.

In its secular variant, the human corresponds to the new “ultimate orientation” of Europeans, carrying within itself both its immanent reality and transcendent possibility to exceed itself.\textsuperscript{234} The human as autonomous authority vis-à-vis the authorizing powers of Christendom, is the site for this new religious orientation. The human is at once an inclusive and exclusive category; it includes all as a species-being, while differentiating and separating on the basis of a

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\item \textsuperscript{232} For a historical account of the links here see, Lisa Lowe, \textit{The Intimacies of Four Continents} (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).
\item \textsuperscript{233} Gil Anidjar, \textit{The Jew, the Arab: A History of the Enemy}, xxiii-xxv.
\item \textsuperscript{234} By the language of “orientation,” I am drawing on Charles Long’s minimal description of religion as “orientation – orientation in the ultimate sense, that is, how one comes to terms with the ultimate significance of one’s place in the world.” See Charles Long, \textit{Significations: Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion} (Aurora: The Davies Group, Publishers, 1995), 7.
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teleological or historical logic of progress and development.\textsuperscript{235} It incorporates all by degrading its others, by racializing those who depart from the proper form of this universal.

In what follows, I focus the argument on how religion is operationalized discursively and administratively to define the boundaries of human being, to establish the limits of the human as white, masculine, and bourgeois. My focus here is on the settler-colonial installation of “the human,” under its shadow “religion.” To do so, I read David Chidester’s genealogy of comparative religions in his book \textit{Savage Systems} through Lindon Barrett’s interrogations of race and value. I will draw on what Barrett calls the “dialectical syntax” of value to elaborate how the deployment of religion in colonial comparative religion disciplines the range of human practices for the sake of mercantile capitalist exchange. Finally, I conclude with some thoughts on exorbitance and the undoing of religion.

3.2. The Human and the (Mis)recognition of Religion

The invention of religion in South Africa corresponds to the establishment of European colonial control and domination. As colonial comparativists were describing and categorizing South African religions, these designations also created, and were guided by, boundaries of racial difference. Chidester observes that the initial comparative strategies of European colonialists in South Africa denied South Africans had religion. With regularity, once indigenous sovereignty had largely been dominated, Africans were suddenly “discovered” to have a religion. Chidester shows that these two comparative strategies correspond to the modes of colonial conquest and settler containment and management. Denial justified the conquest, and discovery informed

\textsuperscript{235} Denise Ferreira da Silva, \textit{Toward a Global Idea of Race} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).
colonial discipline and regulation of dominated peoples. When colonial frontiers were re-opened and expanded, the discovery of religion shifted back to denial until hostilities were over.236

For example, Otto Friedrich Mentzel’s (1787) account of the Hottentot people denied that they had religion. While others attributed religion to Hottentot ceremonies of dance and festivals, Mentzel argued the Hottentots could not have a religion because their language lacked religious terms and thus lacked the capacity to formulate religious concepts.237 Rather than religion, Mentzel described the Hottentot as “immersed” in superstition and fear of “evil forces.” Stupid and lazy, “their stupidity was most dramatically demonstrated […] by their ignorance of the trade value of cattle.”238 Mentzel’s catalog of descriptors - stupid, lazy, steeped in superstitions – signify Hottentot sociality as the effect of the absence of European scientific – that is human-rationality.

Similarly, the category of “fetishism” developed to characterize this alleged African lack of religion. Fetishism indexed the inability of Africans to value items properly in networks of mercantile exchange. As Chidester explains, “According to the Portuguese, Dutch, and English traders, Africans had no religion to organize relations among human beings or relations between human beings and material objects.” In other words, “without religion, Africans were unable to evaluate objects. They overvalued trifling objects – a bird’s feather, a pebble, a bit of rag, or a dog’s leg – by treating them as fetishes, but they undervalued trade goods […] this alleged inability to assess the value of material objects became the defining feature of African ignorance,

childishness, capriciousness, and lack of any organized religion."²³⁹ From within Man’s order of consciousness, the social life of distinct African peoples was perceived as a general “African lack of humanity,” and fetishism signified the incommensurability of these practices with mercantile exchange economies. In relation to these economies, these alternative socialities could only be registered as the absence of human being, that is, the presence of the fetish. The colonial construction of fetishism constructs the colonized as affectable subjects, whose religion - if it is present at all - can only be the effect of fear or ignorance of rational, natural forces. At the same time, this construction of fetishism names self-determination as the distinguishing attribute of European human being.²⁴⁰

According to the colonialists, fetishism not only interfered with the capacity to properly value possible commodities for exchange, it also was an obstacle to incorporating Africans as laborers. European comparativists argued that Africans who lacked religion “lacked industry. The notion of the ‘lazy savage’ was an immediate correlate of the absence of religion. This stereotype arose, however, to explain the widespread indigenous resistance to being incorporated as labor in an expanding colonial economy.”²⁴¹ Consistently, comparativists (mis)represented this resistance by peoples like the Hottentot, Xhosa, and Zulu as evidence of their subhumanity. During his time on the cape (1772-1778), professor of botany Pehr Thunberg observed the Hottentot and concluded, “few animals […] were lazier than Hottentots.”²⁴² More than this, “too idle to work, the Hottentots, according to Thunberg, were also too lazy to have a religion (my

²⁴⁰ This double cathexis is the theme of Denise Ferreira da Silva’s book, Toward a Global Idea of Race (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).
emphasis). In this string of associations, Thunberg links the presence of religion to a racial calculus of a people’s inherent capacity for self-development through work. The work at issue here is the development of the land for the sake of capital accumulation, and wage-labor as the putative achievement of civilized, free, and rational work.

This is one of the binds for those exploited by the wage; that it is simultaneously held up as a moral and social signifier. Moral people work, and work hard. But the Hottentot are “too lazy to have a religion.” This alleged lack of industry will also serve as a basis for distinguishing between the “bestial Hottentot” who must be made to work, and Europe’s labor force, who exercise self-determination by “freely” entering into contracts with capital. These contracts are, of course, anything but free; they are coercive, and only appear as free in the abstract, legal terms of the contract. But the racialization of the Hottentot, “too lazy to have a religion,” enables the comparativists to distinguish the allegedly free forms of (wage) labor within Europe, from the necessarily violent, coercive (unwaged) labor in the colony. The privileged valuation of religion appears for colonized Africans as violence. In this way, the invention of religion participates in the commodification of black bodies, and the production of a normative mode of the human, by constructing social figures of non-value excluded from the regime of the human, but whose material and symbolic labor are essential to its overall conditions of production. The regime of the human needs the religion of the “lazy black brute” in order to mark the “white industrious Protestant.”

3.3. The Dialectical Syntax of Value

Lindon Barrett’s theoretical elaboration of value helps us think through how this colonial installation of religion works to shore up the discourse of the human by denying certain forms of life or living as essential human life, and to tether essential human life to the liberal bourgeois subject. Barrett writes, “[a]t its simplest, value is a configuration of privilege, and, at its crudest, race is the same. Insofar as value, as a theoretical dynamic, promotes one form(ation) to the detriment of another (or others), race proves a dramatic instantiation of this principle.” It is precisely this “dialectical syntax” of value that I want to highlight in order to help us think through what Chidester calls the invention of religion in South Africa, as the violent promotion of European colonial form(ality) through the forcible alteration of indigenous sociality.

Not only denial, but discovery as well functioned to establish and maintain colonial control. And what was discovered? According to colonialists, some South Africans had degenerate forms of Judaism or Islam; others worshipped the moon, had noisy dance and pissing ceremonies, and, of course, fetishized objects were ubiquitous. Or – read against these (mis)recognitions – colonialists “discovered” alternative relationalities, movement and sound, intimacies with land and animals, “chattering, gabbling, and clucking,” shouting and singing, and enduring associations with the dead – the ancestors. European colonialists would be preoccupied with dance and song, shout and movement, as potential sites of religion.

What denial and discovery do is dominate multiplicity. The imposition of religion establishes the dominance of European colonial forms of social organization, and translates alternative organizations or aspects of alternatives in a hierarchy of lack that sets off the form of

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proper human being from those practices religion (mis)recognizes: dance, song, ecological intimacies and so on; rhythms that do not find their intelligibility within the calculus of capitalist subjectivity. The valued form – European colonial, capitalist rationality and labor – is constituted by devaluing other-wise possibilities and capturing them as deviations from that true and universal form of humanity.

The imposition of religion – denied or disfigured – disciplines and constrains what can be considered *life* within the parameters of possessive individualism. Comparative religion provided evidence that these colonized Africans lack rational thought, and exhibit a “primitive mentality.” And what is rational thought and conduct? As C.B. Macpherson summarizes in his study of possessive individualism in Enlightenment thought,

> The essence of rational conduct […] is private appropriation of the land and the materials it yields, and investment of one’s energies in improving them for the greater conveniences of life one may thereby get for oneself. The **industrious** and **rational** is he who labours and appropriates. Such behaviour is rational in the moral sense of being required by the law of God or law of reason, as well as in the expedient sense. 246

For the colonialists who discerned no “reason” in Africans, this lack of rationality served to index the lack of individuals capable of entering into relations of “free” labor and exchange. Within the documents Chidester surveys, whether South Africans have religion is whether they have a human right, a right of the propertied subject, to the land. Conquest was conditioned by the colonial assessment that the colonized had no religion, and therefore no human claim to the land. Their lack of industry similarly indexed their lack of humanity, and lack of claim to the land.

However, “lack” names precisely the aspects of indigeneity that pose real threats to colonial conquest and management. “Lack” (mis)represents what are *other modes of being and*

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246 Quoted in Barrett, *Blackness and Value: Seeing Double*, 72..
belonging whose existence challenges the singular value of market society and the modern/colonial subject. The threat of the other-wise is pacified by integrating colonized peoples into a progressive, teleological unfolding of human life that finds its culmination in European expansion. This progressive teleology cannot admit excess. The category of religion, importantly, captures the excesses of the demystified, secular, rational political life of capital. The category disqualifies these excesses from interposing themselves as other modes of life together by either policing the boundary of the secular and religion, or by articulating the kind of religion as the effect of backwards, childish, or fanatical (and dangerous) kinds of human beings.

In this way, colonial comparative religion functions to define the limits of human being. What is being consolidated in these operations is a concept of “the human” embodied by the practical and intellectual activity of European colonialists (broadly, including travelers, missionaries, etc.), around which religion takes shape. The significance of religion in colonial South Africa, whether assessed positively or negatively, is its power to represent certain subjects (white-masculine-bourgeois) as valuable/human/naturally selected, and others as devalued/subhuman/naturally dysselected; or more precisely to (mis)represent them within the Western regime of the human.

Because the form of human being at stake here is bourgeois, the deployment of religion to manage colonized peoples will also inform the modes by which the bourgeois exploit Western workers granted a place within the terrain of civil society. While comparativists were “discovering” African religions by comparing them to Catholicism, Irish Catholics in the U.S. were struggling to be acknowledged as white. Nell Irvin Painter reminds us that by 1850, a prideful Saxon-American juggernaut was elevating Protestant Americans above Catholics of all classes and provenance. Obviously Irish Catholics were white, and, especially in the South, white enough to hold themselves above black and Chinese people in the name of whiteness. As Celts, however, the poor Irish could also be judged racially
different enough to be oppressed, ugly enough to be compared to apes, and poor enough to be paired with black people.\footnote{Nell Irvin Painter, \textit{The History of White People} (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2010), 132-133.}

There is a lot to unpack in this history, some of which will be attended to in the following chapter. But what I want to note is the convergence of racial and religious identity within the economy of whiteness. And, of course, the material and symbolic attachment of “poor” and “black.”

By classifying the Irish Catholics as non-white, this convergence put the Irish on the edge of civil society, and susceptible to hyper-exploitation and expropriation. For this reason,

Irish immigrants quickly recognized how to use the American color line to elevate white – no matter how wretched – over black […] By the mid-1840s, Irish American organizations actively opposed abolition with their votes and their fists. In the 1863 draft riots that broke out in New York and other northeastern cities, Irish Americans attacked African Americans with gusto in a bloody rejection of black-Irish commonality.\footnote{Painter, \textit{The History of White People}, 143.}

The Irish understood that their vulnerability to economic expropriation was in large part dependent on access to racial whiteness. And, as whiteness is structured by an “irrational despotism,” there was no better way to do so than by indulging in sadistic violence against black people.\footnote{See Steve Martinot and Jared Sexton, “The Avant-garde of White Supremacy,” in \textit{Afro-pessimism: An Introduction} (Minneapolis: Racked and Dispatched, 2017).} By drawing out whiteness’ political unconscious, we may be able to see and move against how “the ‘front story’ of free workers who are contracted by capitalists to sell their labor-power for a wage is enabled by, and depends on, expropriation that takes place outside this contractual arrangement.”\footnote{Jackie Wang, \textit{Carceral Capitalism} (South Pasadena: Semiotext(e), 2018), 123.} After all, Irish Catholics were fighting for a place within civil society, which meant both political rights, and – paradoxically – the right to be exploited through
wage-labor. But the density of effects here demonstrates a material and symbolic imperative to be recognized as white.

Barrett argues that value is invested in limits and boundaries, in the maintenance of points of difference. Value as form can only be identified through the elaboration of a boundary, by which figures of value can be distinguished from the devalued. To “see” value is to “see (at least) double.” The form of value carries the trace of that which it negates, such that to see value properly is to see according to the boundaries and limits that by necessity imply a site (sight) of that which is separated from, set with-out, the figuring of value. This is the point that contemporary critique of religion has emphasized, how the secular is authorized through boundaries that define what constitutes religion, that sphere of human living distinguishable from the pure rational activity of the political, the economic, and the juridical.

But Barrett goes further. Because value is a dynamic of conferring privilege, “[t]he ‘dialectic syntax’ that is always characteristic of value is often obscured and, hence, unrecognized. The investment of value in matters of limits, form, and system is an investment made in the service of conferring privilege; the hypostasization, singularity, and fixity of value are tied to the configuring of lesser and greater status or worth.” Although value needs to appear as non-contingent, “value is fundamentally relational despite all appearances to the contrary.” Value, then, is a relation of domination initiated by violence and in value’s figuration as a form, this originary and ongoing violence hides itself.

Value denotes domination and endurance in a space of multiplicity. Its presence and performance entail the altering, resituating, and refiguring of the Other, or many Others,

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251 Barrett, Blackness and Value: Seeing Double, 17.
252 Barrett, Blackness and Value: Seeing Double, 17.
253 Barrett, Blackness and Value: Seeing Double, 17.
in margins, in recesses – *indeed, paradoxically, outside a self-presence (defined by a fetishized boundary) that nonetheless aspires to be everywhere.*

Value and authority effect “a widely acknowledged and widely organized presence – ‘a positive pattern.’”255 For the others of value, value appears as violence and oppression.256 “[V]alue is always a social formation that more or less openly comprises conflicting social practices in a carefully arranged hierarchy.”257 In order for value to confer privilege, the other to value must be figured, which means this devalued Other is always already at the center of the form of value. Thus, the permeability of the boundary by which value is fixed in its relation to the other-of-value renders value itself unstable. The relative stability of the form of value can only be maintained through the repetition of the force by which “a space of multiplicity” is dominated.

The modern/colonial regime proves a particularly hyperbolic instantiation of value. The human acquired its form and forms of authorization around the disavowal of Black and Native human being. The category of the human formalizes the hierarchy being established in European colonialism and imperialism, beyond which is the unthinkable, the illegible, the zone of non-being.258 Consistently, whether in the form of denial or recognition, European comparativist practices deploy religion in a way that relies on the indigenous African as a structural node, the devalued with-out that constitutes the limit of the positive structure of coloniality. The modern/colonial production of religion has produced peoples and places who must be dominated or made to disappear. It is a racial discourse, thus summarizing the dispossessive practice of


Christian mission as the practice of colonization/extension of Christian civilization that produces certain peoples and places as “backward,” “barbaric,” “inferior,” “degraded;” produces people and places deemed “Other to value.”

From its initial colonial deployment, the concept of religion has generated assessments that certain peoples not only can be, but must be, conquered, eliminated, or enslaved for their own benefit. This is what I mean that the invention of religion - to the extent it is a discourse of dispossession and containment that cuts across institutions and deployments of power - is a racializing practice. Drawing back to Barrett, the imposition of religion, then, is a way European colonialists “displaced or disfigured” (or gave meaning by displacing and disfiguring) people and practices that held “negligible value” in the ascendant regime of literacy/religion. The concept of religion sets these practices in relation to Enlightenment constructions of bourgeois subjectivity and its regime of literacy. As a colonial signifier, religion renders intelligible those material practices that are unintelligible within Western colonial modes of rationality. In this way, the installation of the category of religion is epistemic and cultural violence, because making alternative social life intelligible in this way is at the same time the negation of “alternative grounds of meaningfulness.”259 These deployments of religion are a violent discursive re-arrangement of alternative forms of rationality, exchange, and life together, or perhaps more precisely, of alternative modalities of life that are in excess of the ways of accounting for human living by relations of rationality and exchange.

This contestation of value(s) in colonial conquest, the discovery of religion, operates to establish the privilege of (secular) capitalist rationality. It is a component, a central component, of the production of boundaries and limits that constitute the form of capital as the form(ality) of

259 Barrett, Blackness and Value: Seeing Double, 75.
essential human life. The deployment of religion naturalizes secular capitalist relations of production and domination and ties capital to the Western modern/colonial discourse of the human. Capital becomes the measure of the human, and the human the corporeality of capital. In short, the question of religion’s absence or presence is continuous with the question of whether or not these colonized people can be dispossessed and exploited.

3.4. Religion and Racial Apartheid

Racial apartheid was informed by comparative religion in South Africa. The question of religion marked boundaries between settlers and the colonized, and erected political distinctions between and among the colonized. Boundaries were drawn around particular indigenous peoples by attributing a specific religion to that people. Whether indigenous peoples had an identifiable religion or not was one of the central terrains on which the colonial “order of knowledge” was constructed and enacted. Kinship, belonging, and hostility were mediated through the knowledge afforded by comparative religion. Religion, in other words, was a mode by which indigenous Africans were racialized, and political distinctions generated by colonial relations of power were naturalized as “tribal difference.” The comparative production of religion, therefore, was both the tool that generated boundaries, and at the same time naturalized the very boundaries and differences being constructed.

What is remarkable is how as early as the sixteen-hundreds colonial denials of Hottentot religion linked this absence to the absence of human being itself. As aforementioned, when the Hottentot were “gifted” a religion, some colonialists considered it to be derived from the Jews. Others saw similarities with Roman Catholicism, based on practices of venerating saints and

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sacred places. These “discoveries” also re-interpreted Jews and Roman Catholics: “If Hottentots were like Catholics, Catholics were also like Hottentots.” These distinctions then become the medium by which colonial relations are (re)produced. Those peoples granted an intermediate status in the racial regime were those peoples “discovered” to have higher forms of religion - that is, forms that could be linked (though pathologically, as backward or stunted or facsimiles) to Protestant Christianity. In this regard, there may be some connections to be explored between these sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the nineteenth century association of Irish Catholics with racial blackness.

Within colonial zones, the production of religion as an object of knowledge closes off other modes of knowing and being. Characterizing non-Western peoples as “religious” works to consolidate the governing imperatives of market rationality. To say, then, that Christianity rationalized itself - in relation to its irrational colonial others – is to draw out the way Christianity was deployed as a technology for defining and extending the hegemonic, interlocutory life of racial capitalism; that is, Christian comparative religion catalogue the types of South African religions, and put that knowledge to use in the expropriation of land, and the management of exploited African laborers. In this way, knowledge of religion participates in, and generates, market modes of colonial-imperial knowledge production. Central to market knowledge are the boundaries by which a people can be specified, for the sake of entering into relations of exchange, or for strategizing the expansion of settler frontiers.

In this regard, it is interesting that Theo Goldberg theorizes race as a political theology. Goldberg argues that as race recedes as the explicit ordering principle of Western politics in the

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twentieth century, religion returns. By this he does not mean that the cartographies of race disappear, but that their racial structure is preserved precisely by the formal disavowal of race. Religion “returns” to articulate racial-geographies “evacuated.” What remains out of view for Goldberg is how religion is able to have the appearance of a return in this way because it has been the object of knowledge-power by which racial cartographies have been carved. As described above, the category of religion took on a racial, normative shape as it was deployed as an object of knowledge and governance in the study of Europe’s others.263 It became a structure of non-European forms of life through the empirical violations of colonialism, and the conceptual scaffolding erected on and through colonial space. Religion was “discovered” in Europe’s invasion of its others - materially, in the political and economic practices of empire, and in the intellectual invasion of non-European literature, as the archive of non-Western forms of belief and ritual. Only through invasion were “religion(s)” discovered, and of course this discovery fundamentally altered the empirical objects on which this discovery occurred.

For example, Jason Ā. Josephson-Storm’s seminal book on religion in Japan shows how the category itself did not exist before American warships arrived in 1853, and demanded treaties that included “freedom of religion.”264 Because there was no indigenous concept of religion in Japan before the 1870s, it had to be invented as a diplomatic, political, and legal category in order for Japan to gain admittance to the (Western) global commercial order; which is to say, in order to gain admittance to the category of the Human. The very fact that Americans offered Japan an international treaty meant that Japan was legible, to a degree, in the grammar of the Human in a way the Native American and indigenous African were not.


Through the invention of the category of religion, Japan’s state officials wrote Japan inside the Euro-American civilizing project. Japan’s ensuing imperial-colonial statecraft demonstrates the foreclosure of political options that could have been taken instead. Religion was codified in the Japanese constitution in such a way that it was subject to both internal (belief) regulation and external (ritual practice) regulation.265 What counted as religion has everything to do with permitting beliefs that do not threaten the state, and regulating (often as superstition) the beliefs that do. Of course, the nature of this threat would be registered in relation to the modern/colonial Japanese civilizing project. After the eighteen-fifties, demonology and the source of “foreign” contamination were transmuted into superstition as “beliefs that should not be believed.”266 Superstition came to signify the Irrational and Mad, terms that firmly locate it as an index of subhumanity/nonhumanity.

Empirical studies like Josephson-Storm’s and Chidester’s show that the colonial invention of religion was both a site of racialization, and mechanism of racialization. Generally, “religion” from the sixteenth to twentieth century was refashioned as an indicator of racial belonging and of place on the hierarchical global taxonomy of development. This development was discerned by its cultural, economic, and political marks. The limits of a particular religion - its boundaries and characteristics - has in modernity been tied up with the limits of racial community, and historical essence.267 Oriented by what Wynter terms the secular bio-economic conception of the Human, religion is a cultural property, belongs to a people, and expresses the

265 Josephson-Storm, The Invention of Religion in Japan, 226.
266 Josephson-Storm, The Invention of Religion in Japan, 254.
character of that people - its inner life. Religion, then, tells us about racial characteristics.

Racial characteristics tell us something about political and economic organization, and the limits thereof. This general function of religion in the modern-colonial archive produces knowledge of peoples and places integral to global relations of expropriation, exploitation, and conquest. In this way, religion as a modern category is unrelentingly hierarchical; it carries within itself the divisions and separations of empire, while working at the same time to naturalize those relations of domination.

3.5. Anti-blackness and Religion

Recently, Theodore Vial has made a similar argument in his book, *Modern Religion, Modern Race*. According to Vial,

> Modern religion and race are the offspring of a new theological anthropology. This anthropology recreates race and religion because it reformulates the relationship between individual and group. It makes group membership an organic part of personal existence and identity; it shows how the individual is shaped by the group to which the individual belongs.

What Vial points towards is the way modern religion indexes belonging, as well as the racial capacity for enlightenment or political existence (“liberal democratic development”). In this regard, Wynter interprets the elevation of individual “black people” within bourgeois society not as the overcoming of whiteness, but as a structural adjustment by which “job-holder/owner” and “property-less/job-less” function metonymically with “white” and “black.” These signifiers

268 Christianity in this process is not rejected, but civilized. Christianity is being re-negotiated as one of the marvelous possessions of “Europe.” In other words, Christianity does not have to be rejected in enlightenment narratives of progress and reason. It can be, and often was considered, a sign of (white) Europe’s racial genius, its cultural creativity and leap forward beyond other civilizations.

register shifts in the discursive logic of political repression and economic dispossessing. But they do not fundamentally revise the racializing assemblages by which capital and market society continue to draw their lifeblood. The elevation or incorporation of “black people,” but especially non-black racial others, re-arranges and re-asserts the anti-black structure of our neoliberal market society. For example, the multicultural incorporative gesture is able to render itself effective only by simultaneously expanding the carceral technologies of the state. The securitization of society - mass imprisonment, mass surveillance, and so on – has been the political response to the multicultural.

In the U.S., multiculturalism preserves the structure of whiteness by its paradoxical perception as a threat to the structure of whiteness. “Black visibility” is regulated and contained in such a way that the anti-black structure of the United States remains. The “black owner-CEO” strains the representational field of whiteness, and is compensated for by the criminalization of blackness, and the gratuitous state violence against black geographies formerly upheld by white para-military, fascist violence. Rather than pin our analysis on a calculus of worse/better - and the teleology this calculus insinuates - scholars like Saidiya Hartman, Jared Sexton, Frank Wilderson, and Hortense Spillers have been creating theoretical discourses capable of elaborating the “afterlives of slavery.” This begins from a fundamental revision of how slavery and settler-colonialism have been thought in historical periodizations of emancipation. While elaborating Orlando Patterson’s theorization of slavery as “social death,” Frank Wilderson comments,

One of the points that Patterson makes at a higher level of abstraction is that the concept of community, and the concept of freedom, and the concept of communal and

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interpersonal presence, actually needs a conceptual antithesis […] So the idea of freedom and the idea of communal life and the idea of civic relations has to have a kind of point of attention which is absent of that or different from that. This is the function that slavery presents or provides to coherence […] In other words, there is a global consensus that Africa is the location of sentient beings who are outside of global community, who are socially dead. That global consensus begins with the Arabs in 625 and it’s passed on to the Europeans in 1452. Prior to that global consensus you can’t think Black. You can think Uganda, Ashanti, Ndebele, you can think many different cultural identities, but Blackness cannot be dis-imbricated from the global consensus that decides here is the place which is emblematic of […] social death. That’s part of the foundation.\textsuperscript{271}

For Wilderson, anti-blackness names the structural antagonism by which the edifice of the world has been built, from the Arab slave trade, to the colonial enterprises of Europe, and modern racial capitalism.\textsuperscript{272}

Central to the coherence of the modern-colonial world, then, is the violence constitutive of its political ontology. Again, to quite Wilderson at length,

that violence against the slave is integral to the production of that psychic space called social life. The repetitive nature of violence against the slave does not have the same type of utility that violence against the post-colonial subject has--in other words, in the first instance, to secure and maintain the occupation of land. It does not have the utility of violence against the working class, which would be to secure and maintain the extraction of surplus-value and the wage. We have to think more libidinally and in a more robust fashion. This is where it becomes really controversial and really troubling for a lot of people because what Patterson is arguing, and what people like myself and professor Jared Sexton and Saidiya Hartman at Columbia University have extended, is to say that what we need to do is begin to think of violence not as having essentially the kind of political or economic utility that violence in other revolutionary paradigms have.

\textsuperscript{271} Frank Wilderson III, “Blacks and the Master/Slave Relation,” in \textit{Afro-pessimism: An Introduction} (Minneapolis: Racked and Dispatched, 2017), 20.

\textsuperscript{272} For example, economic dispossession does not work in Ferguson only or primarily through the wage-relation. Rather, what the Ferguson Report shows in depth is how the everyday practices of policing in Ferguson dispossess, criminalize, and brutalize the residents of Ferguson. This structure of state violence is designed to intervene in any and all possibilities of black sociality - informal, formal, other-worldly or not. There is no protected domestic space in Ferguson from which the worker can reproduce life itself, no respite from the demands of the boss. It is precisely the possibility of normative domesticity, of the black family, that is crossed out and through by the everyday violations of policing. This form of economic dispossession opens up what Silva refers to as the “total expropriation” of blackness. See Denise Ferreira da Silva, “Toward a Black Feminist Poethics: The Quest(ion) of Blackness Toward the End of the World,” in \textit{The Black Scholar}, 44, no. 2 (Summer 2014).
Violence against the slave sustains a kind of psychic stability for all others who are not slaves.\textsuperscript{273} The “psychic stability” generated by this violence is constitutive of the modern bourgeois modes of belonging, and circuits of value.\textsuperscript{274} It also provides a vantage for analyzing anti-blackness as the constituent element of the cuts and divisions internal to the “human community.” The intramural violence of whiteness has as its aim the production of the proper or normative citizen. “White people” who deviate from this regulatory norm, are subject to state violence. The criminalization of homelessness is one example. But we can also look at the twentieth century U.S. history of eugenics, and how the medical violations and incarceration of those written outside the categories of job-holding/owner is structured along the axis of whiteness. It is the empirical and conceptual existence of the “bestial black” that enables and unleashes the anxieties about whether and in what ways non-normative bodies and minds lack human-ness. John Down, for example, used craniology to theorize that “Down’s syndrome” was the effect of a “spontaneous reversion” to a racially degenerative past. Humans were classified, and then dealt with, according to their proximity to blackness - the political unthought.\textsuperscript{275}

Or, as Barrett puts its, the devalorization of “racial blackness” functions to valorize “whiteness.”\textsuperscript{276} This point has been elaborated at length by Jared Sexton, who draws attention to the anti-black libidinal economy of racial capitalism. “White” kinship is forged through anti-black intimacy, and whiteness is (re)produced in the enjoyment of black death. Similarly, though

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{273} Wilderson III, “Blacks and the Master/Slave Relation,” 19.
  \item \textsuperscript{274} Lindon Barrett, \textit{Racial Blackness and the Discontinuity of Western Modernity}.
  \item \textsuperscript{276} Barrett, \textit{Blackness and Value: Seeing Double}, 93-95.
\end{itemize}
avowedly not an Afro-pessimist, Alexander Weheliye has shown how deeply the structure of the human is conjoined to the gratuitous enjoyment of mutilating black flesh. Through the concept of “pornotroping,” Weheliye demonstrates the ungendering of black flesh - which is to say the disarticulation of the possibility of staging bourgeois humanity - in the everyday violence of the plantation. Here, on the plantation - the icon of the world itself - open and vulnerable black flesh is the stage on which the marks of blackness are inscribed, through the “brandings” of punishment and ownership. Ungendered black flesh is the medium through which the organization of the plantation is realized.

Legally, in the U.S. when slaves fled they “stole themselves.” The free/slave barrier has ontological weight: of different kinds. For “white people” the condition of slavery could be left behind or overcome. Whiteness was the structure of their emancipation. In contrast, slavery “attaches” itself to blackness as an ontological status: non-human. The criminalization of blackness post-emancipation serves to reconfigure this status, rather than overcome it. This divide between the human and the non-human, also serves to mark divisions within the human itself. These intramural distinctions govern the socioeconomic relations of those marked within the circle of the human. Which is to say, the foundational division (free-human/slave-nonhuman) informs and is informed by the management of political-economy within whiteness itself. The


279 See David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 1991), 32: “[W]hite servitude was a problem that could be and was conquered both at the social and at the individual level in a way that Black slavery was not. The metaphoric ‘political slavery’ of which Americans of all classes complained was swept away by an uneven, but by world standards remarkably successful, process of democratization among whites.”

point is not only the fundamental division, but how that division works to elaborate a series of
degrees of humanity on the terrain of civil society. What marks the human is not only the
empathy for the right things; but not having empathy for things in which one cannot recognize
oneself.

What we see in Chidester’s work is the way comparative religion in the nineteenth
century “science of Man” resolves difference in the universal. Comparison, in this way, functions
to project the being of the human onto the world. The human is a normative category, which is
only meaningful in the specification of boundaries. This normativity is known through the
empirical specifications, classifications, and taxonomical arrangements of modern-coloniality;
which is to say, through the un/equal, observable differences captured in these scientific tables.
Colonial comparative religion in the nineteenth century is practiced as a branch of anthropology,
and participates in the collection of observable data about the human. Now, of course, the
historical matrix of collecting this data is colonialism and imperialism. Furthermore, those who
collect, and those who are observed, are imbricated in relations of power. Meaning, the practice
of “the science of religion” in this way is materially dependent on relations of domination. And,
furthermore, that the beliefs and practices designated as “religion” are political distinctions,
distinctions produced in and through power relations. The colonized cannot have “a religion,” in
this sense, because “religion” is the outcome of a particular political/religion division specific to
Europe’s coming to be as a people. It exports, then, its own internal conflicts. Which is what
happens in colonialism more generally. In so doing, though, the West generates its religiosity -
its transcendent (in the sense of natural, inviolable, non-contingent) claim to and upon the earth.
3.6. Conclusion: Exorbitance, Excess, and the Undoing of Religion

To summarize the ideas above: religion is a translation of movement. The appearance of the category, whether in the form of denial or of discovery, arrests possibilities of social organization alternative to the market. Those alternative movements – dance, shout, alleged veneration of objects – are captured by religion; modes of living that must be altered or removed in order to make people and land productive for the sake of accumulation. The invention of religion in colonialism re-forms religion itself, instrumentalizes religion as a tool for the cultivation of disciplined, efficient, useful, and dominated subjects. In this way, the meaning of religion itself is undergoing a re-formation, as it is being instrumentalized.

Though there is of course resistance, I want to say more than that this imposition is resisted by colonized peoples. It is worth quoting Barrett again by way of conclusion:

If value, the ‘positive structure,’ a ‘proper’ identity, is the fabrication of a community, which ‘commits men and women to [the] norms [of the community] (Douglas 92), then […] the performance of value where it is not, is the fabrication of value by those not committed to the norms of the valued, the ‘positive structure,’ a ‘proper’ identity. It is the fabrication of those who Otherwise figure that ‘there ha[s] to be something better than this.’

The practices which colonial religion regulates interpose alternative values. The policing of these practices instates colonial authority. “Improper valuation” sites (sights) the absence of the self (the colonizer) in the colonized, the positivity of otherwise articulations of value are refigured as the “negative fuel” of colonial capitalist valuation. For the colonial regime, the limits and boundaries of human creativity are limited to the exchange of commodities produced in and around capitalist markets. That which falls under the discursive rubric of religion is a multiplicity of social practices that interpose practices of embodiment, desire, affect, intimacy – of

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281 Barrett, Blackness and Value: Seeing Double, 25.
“something better” - that must be dominated in order for capital to become the privileged form of value.

These indigenous practices are exorbitant. They are anterior to the rationalized organization of life under capitalist relations of production; their profanation is their devaluation. Or, and this is the same thing, their reconfiguration as religious practices, re-locates them to a site (sight) of value categorically sealed off from secular, material practices of value production and circulation. The indigenous practices aggregated as religion, relativize the value of capital. Religion is a critical category of incorporation because its particular function is to secure the boundary by which capitalist practices take on the form of singular and coherent privilege. To develop the claim made above somewhat further, through the deployment of religion, capital becomes the measure of the human, and the human the corporeality of capital.

But what constitutes this religion is always already undone. The proliferation of colonial discourse on religion re-asserts the truth of religion and the need for colonial administrators to respond to the ongoingness of indigenous life, which exposes European comparative procedures as contingent and indeed arbitrary hierarchies of power, authority, and value. It is for this reason as well that religion has often figured centrally in resistance to modern/coloniality. But resistance, again, in more than a dialectical sense. Precisely those anterior forces that the imposition of religion was meant to hold at bay must be repeatedly acknowledged in order to maintain the singular authority of colonial architectures. When the colonists, missionaries, and administrators (mis)recognized indigenous life and living as religion - dance, shout, the valuation of land and animals – this incorporative move admits a living anterior to what it attempts to name, designate, and control for the sake of rational capitalist exchange and production.
More than resistance to colonial power, colonial religion (mis)recognizes the living - the life or movement or registers of other-wise that do not emerge dialectically - in opposition to colonialism, that in fact precede the imposition of religion; and thus that continue to remain opaque in the postcolonial dialectic, by which the human agency of the colonized is represented in the registers of resistance. In those sites of religion there are other frequencies, opaque alternatives that cannot be recuperated within a dialectic of resistance, but are in some way that anterior that must be dominated, contained, and repressed. Chidester’s re-telling of comparative religion in South Africa demonstrates this story, that the invention of religion is deeply invested in tamping down these other frequencies, so that its power and authority can appear as singular, and even resistance to that power becomes a self-recognition that this thing sometimes called Christendom, sometimes called secular modernity, and sometimes called whiteness, is the ruler of the world.\textsuperscript{282} And yet, the imposition of religion carries with it the undoing of this world.

\textsuperscript{282} What is Christianity? A religion? A way of mapping and managing colonized people? The practice of body management for the sake of producing laborers and goods for the world economy? Where does Christianity stop, and the political begin?
CHAPTER FOUR
HUNTING WITCHES: THE INSTALLATION OF THE HUMAN UNDER THE SHADOW OF RELIGION

What kind of creature is a Witch? This is no simple question. Are witches properly religious, or should we think of them as figures of exchange, or medicine, or even science? The figure of the Witch escapes our grasp. In the era I address in this chapter, primarily the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, witches are created through relations of power, and by being designated as witches are depoliticized. Even many modern histories of the witch-hunts portray witches “as wretched fools, afflicted by hallucinations, so that their persecution could be explained as a process of ‘social therapy,’ serving to reinforce neighborly cohesion or could be described in medical terms as a ‘panic,’ a ‘craze,’ an ‘epidemic.’”283 The naming of Witches configured these women as theological threats, or subsequently as figures of irrationality or madness, whose existence in itself posed a threat to social life.

In this chapter, I extend the framework developed in the previous chapter. I turn the focus to the subjugation of the European peasants, as a constitutive relation of settler-colonialism. The aim of this chapter is to think settler-colonialism as the practice of installing the human, under the shadow of religion, as that practice is imposed on Europeans who will be granted a supraordinate status within the human. To this end, I read the work of Silvia Federici on the role

283 Silvia Federici, Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation (New York: Autonomedia, 2004), 164.
of the witch-hunts in the rise of capitalism, as constitutive of the racial formation of the European proletariat. In contrast to colonialism in South Africa described in the previous chapter, heresy or magic in Federici’s book signifies an excess or conflict within the human community, and which must be regulated in the interest of the life of “the people.” In this way, the subjugation of the communes, and the delimitation of “public space,” occurs in the register of the religious. The transition to capitalism happens at the intersection of a Church rationalizing itself, by racializing and gendering forms of the “heretical” or “mystical” that subtend peasant social alternatives. The racializing and gendering of “the heretical” is hyperbolically demonstrated in the witch-hunts.

For Federici, the witch-hunts of the sixteenth through seventeenth centuries are the material sites in which the body is captured as an object of capitalist power. “Witch-hunting,” Federici points out, “reached its peak between 1580 and 1630, in a period, that is, when feudal relations were already giving way to the economic and political institutions typical of mercantile capitalism.” The witch-hunts are at the center of the gendered dynamics of land enclosures (i.e. formation of patriarchy by which capitalism comes online). Drawing on Federici’s work, I argue that the witch-hunts get at the dynamic by which Christianity is racializing itself in the bourgeois counter-revolution of capitalism. In this way, the privatization of peasant lands produces the conditions for being able to identify certain forms of sociality as “heretical,” or improperly religious, which will subsequently be formulated as irrational kinds of (sub)humans that cannot be accommodated by the state. Laws against witchcraft in the late Middle Ages generally targeted damages done by magic, or potential damage magic could do. After the 1550s, a series of laws were passed throughout England, “Scotland, Switzerland, France, and the

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284 Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*, 166.
Spanish Netherlands” which targeted “witchcraft as such,” rather than its effects.\textsuperscript{285} We can see in this transition the re-signification of witches as dangerous kinds of beings, immoral threats to “social health.”\textsuperscript{286} To recall Wynter, witches in the sixteenth century are being re-signified from enemies of Christ, to enemies of the human itself.

Land enclosure, then, is the condition of possibility for racializing European peasants. The witch-hunts aim towards the subordination – which is the Christianization – of what Federici calls “popular power,” the antagonistic social life among the European peasants. If we think of this as the incorporation of the European peasants into the hegemonic regime of the human (Man\textsuperscript{1}), then we can propose that the imposition of whiteness on the European peasants occurs through the enclosures and violent suppression of the mystical or religious; that is, those “religiosities” which constitute the basis for material and symbolic resistance to the universal, binding authority of the mercantile state.

The intra-European Christianization of the peasants, while distinct from the modes of domination in the “New World” and the slave trade, was intimately linked with them.\textsuperscript{287} Which is to say, the bourgeois theft of peasant land, and forced transformation of peasants into workers, conscripts European peasants into the transatlantic networks of dispossession, and the order of homo politicus. This order manifests itself to those inside its supraordinate terms (the peasants re-made as wage laborers) as the theft of peasant land, and incorporation of peasant bodies into the gendered-sexual regime of bourgeois (re)production. This may in part explain why peasant “heresy,” “witchcraft,” or peasant spiritualities generally are targeted; they articulate relations to
land that recognize the life-giving subsistence the land provides - relations to the land and collective life not predicated upon the logic of property.

The witch-hunts are a form of political terror, which function differently in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries than during the Middle Ages. The effect of the witch-hunts in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was to repress forms of autonomy to the wage. Which is to say, the meaning of “Witch” and “Heretic” undergoes a shift as well, and is at the center of a density of effects which Wynter gathers under the genealogy of Man\(^1\) (the reigning episteme of roughly the fifteenth through the seventeenth centuries). Recall, Wynter refers to Man\(^1\) as partially degodded. Like the Native in the Americas, “Heathen” is refashioned as a signifier of irrationality, that is, the lack of political rationality characterized by what John Locke calls political liberty. As such, the meaning of Heathen refers to an interior condition, to an improperly functioning interiority or Mind. To name Natives Heathen, then, is to raise questions as to their interior-racial capacity for self-governance, and the capacity to participate in transatlantic networks of exchange.

The overall aim of this chapter is to think the racial architecture of the category of religion, and its attendant relations of exploitation and expropriation, through the witch-hunts. As we will see, the European witch-hunts not only expropriated land and criminalized forms of collective social life; at the same time, these campaigns reformed the relation between the ruled and the rulers, in the discursive formation of “the people.” The installation of the human in Europe takes place as the production of the nation, through the enslcours and the racialization of the mystical and magical. Rational religion - concerned with the formation of the citizen - is constituted by the violent dispossession of the peasants, and violent subjugation of “popular power,” of the mystical and other forms of social obligation or allegiance.
4.1. Hunting Witches: Installing the Human

The history of the body and the witch-hunt that I have presented is based on an assumption […] the 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. In both cases we have the forcible removal of entire communities from their land, large-scale impoverishment, the launching of ‘Christianizing’ campaigns destroying people’s autonomy and communal relations. We also have a cross-fertilization whereby forms of repression that had been developed in the Old World were transported to the New and then re-imported into Europe.

-Silvia Federici

Both Federici and Cedric Robinson argue that the bourgeois “revolution” of capitalism was, in many important ways, a counter-revolution. Rather than a progressive, revolutionary event, they argue that capitalism extends critical aspects of feudal social relations, and is reactive against popular power. Federici shows how the enclosures in Europe bring reproductive labor under the control of the state. This dispossession targeted “the religious,” the Heretic, in an effort to and to manage/discipline bodies.

Consistently denigrated were practices of sharing and reciprocal exchange that were incommensurable with private property. “[T]he figure of the witch […] in this volume is placed at the center-stage, as the embodiment of a world of female subjects that capitalism had to destroy: the heretic, the healer, the disobedient wife, the woman who dared to live alone, the obeah woman who poisoned the master’s food and inspired the slaves to revolt.”

Much of what falls under the rubric of “witchcraft” are practices and beliefs that constitute a refusal to

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289 Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*, 21. “Capitalism was the response of the feudal lords, the patrician merchants, the bishops and popes, to a centuries-long social conflict that, in the end, shook their power, and truly gave ‘all the world a big jolt.’ Capitalism was the counter-revolution that destroyed the possibilities that had emerged from the anti-feudal struggle [of small peasants, artisans, and day laborers].”

Kathi Weeks has elaborated the importance of anti-work politics to challenge the normative power of work as a social value, and to unveil the overvaluation of work in capitalist society as a social convention. According to Weeks, “the work society” and its institutions produce disciplined citizens, for whom the work ethic is common sense.

Weeks reminds us that work “is not just defended on grounds of economic necessity and social duty; it is widely understood as an individual moral practice and collective ethical obligation” (emphasis mine).

For Weeks, the question is “how to struggle against both labor’s misrecognition and devaluation on the one hand, and its metaphysics and moralism on the other hand.” Weeks does so by developing the concept of the “refusal to work,” which challenges not only the exploitation of labor and extraction of surplus value, but the ideal of work that dominates our lives. The “refusal to work” is a challenge to the work ethic that moralizes about work. In the context of the witch-hunts, figuring the Witch, Heretic, and Healer as immoral functions to constitute “work” itself as a moral and ethical obligation at the center of social relations. As such, what surfaces in both Chidester and Federici’s studies is that Christianity is part of the machinery of racial capitalism. Or, in perhaps a more polemical form, that racial capitalism is Christian.

In an expansion of Marx’s concept of primitive accumulation, Federici describes primitive accumulation as including,


292 Week, The Problem With Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries, 11.


(i) the development of a new sexual division of labor subjugating women’s labor and women’s reproductive function to the reproduction of the work-force; (ii) the construction of a new patriarchal order, based upon the exclusion of women from waged-work and their subordination to men; (iii) the mechanization of the proletarian body and its transformation, in the case of women, into a machine for the production of new workers. Most important, I have placed at the center of my analysis of primitive accumulation the witch-hunts of the 16th and 17th centuries, arguing that the persecution of the witches in Europe as in the New World, as as important as colonization and the expropriation of the European peasantry from its land were for the development of capitalism.295

In this formulation, Federici brings gender in proximity to the mercantile relations of political and economic power. That is, gender is not a natural category but is constituted within the shifting field of power relations in the transition to capitalism, central to which is the state violence that serves to establish and reproduce a gendered division of labor. Federici explains, “[i]f it is true that in capitalist society sexual identity became the carrier of specific work-functions, then gender should not be considered a purely cultural reality, but should be treated as a specification of class relations.”296 This is an important argument. Federici thinks “economy” in a way that sees wage-labor as enabled by other relations of expropriation. In the history of the witch-hunts, wage-labor is made dependent on the gendered division of labor, by which labor is split into reproductive and productive forms. Federici reconstructs a landscape of various figures of capital production, in particular the “woman” as a relation of capital production. The position of the Woman names a relation to capital, as the position tasked with reproducing labor power. This gendered division of labor is centered on intensive state regulation of women’s bodies, reproduction, and subsistence.

As Federici repeatedly shows, the gendering of capital’s relations of production was, and continues to be, a relation of expropriation that enables and supports the exploitation of the

295 Federici, Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation, 12.

296 Federici, Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation, 14.
wage. In this process, reproductive labor and productive labor are distinguished, and reproductive labor is “biologized,” or naturalized as non-work: it is simply what women do, and for which they are responsible. Gendering, then, does not exist outside of the field of power relations by which capitalism comes online, nor is gender simply affected by capitalism. The witch-hunts are, rather, practices of gendering that are constitutive of capitalism. Hence, Federici names wage-labor as a patriarchal relation, and capitalism as a patriarchal system. Or, as Wynter argues, gender is a function of the “genre” of the human, of Man. “Woman” names a position constitutive of the relational ontology of the human, not a biological or natural category of difference.297

Part of the difficulty of assessing the history of the witch-hunts, according to Federici, is that “one cannot account for the extermination of the witches as simply a product of greed, as no reward comparable to the riches of the Americas could be obtained from the execution and the confiscation of the goods of women who in the majority were very poor.”298 Nevertheless, Federici argues that if we consider the historical context and persons targeted by these terror campaigns, we can discern a political and economic rationale: “witch-hunting in Europe was an attack on women’s resistance to the spread of capitalist relations and the power that women had gained by virtue of their sexuality, their control over reproduction, and their ability to heal.”299 The witch-hunts, in this interpretation, were less about accumulation by dispossession than about breaking women’s power and autonomy. Whether we are convinced by Federici’s interpretation or not, she points to the historical fraternity between political violence and the economic


298 Federici, Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation, 169.

299 Federici, Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation, 170.
reasoning of an emerging mercantile capitalist class. This is not, of course, a unique insight.³⁰⁰ But the specificity of the witch-hunts may help us draw out the logic of what was already at work in racial capitalism’s libidinal economy, especially as racialized expropriation came to be, and remains, essential to enabling the exploitation of wage-labor. The witch-hunts bring together both an economic rationale, and a mode of excessive – but mundane - violence whose performance is irreducible to this reasoning. And, as theo-political figures, witches function as one of the doorways by which the theological grammar of Christendom transmutates into the grammar of the human.

By making the witch-hunts not a crime in general, but a female crime, all women were gathered up as objects of suspicion; that is, potential witches. In this way, their subjugation is enabled by the shifting discursive operations of the religious and the political. What is significant to note, though, is the way witches will increasingly come to be signified as creatures of irrationality. Thus, under what Wynter terms the episteme of Man¹, the Witch figures an opposition to rational, political Man. With this transition, not only is the opposition inscribed on the body, but it also gives rise to what we might call the democratization of despotism. Witch-hunts were officially state-sponsored, but they called on, and included, the participation of the entire society. Not only did this induce the patriarchy of the wage, as Federici argues (i.e. the gendered division of labor), but it did so as patriarchy would be a collective enterprise in which European men of all ranks could participate in the cruelty of the witch-hunts. Thus, although the witch-hunts were central to breaking the power of the peasants in general, and installing the

hegemony of the wage, they also served to conscript “men” into a regime of generalized, and enjoyable, power over women.

Take, for example, Federici’s description of the “sexual sadism” of the torture of accused witches:

[T]he accused were stripped naked and completely shaved (it was argued that the devil hid among their hair); then they were pricked with long needles all over their bodies, including their vaginas, in search for the mark with which the devil presumably branded his creatures (just as masters in England did with runaway slaves). Often they were raped [...] their limbs were torn, they were seated on iron chairs under which fires were lit; their bones were crushed. [...] The execution was an important public event, which all the members of the community had to attend, including the children of the witches, especially their daughters who, in some cases, would be whipped in front of the stake on which they could see their mother burning alive (emphasis mine).301

The sadism on display here is productive of a putative subject (Man), and subjective position, in relation to another putative subject and subjugated position (woman/Witch). We can point to the tragedy here for Europe’s lower classes, that this site of collective catharsis was at the same time one of the means by which they were being dispossessed by the emerging bourgeoisie and the mercantile state, and left with compensatory political rights in exchange for dependence on the exploitation of the wage. Even more, there is a symbolic and psychic link established in this collective sadism, by which the subjective position of “wage worker” and its real inequality, is being materialized in a close relation with power over witches, who stand in more generally for women.

By drawing attention to the formation of this political unconscious, we may gain some insights about the way racial capitalism’s exploitative relations are supported and enabled by its ongoing relations of expropriation. For example, although Federici is deeply invested in connecting the transatlantic relations of expropriation in the transition to capitalism, she severely

301 Federici, Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation, 186.
undertheorizes the practices of race making.\textsuperscript{302} Which is to say, although Federici shies away from making this point, her own account demonstrates the division between European women and enslaved African women around their “reproductive function.” It is because enslaved women’s reproductive role was not the reproduction of wage-labor, but a relation of property, that racial slavery configured black women as unable to inhabit normative gender.\textsuperscript{303}

Once European peasants are dispossessed of land, and transformed into workers by biopolitical technologies including the witch-hunts, they were prepared to be bonded to the wage relation and the mercantile state in the form of what Gramsci terms “voluntary consent.”\textsuperscript{304} This is to say, Federici’s work shows that Christianization campaigns materialized the conditions for “whitening” the European peasants. That is, the witch-hunts were one of the ways in which Europe’s lower classes would be positioned racially in relation to capital, as those subjects to be incorporated within capital’s political-economy as wage-laborers. In this regard, Robin D. G. Kelly has argued “the first European proletarians were racial subjects (Irish, Jews, Roma or Gypsies, Slavs, etc.) and they were victims of dispossession (enclosure), colonialism, and slavery within Europe.”\textsuperscript{305} We might think of the witch-hunts as exemplary of the ways Europe’s lower classes were themselves subject to internal settler-colonialism by the emerging mercantile

\textsuperscript{302} See, for example, Geraldine Heng, \textit{The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).


political class; a project of dispossession that would subsequently be hidden by incorporating dispossessed Europeans as *citizens* of the newly forming political-economies.

On the promiscuity between New World and Old technologies of domination in the transition to capitalism, Cedric Robinson has described how they are woven through with what he terms “European racialism.” Robinson remarks, “capitalism was less a catastrophic revolution (negation) of feudalist social orders than the extension of these social relations into the larger tapestry of the modern world’s political and economic relations.” Capitalism would take shape in the historically specific matrix of European “civilization.” As Robinson argues, “European civilization is not the product of capitalism. On the contrary, the character of capitalism can only be understood in the social and historical context of its appearance.” That is, the practice of racial distinction does not merely arise to resolve the contradictions of capitalism’s relations of production, but is constitutive of those relations of production.

Robinson’s historical work makes clear that a pre-modern racialism permeated Europe’s social relations before the advent of capitalism. Colonialism and capitalism were the occasion for the extension and dissemination of that civilizational logic. Robinson remarks,

> [t]he bourgeoisie which led the development of capitalism were drawn from particular ethnic and cultural groups; the European proletariats and the mercenaries of the leading States from others; its peasants from still other cultures; and its slaves from entirely different worlds. *The tendency of European civilization through capitalism was thus not to homogenize but to differentiate - to exaggerate regional, subcultural, dialectical differences into ‘racial’ ones (emphasis mine).*

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308 Or, race/ism is not invented as a tool for the ruling elite to divide an otherwise unified working class, though it surely can be, and has been, used in this way. Such “divide and rule” uses of racism only scratch the surface of the centrality of racialism to modern-coloniality, and its contemporary global iterations.

The critical point for Robinson is that we understand “that racialism and its permutations persisted, rooted not in a particular era but in civilization itself.”

In his book, *Racial Blackness and the Discontinuity of Western Modernity*, Lindon Barrett details the broader historical context of the bourgeois expropriation of land - the enclosures – in relation to the material and symbolic trade of “black flesh,” and expropriation of native lands and people in colonialism. The counter-revolutionary character of capitalism, then, refers to both the way it extended feudal racialism, as well as the way it developed in anticipation of resistance from multiple sites along the trans-Atlantic routes.

For her part, Federici points to the central role popular heresy played in the frequent, popular peasant revolts against the feudal lords and the Church. Indeed, “the heretic movement was a conscious attempt to create a new society.”

In Federici’s estimation, “popular heresy […] was the equivalent of ‘liberation theology’ for the medieval proletariat […] It denounced social hierarchies, private property and the accumulation of wealth, and it disseminated among the people a new, revolutionary conception of society that, for the first time in the Middle Ages, redefined every aspect of daily life (work, property, sexual reproduction, and the position of women), posing the question of emancipation in truly universal terms.”

Federici goes as far to say that the “heretic movement was the first ‘proletarian international’ - such was the reach of the sects (particularly the Cathars and Waldenses).” Popular heresy aimed not only at the Church, but also the feudal structures, “since to challenge the Church was to confront at once the

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311 Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*, 33.
312 Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*, 33.
313 Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*, 33.
ideological pillar of feudal power, the biggest landowner in Europe, and one of the institutions most responsible for the daily exploitation of the peasantry.”

Pointing to the life of Christ depicted in the Gospels, “the heretics taught that Christ had no property, and that if the Church wanted to regain its spiritual power it should divest itself from all its possessions.” The medieval question of what constitutes “true religion,” then, cannot be separated from the popular struggles against feudal power relations. Both the suppression of revolt, and revolt itself, were often articulated in theological discourse.

Due in part to the devastations of the Black Death (circa 1347), the decimation of the population in Europe presented a serious crisis for feudal domination. The lack of labor supply gave the lower classes power to possibly subvert the foundations of feudal rule. In fact, the mid fourteenth to fifteenth century was characterized by popular struggles and revolts against feudal power. Federici recounts the myriad forms by which peasants and artisans organized to attack castles, crush the bargaining power of the bourgeois and nobility, and refuse to pay rents. As described in the previous chapter, Wynter generally conceives of the transition to capitalism as characterized by the conflicts between the rising bourgeoisie and the Church. Federici points to the histories of popular struggle against which the bourgeoisie, nobility, and Church allied. Without this alliance, the peasant revolts would have likely succeeded:

Indeed, the image, that has been handed down to us, of a bourgeoisie perennially at war with the nobility, and carrying on its banners the call for equality and democracy, is a distortion. By the late Middle Ages, wherever we turn, from Tuscany to England and the Low Countries, we find the bourgeoisie already allied with the nobility in the suppression

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314 Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*, 33-34.
315 Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*, 34.
316 Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*, 44.
of the lower classes. For in the peasants and the democratic weavers and cloggers of its cities, the bourgeoisie recognized an enemy far more dangerous than the nobility - one that made it worthwhile for the burgers even to sacrifice their cherished political autonomy. Thus, it was the urban bourgeoisie, after two centuries of struggles waged in order to gain full sovereignty within the walls of its communes, who reinstitute the power of the nobility, by voluntarily submitting to the rule of the Prince, the first step on the road to the absolute state.  

It is for reasons like these that Federici argues the transition to capitalism needs to be thought in its counter-revolutionary dynamics. The regulatory technologies of the mercantile state were designed to snuff out the flame of revolt, which means the state recognized the generativity of common struggle, and the threat the communes posed to the status quo.

4.2. Biopolitics, Labor Control, and Privatizing Religion

With the enclosures of peasant lands in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, European peasants were increasingly alienated from communal relations. “With the demise of the subsistence economy that had prevailed in pre-capitalist Europe, the unity of production and reproduction which has been typical of all societies based on production-for-use came to an end, as these activities became the carriers of different social relations and were sexually differentiated.” As a result, “the sexual division of labor that emerged from it not only fixed women to reproductive work, but increased their dependence on men, enabling the state and employers to use the male wage as a means to command women’s labor.” Thus, Federici argues, “[i]t was not the workers - male or female - who were liberated by land privatization. What was ‘liberated’ was capital, as the land was now ‘free’ to function as a means of

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318 Federici, Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation, 49-50.
319 Federici, Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation, 75.
320 Federici, Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation, 75.
accumulation and exploitation, rather than as a means of subsistence.”\footnote{Federici, \textit{Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation}, 75.} The expropriation of the commons also eliminated spaces and resources that enabled communalism, and the regulation of the newly privatized commons gave rise to an increasingly centralized, powerful state.

Federici draws attention to the role Christianity played in serving the new state aims, especially in the regulatory function of social discipline. In order to remake dispossessed peasants into waged workers, the state sought “(a) to create a more disciplined work-force; (b) to diffuse social protest; and (c) to fix workers to the jobs forced upon them.”\footnote{Federici, \textit{Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation}, 83.} Campaigns of social discipline aimed at “desocialization or decollectivization” by suppressing “all forms of collective sociality and sexuality including sports, games, dances, ale-wakes, festivals, and other group-rituals that had been a source of bonding and solidarity.”\footnote{Federici, \textit{Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation}, 83.} In this regard, Federici interprets the Reformation as contributing to the discipline and production of individuated workers. She observes, “[e]ven the individual’s relation with God was privatized: in Protestant areas, with the institution of a direct relationship between the individual and the divinity; in the Catholic areas, with the introduction of individual confession. The church itself, as a community center, ceased to host any social activity other than those addressed to the cult.”\footnote{Federici, \textit{Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation}, 84.} The privatization or interiorization of Christianity in the Reformation is accompanied by intensive regulation of bodies. This regulation produces “the body” at the nexus of state power and relations of labor. The privatization of religion, in this sense, produces interiority as the
privileged space of freedom, at the same time it exposes the flesh to the bio- and necro-political technologies of the new political economies.

The gendered division of reproductive and productive labor was co-constitutive of a broader process of women’s social degradation, which we may also think of as a Christianizing campaign.\textsuperscript{325} In this regard, the witch-hunts were less an exceptional case of extreme violence than paradigmatic of the formation of a centralized state apparatus, designed around the intense regulation of women’s bodies, reproduction, and autonomy. At this point we can see a convergence between Wynter’s history of Man\textsuperscript{1}, and Federici’s account. The sociogenic principle of material redemption, organized towards the enrichment and expansion of state power, facilitated the building of political infrastructures capable of broad surveillance and regulation. As nascent forms of bio-political governmentality, the subjugation of European peasants aligned women with figures of social threat, in need of ongoing discipline and surveillance. Importantly, these figures were constructed as theological deviations - Witches, Heretics, Whores; a panoply of demonically inspired threats to (Christian) social order.\textsuperscript{326}

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325 In the 16th and 17th centuries, “women lost ground in every area of social life. A key area of change in this respect was the law, where in this period we observe a steady erosion of women’s rights. One of the main rights women lost was the right to conduct economic activities alone, as femme soles. In France, they lost the right to make contracts or to represent themselves in court, being declared legal ‘imbeciles.’” Silvia Federici, Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation (New York: Autonomedia, 2004), 100.

326 Although it lies beyond the scope of this chapter, Federici points to a significant shift in the discursive representations of European women in the 18th century: “While at the time of the witch-hunt women had been portrayed as savage beings, mentally weak, insatiably lusty, rebellious, insubordinate, incapable of self-control, by the 18th century the canon had been reversed. Women were now depicted as passive, asexual beings, more obedient, more moral than men, capable of exerting a positive moral influence on them.” Federici, Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation, 103.
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This shift coincides with the transition to what Wynter terms our present, bio-economic conception of the Human. This seems to me an important period for further study, given the overlap between industrial modes of production, bio-evolutionary figurations of “the species,” the birth of the formal “study of religion” in the 19th century, and what might be thought of as a distinctly Methodist, bio-evolutionary narrative of sanctification (“Christian perfection”).

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The constitutive factor is, once again, a theological practice of naming figures of waywardness. Rather than think of these various repressive techniques as simply reactive, we may also think of them as anticipatory. The transatlantic circuit of dispossession circulated raw materials from the “New World” to the “Old” for the new relations of wage-labor production. And “what traveled with these ‘exports’ was not only the blood of the slaves but the seeds of a new science of exploitation […] Slavery, (like the witch-hunt) was a major ground of experimentation for methods of labor-control that were later imported into Europe.”

These techniques for managing populations go hand in hand with the management of masses of people rendered instruments of production. Like a mass machine, the body and body-politic has to be cared for, inoculated, disciplined, strengthened, and purified. This general “thingification” is established through differential relations of race and gender, which constitute a range of relations of capital production.

These methods of labor control anticipated resistance to their implementation. As aforementioned, the alliances among the merchants and nobility feared the collaboration of Europe’s working classes, indigenous peoples in the Americas, and enslaved Africans. In American colonies, Europeans who arrived as indentured servants in the early years of the seventeenth century frequently fled to live with the indigenous peoples. Steve Martinot historicizes the racialization of American colonial social structures in relation to this perpetual risk of fugitivity. The racial and gendered boundaries constituting relations of capital expropriation and exploitation were drawn, and are maintained, through force. As Peter

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327 Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*, 105.

Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker write, “Terror created boundaries.”\textsuperscript{329} To recall Lindon Barrett, racial boundaries confer value through the violence by which the devalued are figured. The practice of racial distinction, in this sense, anticipates what Fred Moten calls “blackness” - “the anoriginary drive and the insistences it calls into being and moves through, that criminality that brings the law online, the runaway anarchic ground of unpayable debt and un-old wealth, the fugal, internal world theater that shows up for a minute serially.”\textsuperscript{330} Racial regulation disavows this fugitive drive at the same time it depends on it as its reason for being.

Historically, then, there has been a proximity between the political suppression of heresy, magic, and the like, and resistance to domination. Or, perhaps more precisely, that the threats which political order targeted have been figured as the Heretic, the Witch, and the Pagan. The specificity of these practices is important, because they reach towards unregulated connection. For example, Federici cites the eighteenth century Inquisition in Mexico, which sought to “eradicate magical and heretical beliefs,” in which “the testimonies collected reveal the existence of multiple exchanges among women in matters relating to magical cures and love remedies, creating in time a new cultural reality drawn from the encounter between the African, European and indigenous magical traditions.”\textsuperscript{331} These “multiple exchanges” constituted practices of care and connection, and forged communal knowledges. Such “black markets” of care enacted present alternatives to settler-colonialism and capital.

To pivot back to our framework, the installation of the human, under the shadow of religion, is shadowed by capital. The figures of the Witch and the Heretic are morally degenerate

\textsuperscript{329} Quoted in Federici, \textit{Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation}, 106.

\textsuperscript{330} Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, \textit{The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study} (New York: Minor Compositions, 2013), 47.

\textsuperscript{331} Federici, \textit{Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation}, 109.
signifiers, which serve to construct a semantic field of value, or to generate “moral signifiers to signal European difference, as an element in accumulation.” For example, the French generally derided indigenous American populations as lacking morals, by which they meant these populations “had no conception of private property, of authority, of male superiority, and they even refused to punish their children […] The Montagnais-Naskapi men owed their training in male supremacy to the fact that the French wanted to instill in them the ‘instinct’ for private property, to induce them to become reliable partners in the fur trade.” Furthermore, in his account Chidester relays the continuity of this transatlantic “civilizing discourse” and its moral signifiers. Recall, for the European comparativists, no ethical or moral relation could be established with the Hottentot because they improperly valued objects, and did not properly value money. As such, they could not be incorporated within the human’s grammar of value. “For the definition of blackness and femaleness as marks of bestiality and irrationality conformed with the exclusion of women in Europe and women and men in the colonies from the social contract implicit in the wage, and the consequent naturalization of their exploitation.”

What we see in the work of both Federici and Chidester is that to be recognized as human, one must be capable of entering into the (anything but) free social contract politically, and labor contract economically.

In his critical engagement with Foucault, Alexander Weheliye has argued, “rather than using biopolitics as a modality of analysis that supersedes or sidelines race, I stress that race be placed front and center in considerations of political violence, albeit not as a biological or


333 Federici, Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation, 111.

334 Federici, Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation, 200.
cultural classification but *as a set of sociopolitical processes of differentiation and
hierarchization, which are projected onto the putatively biological human body.*”

Weheliye’s “racializing assemblages” can help think the processes at work in Federici’s work, especially as she expands and revises biopolitical discourses. According to Federici, the processes of disciplining the body “consisted of an attempt by state and church to transform the individual’s powers into labor-power.” This transformation was constitutive of a revised sense of the human, a “new concept of the person,” shared by the sixteenth century Protestant Reformation and the mercantile bourgeoisie’s political grammar. In this new concept, the battle between Reason and Passion was “now staged within the person who is reconstructed as a battlefield, where opposite elements clash for domination […] The battle is fought on many fronts because Reason must be vigilant against the attacks of the carnal self, and prevent ‘the wisdom of the flesh’ (Luther’s words) from corrupting the powers of the mind.” The body, then, becomes the principal site at which theological enemies are reterritorialized to unregulated passions.

There is a significant shift at work here, wherein the source of heresy, paganism, and demonology are situated in the body itself; or rather, “the body” is invented as it is made the object of political violence. Wynter helps us understand that the horizon of this shift is the transatlantic entanglements, by which the human is conceptualized in the grammar of race. In

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336 Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*, 133.

337 Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*, 133.


339 This should not be construed as the suppression or repression of passion, or pleasure. Rather, “passion” establishes a node within the libidinal economy operative here, wherein the modes of knowledge production governed by the rubric of “reason” generate positive affects in the act of regulating or dominating “the passions.” In short, to rule the passions is itself pleasurable.
Federici’s effort to think these processes from the figure of the “world proletariat,” she obscures how these deployments of political violence produce the distinctions between human and slave, between (white) reproductive labor which reproduces the human community, and the openness of black female slaves to sexual violence; what Hortense Spillers theorizes as the ungendering of black female flesh, the (im)possibility for black women to be human, to inhabit normative (human) sexuality.

It is precisely these regimes of sexual violence that differentiate the subject position of the human from the slave, the position of whiteness - that is, human-ness - to racial blackness. It is less helpful, I think, to analogize the subjugation of European women and the subjugation of African-derived women. To be clear, my concern with the method of analogy is not that I think European women had it better. The details recounted above ought to make it clear that such a calculus is not helpful. To the contrary, my concern is that the analogy prevents us from being able to think at the level of structures or political ontology, and actually enables problematic comparisons of suffering. 340 What I am trying to point to is the way the paradigm of modern power is put together. Recall Frank Wilderson’s argument that we should think paradigmatically about the positions of the White/Human, Native/Savage, and Black/Slave. Similar to the way that we theorize “worker and capitalist as positions first,” these figures name positions in a structure of power. As explained by the editors of a recent volume on Afro-pessimism, “The social death of the slave goes to the very level of their being, defining their ontology. Thus, according to Afro-pessimism, the slave experiences their ‘slaveness’ ontologically, as a ‘being for the captor,’

not as an oppressed subject, who experiences exploitation and alienation, but as an object of accumulation and fungibility (exchangeability).”341 Instead of analogy, we can draw attention to the enormous cost of making European women “human;” the vehicles for the cultivation and reproduction of “the species.”342 In this way, we are given a vantage on how the imposition of whiteness on “white people” was made possible through the political violence and degradation of dispossessed European women, as the process by which they would be made white. That is, whiteness is violent for “white people” too. Once more, the structure of the modern-colonial world and its racializing assemblages is violent all the way down.

4.3. The Disenchanted Racial Body

According to Wynter, the over-valorization of whiteness, and devalorization of blackness, is a deeper function of the devalorization of the human species as such.343 This devalorization shows up in the objectifications of the modern philosophical-scientific gaze. It is worth quoting Federici at length:

In the course of this process a change occurs in the metaphorical field, as the philosophical representation of individual psychology borrows images from the body-politics of the state, disclosing a landscape inhabited by ‘rulers’ and ‘rebellious subjects,’ ‘multitudes’ and ‘seditions,’ ‘chains’ and ‘imperious commands’ and (with Thomas Browne) even the executioner. As we shall see, this conflict between Reason and the Body, described by philosophers as a riotous confrontation between the ‘better’ and the ‘lower sorts,’ cannot be ascribed only to the baroque taste for the figurative, later to be purged in favor of a ‘more masculine’ language. The battle which the 17th-century


discourse on the person imagines unfolding in the microcosm of the individual has arguably a foundation in the reality of the time. It is an aspect of that broader process of social reformation, whereby, in the ‘Age of Reason,’ the rising bourgeoisie attempted to remold the subordinate classes in conformity with the needs of the developing capitalist economy.  

The body appears as an always already raced and gendered object of knowledge and discipline for bourgeois tacticians, as a *disenchanted* thing. The “ontological divide” between the mental and the physical renders the body the unruly territory over which the sovereign Mind rules. Characteristic of European state power in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, “[i]n Mechanical Philosophy we perceive a new bourgeois spirit that calculates, classifies, makes distinctions, and degrades the body *only in order to rationalize its faculties*, aiming not just at intensifying its subjection but at maximizing its social utility.”  

That is to say, the function of disenchantment is to make useful subjects for the regime of accumulation. Federici argues, “the mechanical body, the body-machine, could not have become a model of social behavior without the destruction by the state of a vast range of pre-capitalist beliefs, practices, and social subjects whose existence contradicted the regularization of corporeal behavior promised by Mechanical Philosophy.” She proposes we read the attacks on magic and witchcraft from this vantage: “at the basis of magic was an animistic conception of nature that did not admit to any separation between matter and spirit, and thus imagined the cosmos as a *living organism*, populated by occult forces […] Thus, a variety of practices were designed to appropriate the secrets of nature and bend its power to the human will.” For this reason, “eradicating these practices was a necessary condition for the capitalist rationalization of

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345 Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*, 139.
346 Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*, 141.
work, since magic appeared as an illicit form of power and an instrument to obtain what one wanted without work, that is, a refusal of work in action.”  

For Federici, the question of whether “magic,” and the powers it assumes, are “real or imaginary” is not the point. What is significant is that magical practices posed a real barrier to social control, to the rationalization of social life for the sake of capitalist production.  

Although Federici does not put it this way, she draws attention to the carceral logic of colonial-modernity. The political ontology of the human is materialized in the empirical violence at the center of Federici’ study. Through this violence, magic and witchcraft were aligned with the base passions of the body, against which the mind, ruled by Reason, struggles. Federici reminds us,  

The common fate between Europe’s witches and Europe’s colonial subjects is further demonstrated by the growing exchange, in the course of the 17th century, between the ideology of witchcraft and the racist ideology that developed on the soil of the Conquest and the slave trade. The Devil was portrayed as a black man and black people were increasingly treated like devils, so that “devil worship and diabolical interventions [became] the most widely reported aspect of the non-European societies the slave traders encountered.”  

In this way, the witch-hunts are exemplary of how the parameters of the human are worked out around the religious, and the visual and sonic registers these figures signify. What Federici discloses is not the biopoliitical management of unraced, ungendered “bodies,” but biopolitical management as the production of raced and gendered subjects.  

In this regard, white femininity is constructed at the intersection of its degradation, which is also its valorization as the generative source of labor-power. That is, white femininity is

347 Federici, Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation, 142.
348 Federici, Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation, 142-143.
349 Federici, Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation, 200.
produced through state violence, at the same time the state is rationalized as existing for the sake of protecting white femininity. This state-sponsored sexual violence, which subjugated European women, was in the interest of producing a new sense of domestic space and labor for the accumulation of capital, and the establishment of regulated, *white/human* maternity. In contrast, sexualized violence against the captive African woman aimed towards the destruction of any possibility of maternity, or filial relations. The slave’s child belonged to the master, a relation of property. Indeed, the violence Federici traces does not produce a “common experience,” but is precisely the practice of differentiating the free from the slave, around the issue of the (bourgeois) family.350 The sexual violence of the European witch-hunts produced, as it managed, kinship relations between, and among, European peoples. In this perverse way the context of dispossession was simultaneously a context of empowerment within the racialized Master/Slave ontology of the modern world.351

With the establishment of civil society, the political violence of the enclosures was reterritorialized in bourgeois hegemony. As a result, the land-less peasants transformed into waged-workers vis-à-vis capital, found themselves in a world largely imposed on them, but within which they now had a formal place. This formal place, as Karl Marx frequently pointed out, offered abstract political rights in exchange for real, material inequality and suffering.352 Civil society, for Europe’s white working class, is the condition of forgetting the loss of the commons and the subsistence provided by the land, as well as forgetting the enormous expenditures of force by which these were taken. Following the witch-hunts and the enclosures,


all that the former European peasants were left with were compensatory political rights and wage labor.

Though sadistic, the witch-hunts, as Federici makes effort to show, have a function within what Frank B. Wilderson III calls the libidinal economy of capitalism: the witch-hunts materialize the desire of the bourgeois and ruling European classes for European workers in the emerging transatlantic capitalist economy. In contrast, capital’s “desiring machine” went to Africa for slaves. Wilderson writes, “something about the Black body in and of itself made it the repository of the violence that was the slave trade. It would have been far easier and far more profitable to take the white underclass from along the riverbanks of England and Western Europe than to travel all the way to Africa for slaves.” To clarify once more, Wilderson is not talking about a comparison of the experience of suffering itself. His point is about the incommensurability of the “slave’s grammar of suffering” with the grammar of the worker and civil society. According to Wilderson, there are at least two reasons for focusing on this distinction:

First, capital was kick-started by approaching a particular body (a black body) with direct relations of force, not by approaching a white body with variable capital. Thus, one could say that slavery is closer to capital’s primal desire than is exploitation. It is a relation of terror as opposed to a relation of hegemony. Second, today, late capital is imposing a renaissance of this original desire, the direct relation of force, the despotism of the unwaged relation. This renaissance of slavery, i.e., the reconfiguration of the prison-industrial complex has, once again, as its structuring metaphor and primary target the Black body.

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355 Wilderson, “The Prison Slave as Hegemony’s (Silent) Scandal,” 72-73.
As I understand Wilderson’s argument, this is both an analytical point, and a life and death matter for black people who can only have a relation to civil society as non-subjects (what he would refer to as social death). Thus, the “value of reintroducing the unthought category of the slave, by way of noting the absence of the Black subject, lies in the Black subject’s potential for extending the demand placed on state/capital formations because its reintroduction into the discourse expands the intensity of the antagonism.”

Part of the importance, then, of giving attention to the European witch-hunts is that the sadism by which they are animated may also illuminate “capital’s primal desire.” In so doing, they enable us to ask how these relations of expropriation help us think anew about work and production.

This is especially critical if, as Jackie Wang suggests, “the existence of poor whites who have fallen out of the middle class or have been affected by the opiate crisis at the present juncture represents not racial progress for black Americans, but the generalization of expropriability as a condition in the face of an accumulation crisis.”

As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, part of the bind is that work serves not only as a relation of exploitation, but as a marker of citizenship and a relation within civil society. As such, work is simultaneously a relation of economic degradation and exploitation, as well as a social and political signifier of morality that generally works to racially distribute relations of exploitation and expropriation.

Racialization, broadly, works around signifiers of “bad workers,” or lazy (i.e. idle). In seventeenth century colonial Virginia, British settlers indicted indigenous Americans as “lazy.” Similarly, indigenous South Africans (throughout the sixteenth to twentieth centuries) were

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356 Wilderson, “The Prison Slave as Hegemony’s (Silent) Scandal,” 73.

357 Jackie Wang, Carceral Capitalism (South Pasadena: Semiotext(e), 2018), 125.
characterized by a range of European settlers as “lazy.” Even “undesireable” European immigrants to the U.S. in the twentieth century were characterized as lazy and therefore non-white. Work, as a political and moral signifier, has been at the center of dividing those who are human (white people are industrious and develop the land), from the sub- and nonhuman (“Natives are lazy”). There is a tension, then, between the degradation of work and its over-valorization as the signifier of social and ethical subjects to whom one should be obligated.

4.4. Conclusion: The Wounds of Religion

As a function of installing the human, the invention of “religion” in colonial cartographies carves up indigenous life. It enacts new divisions, re-arranges existing divisions, and is bound up with enclosure of the commons. The installation of religion functions to delegitimize competing or alternative forms of social life, which act as barriers to the opening of markets. Thus, our contemporary response cannot rest only with the call to respect religious diversity. We are also response-able to the settler-colonial practices by which the common sense of religion has been assembled. If religion can be carved out of, and separated from, other aspects of a people (politics, economics and so on), then when we are called to “respect religion” we cannot see how religion always already works within the fragmentations of modernity. In this sense, we are called to respect the wounds of a social life that have been cut up, cut apart, and re-organized so that they can be governed as religion(s).

The history of this practice of wounding is part of a broader history by which Christianity biologized itself, and refashioned itself as the cultural property of “the West,” of whiteness; the spiritual or historical or aesthetic genius of a people, “white people.”\(^{358}\) This logic of purity - of

differentiating religions from one another, and insisting on the naturalness of these divisions - repeats the carceral logic of individuation. To say that religion is racialized is to also say that it is an object for regulation, insofar as it can serve or impede the flourishing of the human. The authorizing discourses for religion institute whiteness as the ideal of human being. What I mean here is that the regimes of racialization both work out of theological representations of Europe’s others, and work on religion as a racial category - in the sense of having to be managed, regulated, or contained, as the irrational, or dangerous threat to “order,” authority, truth, and capital. The modern state, predicated on the universality of the law, targets religion for racial regulation. In this way, the alternative materialities signified by religion are not denied, but must be directed into the formation of subjects conducive to the function of markets, the discipline of labor, and the development of affect around a sense of guilt for which unrelenting self-surveillance can relieve us.

Marx brilliantly unraveled the relations of capital as themselves mystifying and magical. In this sense, the kinds of abstractions and alienations produced in the social processes of capital (re)production are not the transcendental, rational antithesis to the magical or mystical. Rather, they illustrate how exchange, production, and accumulation depend on claiming the rational, by racializing, gendering, and sexualizing the irrational. Marx, in other words, by locating fetishism at the heart of capitalist social relations, strikes at the heart of the secular bourgeois state, constituted in its split from, and its regulation of, the religious. This separation collapses on itself when the “rational” relations of capital are shown to be no less magical than the social practices put outside natural history by the signifier “religion.”

The witch-hunts demonstrate that techniques of colonial governance informed, and were informed by, the relations of domination imposed on “white people” granted a supraordinate
status within the human community. The precarity of whiteness as a political project belies every attempt to given whiteness a content it does not have. Whiteness requires ongoing regulation in order to appear as coherent. Thus, the total violence of the witch-hunts would eventually be reterritorialized in modern biopolitics.\(^{359}\) Once this happens, a fictive sense of national character is crucial to determining what belongs and what does not; what constitutes progress, what impedes progress, and threatens the health of the people itself. As the secular variant of the Christian figure of the redeemed, the construction of bio-social threats is essential to marking the borders of the human. What remains excessive to this signification, of course, is the threat of revolt or rebellion that is the antecedent “wild” that must be domesticated.

\(^{359}\) Federici’s study re-situates the birth of modern biopolitics in the 16th and 17th century. One of the strengths of this approach is how it connects biopower, and the subjugation of the European peasantry, to the transatlantic relations of colonialism and racial slavery.
CHAPTER FIVE
RACIAL SLAVERY: THE INSTALLATION OF THE HUMAN UNDER THE SHADOW OF RELIGION

In Marcus Rediker’s book, *The Slave Ship: A Human History*, the story of the slave ship is driven by the interlocking dramas of captain, crew, enslaved, and abolitionists. Rediker constructs what he calls a “human history,” in order to make impossible an “abstract, and thereby dehumanized” history. According to Rediker, coming to terms with the history of the slave ship is central to understanding its multiple legacies and the world it made possible. As he poignantly puts it, “the slaver is a ghost ship sailing on the edges of modern consciousness.” The haunting of modernity/coloniality compels us to see “that such horrors have always been, and remain, central to the making of global capitalism.”

By pairing the work of Charles Long on the history of religions, with the work of black feminists M. NourbeSe Philip, and Hortense Spillers, this chapter interrogates religion as a modern category around the themes of freedom and slavery. In this chapter, I argue whiteness is structured by a grammar of captivity. My argument takes a more indirect route to the category of religion than in previous chapters. In order to get at the underlying grammar of colonial-modernity, I move away from the specific histories of the colonial-imperial formation of

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religion, and towards what Spillers terms the West’s “god-terms.” I am interested in religion in two related ways: first, as what Long refers to as “orientation – orientation in the ultimate sense, that is, how one comes to terms with the ultimate significance of one’s place in the world;” and second, but only indirectly, as the categorical formation of discrete, bounded “religions” that traffic in any introductory textbook on world religions. The coherence and distinction of these “religions” depends on the structure I aim to identify and elaborate: captivity.

5.1. Christianity, Slavery, and the Religious Orientation of the West

The legality and morality of enslavement and conquest was of great concern for the Catholic kingdoms of Spain and Portugal. During the Spanish reconquista (722-1492), the issue of slavery intersected with the issue of “just-war.” It was determined that it was permissible to enslave prisoners of war, which of course meant that medieval theologians and jurists were concerned with what constituted a just-war. Columbus’ voyage (1492) was understood to be an extension of the war won in the Iberian Peninsula. With the territory “reconquered,” Catholic Spain would sail into the world to conquer “the Indians.” This mission, Grandin points out, would require a different theological rationale than the reconquista. In the war against Islam, the reconquista derived its legitimacy from the claim that the Iberian Peninsula belonged to Christians, and it was permissible for Catholics to enslave Muslims, or non-believers more

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generally. \textsuperscript{368} Eventually, the basis for the conquest of the New World, and for claims to the land, was grounded in Spain’s “spiritual mission to save Native American souls.”\textsuperscript{369} However, Grandin notes that this justification also meant “America had to be kept pure:”

The inquisition worked to purge native heresies (including those practices that reminded Spaniards of Muslim rites) while royal officials banned Jews, Jewish converts to Christianity, Muslims, and Muslim converts (who numbered as many as 400,000 people in 1609, almost 5 percent of Spain's total population) from settling in the Americas.\textsuperscript{370}

The issue of slavery took shape, then, in the historical matrix of Catholic Spain’s mission to save the world, and its anxiety over, and suppression of, native practices designated as “heresy”

As race would increasingly be called upon to legitimate colonial hierarchies, religion would increasingly be enclosed within racial belonging. Throughout the seventeenth century, from colonial Virginia to the Caribbean islands and beyond, racial blackness would come to form the basis for the new division between free and enslaved.\textsuperscript{371} The question of Christian identity did not go away, but non-Christian status no longer served as the basis for enslavement. Instead, racial knowledge would ground the hierarchies of colonialism and slavery. A theological lack or error, then, would be transmuted into an inherent, biological lack. Not lack of Christianity, but lack of human being itself. As such, racial blackness would form the ultimate ground on which the human - idealized as white - would recognize itself in distinction from the nonhuman. As

\textsuperscript{368} Grandin, \textit{The Empire of Necessity: Slavery, Freedom, and Deception in the New World}, 189.

\textsuperscript{369} Grandin, \textit{The Empire of Necessity: Slavery, Freedom, and Deception in the New World}, 190.

\textsuperscript{370} Grandin, \textit{The Empire of Necessity: Slavery, Freedom, and Deception in the New World}, 190.

freedom and slavery would increasingly articulate *racial belonging*, racial belonging would increasingly form the fundamental divisions of modern power, and capitalist accumulation.\(^{372}\)

If we follow Long’s claim that “religion is the continual quest for the meaning of human existence,” then we can say that the religion of whiteness finds such meaning in control over, and exploitation of, those signified as racial subalterns.\(^{373}\) My interest in Long’s claim is not to reify a definition of religion. Rather, I am interested in how Long deploys “religion” in a way that deconstructs the ruse of Western civilization. One of Long’s critical moves is to interpret the West - as a political, economic, juridical referent - ontologically. That is, as a project whose onto-epistemology collapses the distinction between *what it knows-says* and *what is*.

Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment philosophy write the privileged subjects of modernity in transparency, and press towards a form of knowledge that sees through to the truth of things. The names that the West gives to the world and its peoples are taken to be the truth without remainder. But Long reminds us, those who “underwent” the “‘creativity’ of the Western world,”

were present not as voices speaking but as the silence which is necessary to all speech [...] As opposed to the existential and historical presumptions of human beings making their world, those who lived as the *materia prima* (raw material, I think, is the economic way of expressing this) kept the ontological dimension open through their silence. This silence was as necessary as it was forced. It is not strange that in the nineteenth century, when the Western world admitted the death of its God, at just that moment it sought God not in its own traditions and cultures but in the cultures of primitive and archaic peoples. It was from this silence that the Western world tried to evoke once again a sign of intimacy and relatedness to ontological meaning.\(^{374}\)


We are living, perhaps, in the decay of the names and meanings by which the West “created” a New World. Long writes, “Modern western cultures in the midst of their tremendous creativity and noisiness find themselves confronting an awesome silence […] The great language of creativity which we used to subdue and exploit the world has been placed in jeopardy; its mighty words are overwhelmed by the silence of the pauses between words.”³⁷⁵ But, “silence forces us to realize that our words, the units of naming and recognition in the world, presuppose a reality which is prior to our naming and doing.”³⁷⁶

Long approaches the religiosity of the West differently than the way we saw in Wynter or Federici. For Long, religion refers to “orientation in the ultimate sense.”³⁷⁷ At the most general, Long sees in religion a structure which refers to an *a priori*, to the experience of an-other or others who cannot be incorporated within the existing semantic range of expression. What Long sees in this structure is the radical contingency of what he terms “the human mode of existence.” This mode is characterized by a confrontation with reality as something that precedes and exceeds it. Indeed, this mode is a *response to* this a priori condition of its existence. In its religious life, the structure of human existence, for Long, is a thinking, doing, and living with a reality other than itself, and in relation to which humans know themselves.

### 5.2. Whiteness and the Propertied Grammar of Captivity

In his essay, “The Souls of White Folks,” W.E.B. Du Bois remarks, “The discovery of personal whiteness among the world’s peoples is a very modern thing […] ‘But what on earth is


whiteness that one should so desire it? Then always, somehow, some way, silently but clearly, I am given to understand that whiteness is the ownership of the earth forever and ever, Amen!”

In this extraordinary formulation, Du Bois cuts to the core of whiteness as a religious performance; a structure of belief, articulated in myths of origins and worldly destiny. More specifically, this religiosity is whiteness’ orientation as a relation of property ownership. Whiteness is about living out a relation to the world as something to be owned. As that which Europe owns, the forms of life in the New World are Europe’s to name. Their other orientations, other ecologies, are the property of Europe; to study, to objectify, to know – and in so knowing, to create a belief in whiteness itself, and its right to rule the world. Whiteness is this relation, and really nothing more; a relation of ownership, expressed in the power to create its others, to name its others, and in this way always already undone by its others – this need, this interdependence in a mode of violent disavowal, renders the practice of whiteness as anything but sovereign.

Whiteness needs its others. And in losing its property, it loses its self. In his examination of the construction of whiteness in colonial Virgina, Steve Martinot explains, “white identity (as racialized identity) defines the idea of being nonwhite for itself in order to bring itself into existence as white. Ensconced within the assumed power to define, whites render themselves privileged as hegemonic, and see themselves as neither.” Whiteness, then, as a “purity concept” is paradoxically dependent on what it names as non-white, and in this way is always impure and unstable.

Du Bois’ formulation situates the belief in whiteness within the geo-cidal epoch that begins at least in 1492. Similarly, Long historicizes the question of religion in “the West” in the

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historical and structural matrix of colonialism and the trans-Atlantic slave trade. This is the context that formed the meaning of religion both for those internal to the Enlightenment project, and those subject to conquest, dispossession, and displacement. As aforementioned, Long identifies the religious life of human beings as structured by the radical discontinuity of the experience of a *mysterium tremendium*: the appearance of a radical otherness, a genuine opaqueness whose meaning and truth cannot be simply seen through and expressed conceptually. This experience constitutes an *a priori* with which one must deal, and which is expressed in the register of the symbolic.

In the New World, European Christians encountered “radical discontinuity;” peoples, lands, and animals whose concrete existence constituted an imposition upon theological knowledge, cartography, and self-understanding. In response to this concrete *a priori*, and irreconciliable otherness, European colonialists imposed their own cultural logic upon the New World. Rather than admit the relativizing of their own cultural understanding, Europeans refused the opaque specificity of the New World and subjected it to a re-creation in their own image. Whiteness’ religiosity – its response to this already existing reality - is a violent refusal of opacity, the historical specificity and entanglements of contact and conquest, which render the *who* and *what* of European presence in the New World as always more than one. As such, the religion of whiteness is a mode of refusing any existence outside, any possibility of a true otherness or exteriority to European modes of conquest, captivity, and exploitation.

Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment modes of knowledge “filter” or conceal the violent context of expansion and conquest. As self-contained, scientific knowledge *about* the others of Europe, these intellectual modes mask the reciprocity and promiscuous exchange that is

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the context of contact and conquest. By refusing the “priority” of peoples in the New World as “something already there, something given,” Europeans had to re-invent the New World in narratives of declension: the primitive past or pathological present. Long apprehends the meaning of modern religion as always already oriented by the Enlightenment project, itself fueled by the negative value of racial blackness. The meaning of religion has been shaped within the new conception of human existence generated by the crises of European expansion and formalized in the knowledge of the West. Religion – as a political, economic, and legal category - insinuates this general conception of human existence, which has been achieved through the degradation of the Native and Black slave. Related to nature/Native in a relation of domestication, and to the Black slave as commodity; a fungible object of accumulation.

Colonialism and slavery are the empirical practices of what Hortense Spillers refers to as a “grammar,” the “American” or Western grammar. The human, as a category, owes its integrity to the intellectual formulations of the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment, and its corporeality to the empirical destructions of colonialism, the slave trade, and the domination of capital. The carceral logic of the slave ship is the logic of racial capitalism. Made black, made a unit of capital value. By anti-black structure I am referring to the refusal and capture of exorbitance, of excess, of the plenitude of life; or, in Long’s words, the refusal of the opaque. Opacity, for Long, is “radical contingency,” the irreducibility of what he calls “the human mode of life.”

As black feminist theorists have demonstrated, the meaning of the human in the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment configurations is dependent on the Black slave as its

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381 Long, Significations: Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion, 52.
382 Long, Significations: Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion, 207.
fundamental point of negation. It is in creating the Black slave, that the figure of the human is created. Anti-blackness is the fuel which generates these violent patterns of mattering, of commodity production, the transformation of black flesh into bodies – units of value, objects of accumulation, financial speculation, production of commodities – a mass of bleeding cargo. Without the symbolic and material uses of racial blackness, the meaning of whiteness’ cultural grammar is put in crisis. It is the loss of whiteness’ hegemonic power to signify that is the crisis we are currently enduring. This is not to say the end of this power, for as Long says, “even the dead signify.” Hortense Spillers puts the matter this way:

[The enslavement of black American women] relegated them to the marketplace of the flesh, an act of commodification so thoroughgoing that the daughters labor even now under the outcome. She became instead the principal point of passage between the human and the non-human world. Her issue became the focus of a cunning difference – visually, psychologically, ontologically – as the route by which the dominant modes decided the distinction between humanity and ‘other.’ At this level of radical discontinuity in the ‘great chain of being,’ black is vestibular to culture. In other words, the black person mirrored for the society around her what a human being was not.

Both Long and Spillers make this move, which is stunning in its implications – the meaning of the West, or what Du Bois calls whiteness, is situated not within a singular or self-defined meaning of the West, or civilization, or whiteness. Whiteness, in other words, is never anything but the mirror image of its racial others.

The diverse and distinct ways in which whiteness racializes – how it names and claims its racial others as possessing different degrees of human-ness – can be thought when we see how it is oriented as a relation of ownership to its fundamental negation: blackness. The question of White being is, again, at stake in the question of what kind of being is “the Negro.” That is, the question of White being depends on what basis or ground the difference of “the Negro” rests. For

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example, in his book *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Thomas Jefferson distinguished “the Negro question” from the question of what was to be done with indigenous Americans. That is to say, for Jefferson the question of the general possibility of difference itself underlies the distinctions he makes. According to Jefferson, “the Indian” is inferior to whites, and different from “the Negro.” Chandler writes, “the burden of Jefferson’s discourse presupposes a Euro-American norm of what it means to be human,” which is the enabling ground of the distinctions he marks between “White, Red, and Black.”

Jefferson argues that “Negro inferiority […] ‘is not the effect merely of their condition of life,’ their social conditions, for example the conditions of enslavement, but is due to their ‘nature.’” In contrast, “the supposed poor status of North American Indians was due to their social conditions and was not due to their nature.” The moral, physical, and intellectual inferiority of the Negro to the American Indian, and the superiority of the White subject or identity to both, was putatively grounded in Nature’s hierarchies. The question of whether the American Indian and the Negro could have a place in the commonwealth depended on the basis for their (inferior) difference. Thus, as the history of Indian Residential Schools in Canada and the U.S. attests, attempts could be made to “civilize” or “whiten” the Indian out of their social conditions, but the inferiority of the Negro – rooted in their natural condition - was insurmountable and absolute; that is, ontological. Such natural difference was the assumed basis for the political hierarchies of the commonwealth.

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5.3. The Slave Ship

The violence of this relation reaches back to the slave ship and the trans-Atlantic practices of enslavement. Marcus Rediker’s historical narrative elaborates the slave ship as a microcosm of the global racial-spatial imaginary of capitalism. Rediker’s account highlights the imbrications of race and class in the slave trade. In particular, Rediker shows how the slave ship might be thought as the paradigm of what is now global colonial-modernity. Drawn primarily from the poorest classes of European societies, sailors joined the slave-trade out of necessity and coercion. Rediker explains, “[w]hat the slave trade offered above all else was ready money – an advance of two or three months’ wages.”388 In other words, capitalizing on the precarity of Europe’s displaced, landless poor, the slave ship offered small shares of what Sexton has called “the vast enterprise of modern dispossession.”389 The slave ship was a “floating factory” that was at once productive of the juridical, political, moral, and economic. It was, to borrow a phrase from Willie Jennings, a space of racial pedagogy.

On the ship, racial blackness would come to form the fundamental division between those above deck and those below. Or, to recall Hortense Spillers’ formulation, between being-for the captor, and Being itself. In many ways, the slave ship established the relations of power central to the emerging global political-economic architecture. Above deck, the struggle of class relations/oppositions was waged; there was always the threat that exploited sailors would mutiny against the captain, who practically and symbolically represented the rule and exploitation of Europe’s capitalist classes. To have a share in this “vast enterprise of modern dispossession” was quite literally a matter of survival for those sailors of Europe’s exploited classes. In this way, for

Europe’s exploited classes, the material conditions for continuing to live were made to depend on the fundamental racial division of this enterprise: above deck and below deck; White and Black; Master and Slave; Free and Unfree. The hold was, and remains, the unthought (im)possibility; the endless void of negativity from which the conditions of white liveability are drawn.

This disvowed relation of dependence constitutes the White political imaginary. This dependence is quite literal. Not only did poor Europeans get paid to traffic “black gold,” when members of slave ship crews got sick they were frequently cared for by enslaved African women.\footnote{Marcus Rediker, “Marcus Rediker: ‘I Took an Interest in Pirates and Sailors Because They Were Poor,’” translated by David Broder. \textit{Verso Blog}, 9 August 2017, versobooks.com/blogs/3349-marcus-rediker-i-took-an-interest-in-pirates-and-sailors-because-they-were-poor. Accessed 18 June 2018.} Anecdotes like these recall Alexis Pauline Gumbs’ critical fabulation in \textit{M Archive}: “if you think you would have survived without the love of fat black women you are wrong, if you say it, you are lying.”\footnote{Alexis Pauline Gumbs, \textit{M Archive: After the End of the World} (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 146.} The world slavery created hates “fat black women,” as surely as it depends on them for its life. This hatred and need are the feedback loops of whiteness; its parasitic dependence on the total value produced in colonialism and slavery. Whiteness needs what it hates, and it hates what it needs, and so the loop repeats, so the violence compounds, accumulates, renews itself.

The slave ship instantiates the regime of \textit{homo oeconomicus}, establishes the truth of the human, through the transubstantiation of black flesh to commodities on a ship ledger. When the struggles on the ship targeted this cut - above and below - that is when a radical other-wise was thinkable. The question, then, for those who would come to fill the ranks of Europe’s working class was \textit{and remains} whether to retain small shares of this vast enterprise, or to move through
and against its founding racialized antagonisms; whether they would come to see their exploitation by the capitalist classes of Europe as dependent on this founding division. On the slave ship, the sailors could and did mutiny; could and did establish experiments in democracy and control of the means of production. But such control did not, by necessity, overturn the line separating above and below; instead it could assume the division, maintain it and profit from it.

There are historical examples that testify to a more radical break. Rediker points out that on rare occasions pirates who took over slave ships would propose slaves join them.\(^{392}\) We should not, of course, romanticize these rare incidents. To join or not join pirates was still a “decision” under duress, if we can even consider it a decision at all. But the point is that, as Hortense Spillers has argued, the racial organization of space on the slave ship is always already the instability and incoherence of whiteness.\(^{393}\) As a classroom of the racial, the slave ship actualizes fragmentation and segregation. Yet this inhabitation of space has to be continually renewed, precisely because its meaning can be inverted or subverted; it can be, and was frequently, inhabited other-wise. Slave revolts – including learning to communicate with one another, refusing to eat, and suicide - and mutiny were an ever-present threat to the stability of the floating political-economic order. Though often unable to take the ship, slave insurrections exposed the tenuousness of the material relations that unfolded on the ship (299). That is, the slave ship – the workshop of whiteness – was constructed to contain the exorbitance which the slave ledger - its juridical-economic text - disavows. Forms of kinship and belonging emerged in the hold that exceeded the segregationalist spatial imaginary that fueled the ship. The hold gave

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\(^{392}\) Rediker, “Marcus Rediker: ‘I Took an Interest in Pirates and Sailors Because They Were Poor.’”

way to intimacies, desire, pain, and “wake work” that could not be captured by the grammar of the ship’s cargo log.\footnote{See Christiana Sharpe, \textit{In the Wake: On Blackness and Being}, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).}

Such exorbitance suspends any simply account of what slavery is, and what is the world that slavery has made. Or, put differently, what happens on the slave ship. In \textit{Zong!}, Philip’s haunted poetic narrative of the well-known slave ship proceeds by transgressing the boundaries of modernity’s foundational categories - economy, politics, religion, ethics, aesthetics. For what happens here implicates them all. More fundamentally, the slave ship is the condition for all that is foundational to modernity. For Philip, slaving is a Christian practice; not in the simple sense that the agents of enslavement identified as Christians, but in the sense that the practice constituted “an act of transubstantiation the equal of the metamorphosis of the eucharistic bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ.”\footnote{M. NourbeSe Philip and Setaey Adamu Boateng, \textit{Zong!} (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2008).}

5.4. (Black) Death for the sake of (White) Life

\textit{There are times in the final book, Ferrum, when I feel as if I am writing a code and, oddly enough, for the very first time since writing chose me, I feel that I do have a language – this language of grunt and groan, of moan and stutter – this language of pure sound fragmented and broken by history. This language of limp and wound. Of the fragment. And, in its fragmentation and brokenness the fragment becomes mine. Becomes me. Is me. The ultimate question on board the Zong is what happened? Could it be that language happened?}

-M. NourbeSe Philip\footnote{Philip, \textit{Zong!}, 205.}

The slave ship Zong has become well-known because it was at the center of an English legal case which served as a touchstone for the abolitionist cause. In 1781, the ship left West Africa with 470 slaves. The captain, Luke Collingwood, misnavigated, and the voyage took four
months, more than twice as long as usual. Because he believed the ship’s owners would be liable for any cargo that died “a natural death,” 150 “negroes” were thrown overboard alive, so that “it would be the loss of the underwriters.” Philip writes, “[i]n other words, the massacre of the African slaves would prove to be more financially advantageous to the owners of the ship and its cargo.” Slaves were thrown overboard for the sake of accumulation, for the sake of ensuring payment for the loss of insured value. This deadly ratio - death, for the sake of the life of capital - may be the purest ground of Western rationality. The ship’s owners, the Messrs Gregson, made a claim against their insurers for the lost cargo, which the insurers refused. The Messrs Gregson took their insurers to court and won. The insurers appealed the decision, and Philip’s work in Zong! is based on the documents from the appeal.

I propose we continue our interrogation of whiteness’ carceral grammar, and the world it creates, through Philip’s Zong! This interrogation cannot presume we know what the slave ship is, or what the slave ship creates. We must be willing to tarry with questions of ontology; and regarding this question, there can be no settlement, no answer that does not always return to us unsettled, unsure, and generative. We can only move towards thinking the slave ship by way of interrogation; a method of interrogation which is generative enough to elaborate the White being that is generated by putting a question mark through, above, and under racial blackness. We must, that is, problematize White being.

Philip remarks that in Ferrum, it feels as if she is “writing a code and, oddly enough, for the very first time since writing chose me, I feel that I do have a language – this language of grunt and groan, of moan and stutter – this language of pure sound fragmented and broken by

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397 Philip, Zong!, 189.
398 Philip, Zong!, 189.
history.” This “pure utterance” is prayer; or perhaps in the poem it is anti-prayer. *Ferrum* in particular is pregnant with religious references, tropes, and utterances. The irruption of liturgy below/above/over board, reverberates in the water, forever and ever, amen.

There is a persistent upending at work in the poems. In the legal text it was the humanity of African slaves that is put into question – the law designated and differentiated black flesh as things, pieces of property that can be insured and accumulated. But in *Zong!* this question is returned to the captor; it is the being of the captor that is put into question. The descriptions by the captors of the captive run together, turned again and again/st the captor, these civilized “Men of sapphire, port, and wine, who traffic in black gold.” Both the ocean, and captain and crew feast on black flesh: “cl/ams feed on we/eeds fe/ed on fle/sh we din/e on neg/ro me/at grow fa/t the son/g calms.” The poem here is imprecise on who does the dining, and the theme of cannibalism that is evoked plays with one of the characteristic indictments issued by Europeans of Africans. But here it is black flesh consumed, fed on by captain and crew for the sake of their own lives and profit.

The Eucharistic resonances reverberate across these pages, as the crew lives by ingesting the body and blood of black flesh; as the communion of the crew owes its ligaments, its binds and sinews, to the life black flesh gives…in the act of consumption. The slave ship is not only a site of racial pedagogy, but of modernity’s liturgy; the site and source of a mystical feast. On the slave ship, in the sharing of the body and blood of blackness, the community of the human is materially, symbolically, and thanatologically bound together:

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399 Philip, *Zong!*, 205.

401 Philip, *Zong!*, 164.
In its potent ability to decree that what is is not, as in a human ceasing to be and becoming an object, a thing or chattel, the law approaches the realm of magic and religion. The conversion of human into chattel becomes an act of transubstantiation the equal of the metamorphosis of the eucharistic bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. Like a magic wand the law erases all ties - linguistic, societal, cultural, familial, parental, and spiritual; it strips the African down to the basic common denominator of man, woman, or child, albeit sometimes meagre. Without a history, name, or culture. In life but without life. Without life in life - with a story that cannot but must be told.\footnote{Philip, Zong!, 196.}

Black flesh transformed, black flesh propertized, made profitable prior to any labor and whether any labor is actually performed. Black flesh profitable in the hold, or under the water.

Run. Run for your life. Maroonage is all over these poems. Run. This is white life predicated on black death, “to se/cure our pro/fit we th/row them to res/cue our for/tunes we/do mur t/hey f/all to in/sure our pr/of its ov/er & o/ver a/gain to sec/ure the/y fall o/ver bo/ard to pre/serve our profit.”\footnote{Philip, Zong!, 140.} Black death, secures the life of the crew. Black death, secures the profit insured. Black death, makes possible a life that is (re)produced again and again…by black death. This life that is death needs death makes death preserves death. This life that is made possible by black bodies, broken for you.

The poems claim us, demand that we question whether we really (mis)understand the slave ship, and the world that slavery makes possible. “Zong! bears witness to the ‘resurfacing of the drowned and the oppressed’ and transforms the desiccated, legal report into a cacophony of voices – wails, cries, moans, and shouts that had earlier been banned from the text.”\footnote{Philip, Zong!, 203.} And so, “At times it feels as if I am getting revenge on ‘this / fuck-mother motherfuckin language’ of the colonizer – the way the text forces you – me – to read differently, bringing chaos into the
language or, perhaps more accurately, revealing the chaos that is already there."\textsuperscript{405} Such acts of revenge does not call us to die, but insists we need ways of living that do not require these deaths in order for it to be life…indeed, \textit{Zong!} is this life already, anterior and interior to the murder parsed in the accounting for what happened.

\textbf{5.5. “My Country Needs Me”}

The list of nominatives that begins Hortense Spillerss essay, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” are attended to with her insistence that the dominant order needs her.\textsuperscript{406} “‘Peaches’ and ‘Brown Sugar,’ ‘Sapphire’ and ‘Earth Mother,’ ‘Aunty,’ ‘Granny,’ God’s ‘Holy Fool,’ a ‘Miss Ebony First,’ or ‘Black Woman at the Podium’ […] My Country needs me, if I were not here, I would have to be invented.”\textsuperscript{407} In this way, Spillers puts weight on role the figure of the black female plays in the (re)production of the dominant order.

What I want to linger on is the religious language that surface in Spillers piece regarding this “life giving” generativity of the black female. The black female is the figure who symbolically and materially gives birth to the New World order. As such, “the black woman” is the generative figure whose generativity is necessary for the signifying patterns of colonial-modernity, but elided through the “misnamings” Spillers unravels. Yet for Spillers, this generativity ultimately offers the possibility of its reclamation towards rewriting “a radically different text for female empowerment.”\textsuperscript{408} In the carceral terms of the dominant order, the black

\textsuperscript{405} Philip, \textit{Zong!}, 205.


\textsuperscript{407} Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” 203.

\textsuperscript{408} Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” 229.
female has no right or claim to her offspring; both her biological offspring of enslavement (property of the Master order), and her symbolic offspring: the American Grammar. Thus, although whiteness comes to operate as the center and facilitator of the “new creation” that is the New world, it does so by deferring the burden of the labor of this new creation onto the black female.

According to Spillers, captivity is the matrix by which the African slave is ungendered, is barred from the nominative properties by which gender differentiation can be marked. Spillers writes, “Every feature of social and human differentiation disappears in public discourses regarding African-Americans, as we encounter, in the juridical codes of slavery, personality reified.”

What Spillers means is that “gender, or sex-role assignation, or the clear differentiation of sexual stuff […] does not emerge for the African-American female in this historic instance, except indirectly, except as a way to reinforce through the process of birthing, ‘the reproduction of the relations of production.’” The black female is denied motherhood, denied femaleness, yet bears the burden of “birthing” the relations of production. Labor here indicates the dual sense of birthing and the production of commodities for capital accumulation.

As she describes the wounding of the African slave trade, Spillers remarks, “no heed is paid to relations, as fathers are separated from sons, husbands from wives, brothers from sisters and brothers, mothers from children – male and female.” The kinship relations of enslaved Africans are negated in the theft of African bodies, pressed inside the social relations of domination on the slave ship. The language Spillers invokes to describe this displacement and

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negation echoes the creation language of Genesis. In this sense, the New World is freighted with theological weight. It is a (re)creation, or an apocalypse, in which the God-terms of this order will valorize European Man, and His family.

This New (Familial) World makes possible and is made possible by the fashioning of its terms of transcendence and degradation. Spillers argues that “hierarchical impulses in both Azurara’s and Equiano’s narratives translate all perceived difference as a fundamental degradation or transcendence.”412 To recall Quijano’s coloniality of power, colonial relations of power are articulated on the skin, or what Spillers names “the politics of melanin.” These politics “will make of ‘transcendence’ and ‘degradation’ the basis of a historic violence that will rewrite the histories of modern Europe and black Africa. These mutually exclusive nominative elements come to rest on the same governing semantics – the ahistorical, or symptoms of the sacred.”413

The invocation of the sacred here is compelling. There is much to reflect on here, but this language of the sacred resonates with Talal Asad’s arguments that the secular is not opposed to the sacred but rearranges the boundaries of the sacred.414

What the language of the sacred enables us to see is how the “new creation” of the New World (re)produces racial subalterns as “the altered human factor,” which “renders an alterity to European ego, an invention, or ‘discovery’ as decisive in the full range of its social implications as the birth of a newborn.”415 The language of “newborn” again points to the idea of creation. With the birth of the New World, “Pagan” (the theological) will increasingly overlap with

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“Ugly” (the aesthetic), wherein ugly is an assessment of the inferiority of the racial subaltern. The black African is indeed the “newborn” of Europe, while at the same time the generativity of black life is irreducible to the terms of Europe’s degradation. In the Modern-Colonial Grammar, the black female is differentiated only to (re)produce its own degradation, to pass on “captivity” to a child. Though denied motherhood by the dominant order, the black female nevertheless gives birth, mothers, from the generativity of the flesh; though denied a claim to one’s child, this generativity cannot be constrained by the dominant order. In fact, it relies on it, even as it attempts to enclose in law and in the itemized list of the slave ship the “cargo that bleeds.”

5.6. The Hermeneutics of Capture

In this way, we are positioned to understand what Long means when he insists that Western civilization is a hermeneutical situation. As a project oriented by the Enlightenment, the West’s “primordial existence” is its relation to the Native as subhuman and the Black slave as non-human. The point for Long is not that these modes of knowledge-power have overlooked their violent conditions, but that they are constituted by this overlooking. The invisibility functions not as a simple exclusion, but as the degradation that valorizes post-Enlightenment forms of existence and knowledge. Knowledge – about whiteness’ others. This knowledge about them traffics as a grammar of captivity, the objectification or capture of “others” in the systems of Western knowledge.

Long elaborates the Enlightenment orientation to the religions of non-Europeans as a relation of objectification. He uses the language, signified upon, signified about.

While the reformist structure of the Enlightenment had mounted a polemic against the divisive meaning of religion in Western culture and set forth alternative meanings for the understanding of the human, the same ideological structures through various intellectual strategies paved the ground for the historical evolutionary thinking, racial theories, and
forms of color symbolism that made the economic and military conquest of various cultures and peoples justifiable and defensible. In this movement both religion and cultures and peoples throughout the world were created anew through academic disciplinary orientations – they were signified.

Long clarifies that “by signification” he points “to one of the ways in which names are given to realities and peoples during this period of conquest; this naming is at the same time an objectification through categories and concepts of those realities which appear as novel and ‘other’ to the cultures of conquest.” Long registers the crisis for those signified upon as a crisis of the meaning of human existence as it has been shaped by the colonial configurations of the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment West. For this reason, Long attends to the West as a problem of interpretation.

The new meanings given to religion within Europe would be oriented by the meanings given to religion in the New World, the petrified “primitive” or the bestial African. Which is to say, whatever can be said about whiteness is ventriloquized on the symbolic and material sites of native and the slave. In looking at these other modes of human existence, the European sees the presence or absence of himself (and this is a gendered looking). The otherness at stake here takes shape in the intellectual structures of categorical knowledge and abstract universals.

This categorical thought is a mode of knowledge that refuses excess. It is the epistemological mode of captivity and capture, of imposing distinctions and separations that define clear – even if shifting – boundaries and divisions. Such knowledge-power thinks these bounded traditions as having some kind of integrity, some kind of internal coherence. This problem is not new in religious studies, but its connection to the empirical practices of captivity formed in the matrix of colonialism and empire is not always made. To put the matter somewhat

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differently, what Long means by signification necessarily thinks towards the material and
carceral violence of colonialism and slavery, by which whiteness’ objectifications are written in
the flesh, what Spillers has called “the hieroglyphics of the flesh.”

Commenting on the European assessment of Native languages as “gibberish,” and nudity
as evidence of a “blank mind and a cultural void,” Long remarks, “The colonizers in this sense
were essentially dramatists who imposed the ‘shape’ of their own culture embodied in speech on
the New World and made that world recognizable and habitable by them.”

Similarly, Philip refers to African slaves on the slave ship as creatures of the word. She
writes, “the ultimate question on board the Zong is what happened? Could it be that language
happened?” The groans, the pleas that surface throughout the poem, are language. They are
the words that (dis)articulate the language of the colonizer, and its formal legal, and economic
texts. But this existence as creatures of the word has another sense. According to Philip, “the law
it was that said we were. Or were not. The fundamental resistance to this, whether or not it was
being manifested in the many, many instances of insurrection, was the belief and knowledge that
we – the creatures of fiat and law – always knew we existed outside of the law – that law- and
that our be-ing was prior in time to fiat, law and word. Which converted us to property.” It is a
haunting and haunted task which possesses Philip in Zong!, of surfacing the sounds of slaves
murdered, primarily from legal documents in which these slaves are present only as objects of
the law.

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418 Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” 207.
420 Philip, Zong!, 205.
421 Philip, Zong!, 207.
It is important to remember that Philip describes *Zong!* as a wake. The spattering of the words on the page gives the sensation of movement, of water. There are quite literally moments in the poem where the words crowd the page so densely that the sensation of suffocation, or I suppose drowning, is unavoidable. “water parts / the *oba* sobs / there is.”

The reference to *oba* calls out to the goddess Oba of the Yoruba. Her name adorns a river in present day Nigeria, the Oba River. But the parting of this ocean water does not bring life but death. The reference to the *oba* is already giving an answer to the truth of what happened that subverts the account(ing) of the law. The law cannot articulate the humanity of these Africans, but the *oba*, their *oba*, sobs with them. They have a be-ing, and existence that is prior to the law and that by the very truth of this existing resists the law. There is something here that the law cannot capture or describe.

There is something here that the language of property, of quantitative measurement, and of financial restitution cannot articulate but which it requires in order for its logic to be logical. I hear in these poems Philip insist, to the law and its underwrites, “No! You cannot have them.” The death of these Africans gives life to the captain and his crew. By their wounds, the crew is healed. Defend the dead, she writes.

The legal text, in this way, formalizes what Spillers refers to as whiteness’ god-terms. The god-terms of whiteness are the signifying patterns that constitute a structure of eternality and primordial being: White being is Being itself. Long interprets such terms as the refusal of opacity, symbolized in blackness. It is worth quoting Long at length:

> But the Indians and all other non-Europeans possess and possessed specific and definitive empirical and imaginative languages […] When opacity (the specific meaning and value of another culture and/or language) is denied, the meaning of that culture as a human value is denied. By not dealing with this opacity, one is able to divorce oneself from the messy, confusing welter of detail that characterizes a particular society at a particular

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422 Philip, *Zong!*, 59-60.
time and to move to the cool realm of abstract principles symbolized by the metaphorical transparency of knowledge.\footnote{Long, \textit{Significations: Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion}, 117.}

This mode of knowledge produces difference as primitive or pathological forms of European humanity. The Native and the Black slave are made to bear the weight of this refusal of opacity. As religion was and is central to the meaning of the West, the genealogies of modern religion are crucial sites of the production of a White political imaginary.

\section*{5.7. Black Production and Total Expropriation}

What Long refers to as a denial of opacity, has a life giving function. That is, the denial is \textit{generative} of the West’s structure of signification. Such a “denial of opacity” is paradoxically dependent on the a priori specificity which is denied. Recall that for Spillers, the full functionality of racial capitalism’s grammar depends on the irreducibility of enslaved women to units in slave logs. Whiteness, then, is constituted by this disavowal. Quijano and Wynter critique the character of this disavowal in the formalization of colonial hierarchies through the idea of race. Wynter emphasizes that bio-economic Man is produced by the \textit{naturalization} of the political-economic architectures of colonialism, which are represented subsequently as the effect of the universal laws of reason or natural selection. Wynter tracks how the evaluative gaze mutates from its theological register, to the symbolic of the Rational/Irrational, before sedimenting in the symbolic selected/dysselected.

If we follow Long that “the religious mode of human life” is a response to the opaque, captivity and conquest constitute the West’s \textit{religious orientation} to those it colonizes and enslaves. Wynter marks the shift to homo politicus as a shift away from homo religiosus. Yet as I
have argued, the colonial formation of religion as categorically distinct from the economic, political, and juridical, is central to depoliticizing colonial hierarchies. And further, religion must be distinguished from its untrue/superstitious underside/others, in order for it to demonstrate the interior (racial) fitness of the anthropological mind it expresses. The broader struggle concerns the global domination of the geosocial formation of “Europe” through colonialism and the slave trade. It’s patterns of economic, cultural, and political signification depend on relations of exploitation and expropriation, by which the viability of the Western project is resourced.

The liveability of Man in its various iterations is secured through the containment or assimilation of the racial subaltern. It is this life-saving function that Silva illustrates in her argument that slavery and racial subordination continue to be the life-blood of global capital. Silva helps us understand the varied ways “blackness” produces value, as well as why otherwise untenable violence against black and brown people is the very means by which the being of Man generates its forms of belonging. Key to the life of racial capitalism is what Silva terms the “total expropriation” of the productive capacity of blackness, and thus we must account for the multiple ways that blackness produces value. Slavery is not only a relation of exploitation, but is total expropriation. In this relation, the total value of blackness functions to make possible the life of Man politically, culturally, economically, symbolically; a value that cannot be accounted only in monetary sums of accumulation.

In the World of Man, blackness is tasked with the labor of producing the coherence and possibility of white life. Wynter’s counter-narrative of the secular biocentric conception of Man makes it possible to think global capitalism not as the material provisioning of life in general, but

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as the particular material provisioning necessary for instituting the being of the white bourgeois Man. In the case of the Zong, the destruction of black life directly serves to give life to capital, to enable accumulation, to secure and guarantee the profit of the slave voyage. Blackness, enclosed within the World of Man, is the capture of its infinite possibilities inside the processes of accumulation and production. Blackness is made to signify the life of whiteness, in all its material and symbolic productivity. Silva argues that “the total value produced by slave labor continues to sustain global capital.” Her account pushes beyond the limitations of Wynter’s constructive moves, and helps to clarify the racial architecture of global capitalism.

Silva’s refiguring of racial capitalism begins with her account of the total expropriation of the productive capacity of colonized land and enslaved bodies, which is secured through total violence. She writes, “focusing on or reducing colonial production to property (of lands and slaves) occludes the economic character of the expropriation of the enslaved labor productive capacity, thus designing analytical models that read slavery outside of the actual workings of the capitalist mode of production.” In a curious move, Marx considers the surplus value produced by slave labor to nourish the accumulation of capital, but not enslavement itself as a relation of capital accumulation. This elision is sustained by the analytics of racial knowledge. According to Silva, “because racial knowledge transubstantiates (shifts them from the living to the formal

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425 Silva, “Toward a Black Feminist Poethics: The Quest(ion) of Blackness Toward the End of the World,” 82.

426 Silva, “Toward a Black Feminist Poethics: The Quest(ion) of Blackness Toward the End of the World,” 83.

427 Karl Marx, Capital, vol. 3 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), 809. “The price paid for a slave is nothing but the anticipated and capitalized surplus-value or profit, which is to be ground out of him. But the capital paid for the purchase of a slave does not belong to the capital, by which profit, surplus labor, is extracted from him. On the contrary, it is capital, which the slaveholder gives away, it is a deduction from capital, which he has available for actual production. It has ceased to exist for him, just as the capital invested in the purchase of land has ceased to exist for agriculture.”
register) what emerges in political relations into effects of efficient (scientific reason’s) causality, its critical tools fail to register how the total (past, present, and future) value expropriated is in the very structures (in blood and flesh) of global capital.”

Historian Greg Grandin notes that when Edmund Morgan drew on colonial Virginia to elaborate the “paradox” that the Age of Liberty was also the Age of Slavery, this paradox also characterized “all of the Americas, North and South, the Atlantic to the Pacific.” Indeed, “[w]hat was true for Richmond was no less so for Buenos Aires and Lima - that what many meant by freedom was the freedom to buy and sell black people as property.” Although from the early 1500s on, Spanish slavers had brought enslaved Africans to the Americas, “starting around 1770s, the slave trade underwent a stunning transformation.” According to Grandin, around the “Spanish Crown began to liberalize its colonial economy and the floodgates opened. [Merchants] didn’t mince words saying what they wanted: they wanted más libertad, más comercio libre de negros - more liberty, more free trade of blacks.”

Following the force of this thought we need to complicate the borders of what constitutes capitalism’s means of production, given that production in historical-materialism is usually sequestered to the category of the economic. The degradation and policing of blackness can be situated as means of production, inasmuch as capitalism is the material provisioning for the epistemic regime of white bourgeois Man. The value of blackness for capital is more than a

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430 Grandin, The Empire of Necessity: Slavery, Freedom, and Deception in the New World, 6-7.


quantitative sum that indexes accumulation. Blackness’ productive use-value is the site of convergence of the cultural, political, economic, religious, and so on; it’s symbolic and material capacity, the density of meanings it generates, are included in what Silva calls the total expropriation of the productive capacity of the slave. The black African is the material and discursive site for the production and proliferation of meanings by which whiteness is given its coherence and identity.

Grandin explains,

[i]n both the United States and Spanish America, slave labor produced the wealth that made independence possible But slavery wasn’t just an economic institution. It was a psychic and imaginative one as well. At a time when most men and nearly all women lived in some form of unfreedom, tied to one thing or another, to an indenture, an apprentice contract, land rent, a mill, a work house or prison, a husband or father, saying what freedom was could be difficult. Saying what it wasn’t, though, was easy: ‘a very Guinea slave.’ […] In turn, repression of the slave was an often repeated metaphor for the way reason and will must repress desire and impulse if one were to be truly free and be able to claim equal standing within a civilization of similarly free men.433

When we identify slavery, in this way, as total expropriation, we are better positioned to understand the total value of blackness for the production and accumulation of capital. The deployment of state-violence against black bodies to “preserve law and order” can also be understood as included in what Silva calls the total expropriation of the productive capacity of the slave. In scenes of state-preservation, blackness signifies that which threatens the state.

5.8. Conclusion: Whiteness in Crisis

We know that universal definitions of religion have long been subject to critique. What remains to be asked is whether the critique of the universal has become a critique of the Western conception of human being itself, and the radical dismantling of the World designed for this

being. Long poses the question, “what is the meaning of the human now that the West must realize that those who were formerly considered lesser or second-class human beings have in fact always been fully human?”434 The meaning of “civilization” takes shape in its distinction from, and negation of, “the primitive.” The meaning of civilization carries within itself the meaning of the primitive. Without the primitive, the meaning of civilization is put into crisis, and made incoherent. Which is to say, its coherence is always already incoherent; is held together only by being able to thingify the native and black as lack. Lacking European socio-political traits, and therefore lacking human-ness itself. The power to name is essential to this propertied relation.

For Philip, language is the space of captivity and the site of the new. She both loves and deeply distrusts it. In Zong! she describes this duality: “the law uses language as a tool for ordering; in the instant case, however, I want poetry to disassemble the ordered, to create disorder and mayhem so as to release the story that cannot be told, but which, through not-telling, will tell itself.”435 For Philip, language must become the site of release. The linguistic possibility of capture/release returns us to the threat that haunts Man. This threat is actualized as the African turns the havoc of the Middle Passage back against itself, by revisiting havoc on the language of colonial domination. The possession of Man - English - in the mouths of the African, echoing back a word that terrifies Him even as He must insist it be spoken. The fact that His word can be echoed back means his language can lose its most precious predicate: ownership. The fact that it can be re-arranged, subverted, and even destroyed means not only that his language can be made degenerate; but that this l/anguish can create something new, can express an i-mage He cannot control and that does not mirror Himself. His language was never meant to


435 Philip, Zong!, 199.
reproduce His I-mage in the African. It was intended to destroy the African i-mage, to circumscribe the African as a thing in the juridical-economic transit.

In this regard, what Long calls the “religions of the oppressed” communicate in other shapes than the discursive mode of capture and categorical distinction. They offer other methods of study. But the current visibility of subaltern voices in the American academy is more than an ethical problem. The problem is situated deeper, in the “atrophied” imagination of America as a structure of the West. “American culture has yet to come to terms with its ‘native sons’ – and this is just another way of saying that America has yet to come to terms with itself.”

For those Long refers to as the “stepchildren of the Enlightenment,” community expresses “an-other attitude, an attitude that confronted the reality of America, not as plastic and flexible, amenable to the will of the human being through hard work and moral fortitude, but as a reality, impenetrable, definite, subtle, and other.” This distance and otherness, according to Long, are not problems to be solved or reconciled. This otherness cannot be recuperated within a teleological arc of progress, as a particular moment sublimated within the universal. No, “the reorientation of America is contingent upon a recognition of the otherness within and the otherness without. America is a hermeneutical situation.” Because they must deal with the given-ness of racial violence and dispossession, the symbolic grammars of the “religions of the oppressed” open alternatives to the structure and orientation of whiteness.

In the religious life of those whiteness has imposed itself on, are other frequencies, other orientations to the tragedy and comedy of existence. To cling to whiteness, to invest in

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whiteness, is to commit to not seeing, not hearing, not touching the other frequencies - of the mystical, the poetic – these modes of thinking and doing that are modes of gathering together, of communing, of making a way out of no way. In these modes, whiteness loses its singular power to name and objectify – to turn beings into chattel, to claim ownership of the earth, to build fences and borders, invest in nations and national security.

This is why Long proposes that the otherness that is always already internal to Whiteness – the otherness of and in what Du Bois calls double consciousness of black life – opens toward an-other structure of existence.

These bodies of opacity […] were paradoxically loci of a surplus of meaning, meanings incapable of universal expression during the period of oppression. These opaque ones were centers from which gods were made. They were the concrete embodiments of matter made significant in the modern world. They formed new rhythms in time and space; these bodies of opacity were the facts of history and symbols of a new religious depth. The totalization of all the great ideals of Western universalization met with the factual symbol of these oppressed ones.439

The point is not, then, to turn to the voices of those on the underside of modernity, for the sake of completing or enhancing the incompletions of the Enlightenment project of progress. Our task is not to insert the excluded inside the grammar of whiteness, but rather to be oriented by the otherwise in the living of those excluded; the possibilities of other forms of living, other shapes of life and commune-ing, in the face of the harshness of our everyday violence. To be oriented in such a way, is to be oriented to the study of religion as the study of, and for, the depths of freedom.

439 Long, Significations: Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion, 211.
CONCLUSION

That well-established study [of the effects of racism on its objects] should be joined with another, equally important one: the impact of racism on those who perpetuate it [...] What I propose here is to examine the impact of notions of racial hierarchy, racial exclusion, and racial vulnerability and availability on nonblacks who held, resisted, explored, or altered these notions. The scholarship that looks into the mind, imagination, and behavior of slaves is valuable. But equally valuable is a serious intellectual effort to see what racial ideology does to the mind, imagination, and behavior of masters.440

-Toni Morrison, Playing in the Dark

‘The mighty saga of the outward acts’ is a description of the origins not simply of an American language rooted in the physical conquest of space but equally of a language which is the expression of a hermeneutics of conquest and suppression. It is a cultural language that conceals the inner depths, the archaic dimensions of the dominant peoples in the country, while at the same time it renders invisible all those who fail to partake of this language and its underlying cultural experience. The religion of the American people centers around the telling and retelling of the mighty deeds of the white conquerors. This story hides the true experience of Americans from their very eyes. The invisibility of Indians and blacks is matched by a void or a deeper invisibility within the consciousness of white Americans. The inordinate fear they have of minorities is an expression of the fear they have when they contemplate the possibility of seeing themselves as they really are.441

-Charles Long, Significations

I don’t believe that what has happened in general is reparable, but if the United States finally decided to write me a check, I would cash the check and put it in the bank or go buy something stupid with it, a Rolls Royce or a Bentley, something that will really make George Stephanopoulos mad. I would accept the check, and be pissed off that it ain’t as much as it should be. But I also know that what it is that is supposed to be repaired is irreparable. It can’t be repaired. The only thing we can do is tear this shit down completely and build something new.

-Fred Moten, The Undercommons

There is no way of writing a conclusion to the argument of this dissertation that is not


inconclusive. There are no reparative prescriptions I can offer, and no better way forward than to repeat, with Fred Moten, the desire to “tear this shit down completely and build something new;” the desire for what Frantz Fanon called “the end of the world.” But in an undisciplined deferral to disciplinarity, at the most general there are two implications that follow from my argument: First, the specific iteration of the human which we inhabit, and the forms of political and economic subjectivity within which we labor, are constituted by secularized, racialized Christian theological categories. I propose that the question of the human become a question of, and for, the study of religion. Unless this happens, the common sense of religious representations will continue to be organized by the human. That is, however we attend to the category of religion – whether lived religion, material religion, textual religion, emplaced religion, and so on – religion is fundamentally understood to be a human enterprise. But because the human is always already a dialectical category, distinguished as human over against the subhuman and the nonhuman (the position of animality), our study of religion even at its best risks reifying what Wynter calls “the coloniality of being.”

Because the human is always already idealized as white, I am particularly interested in how whiteness’ logic of purity is repetitively reiterated through the carceral practices of enclosure and regulation. These practices displace a Christian anxiety inherent to the structure of conversion itself. Our issue is less how Christianity is normative for the category of religion than how Christian concepts have been “humanized” in the techniques of managing religion, that is, in the racial capitalist state’s modes of governing its subjects.


Second, following the itinerary of Christina Sharpe, I propose that we think religion in relation to “what survives” or escapes the installation of the human.\textsuperscript{444} Sharpe theorizes “Black being” as practices of “wake work,” of care and creativity which insist themselves in relation to the “ongoing problem of Black exclusion from social, political, and cultural belonging.”\textsuperscript{445} Rather than attempt to resolve this exclusion, Sharpe asks instead “what, if anything, survives this insistent Black exclusion, this ontological negation, and how do literature, performance, and visual culture observe and mediate this un/survival.”\textsuperscript{446} To think religion in relation to what survives, then, is to attend to religion also as a site of “mediating this un/survival.” In this regard, Andrea Smith has argued that the project of decolonization is “less of one based on self-improvement or even collective self-improvement, and more about the creation of new worlds and futurities for which we currently have no language (my emphasis).”\textsuperscript{447} To think religion in relation to what survives, is to participate in what Smith calls “our collective imagining of a ‘beyond,’” which “can be contrasted with that of the projects of anti-racist or anti-colonialist self-reflexivity in that they are not based on the goal of ‘knowing’ more about our privilege, but on creating that which we cannot now know.”\textsuperscript{448} I take this task to resonate with Charles Long’s attempts to “account for religious experiences in historical rather than psychological terms,” by which he sees “history as the arena for the constitution of consciousness rather than the temporal-spatial arena in which the powerful overcome powerlessness with justifying

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{445} Sharpe, \textit{In the Wake}, 14.
\bibitem{446} Sharpe, \textit{In the Wake}, 14.
\end{thebibliography}
ideology.”449 To think religion in this way would mean to think religion not in relation to the regulatory, but in relation to the excess of life/living, the flights of mind, the joy, the practices of care, the practice of the commons, of commune-ing. This “exorbitance” materializes in the concrete, opaque otherness that emerges in and as the sociality of those Long terms the “stepchildren of Western culture.”450

“This Shit is Killing You Too”

Why does this work need to be done, and more specifically, why do white people need to do this work? Most simply, racial capitalism is killing us all. Following the 2016 presidential election, Toni Morrison suggests that, in an attempt to “restore whiteness to its former status [...] a number of white Americans are sacrificing themselves.”451 My dissertation is a sustained effort to engage this violent project, and to draw out its religious logic. From at least the fifteenth century on, whiteness has been devastating for black and brown people. But it has also, in its own way, conscripted white people - especially poorer white people - as its disposable agents. In this regard, we need teachers who are able to explicitly address religion, Christianity, and whiteness in constructive ways. My research and teaching enters here, in an effort to counter this “self-sacrifice,” to help us understand its pull, and to work towards its abolition.

Additionally, while it is important that white people are beginning to see and understand the importance of critical race theory and liberationist discourse, there is an important bit of research that has to happen: how whiteness performs itself within, and functions as the


unconscious grammar of, the study of religion. The problem, as I have posed it, is that our hegemonic common sense about religion is rooted in whiteness and white supremacy. We need some scholars to give us analyses of how whiteness itself is functioning. I have shown schematically how the White imaginary generates itself discursively in the register of religion and theology. In this sense, the argument is primarily diagnostic. But the argument suggests that our understanding of whiteness is insufficient if we do not attend to how whiteness constitutes itself religiously – that is, by way of an-other, by way of a differential figure or mark of social death. The reason, therefore, for yet another discourse analysis is to unsettle the terrain, to sift the ground on which our capacity to think the imbrications of religion, race, and class.

On one level, there is no sidestepping the ideology of whiteness. To understand whiteness is to understand my own subject position within an anti-black structure, and to think from a position that is always already undone, under threat, by the social life of those negatively racialized. I grew up in a Catholic family in a small, Dutch Reformed city in West Michigan. Because of my mom’s terminal illness, our family of six lived off my dad’s income alone. As a city planner, and eventually assistant city manager, money was always tight. Fortunately, I did not worry that we would not have food on the table, though I would learn later that my parents’ were not always so assured. Due to my mom’s illness, if we did not have health insurance through the city we likely would have gone bankrupt. What I did not know is that my family’s struggles were part of a system that fed off of, and made black and Latina/o neighborhoods in the city unliveable. Cop cars did not run up and down my street. But only ten streets north, the police were conducting “gang control” surveillance and occupation of Latina/o neighborhoods. About two miles east, the police and predatory banks stalked black people living in the city projects. We were not rich, but we were safe.
As I have told the story again and again, it took a sixteen year old black boy named Micah to point out my whiteness to me, and the difference that whiteness made, in order for me to begin to understand “our” safety – and the struggles inside this safety - was the direct result of the unsafety of others. This is also why I deploy a deconstructive approach. Recall that, according to Chandler, the organizing ground of the problem of the “Negro” or the “Slave,” is the status of a “putative European” or “White” subject. In other words, “the Negro question” functions as the opening of a discursive economy that is concerned with grounding the ontological, categorical status and purity of a White subject. There is no White subject without the Black Slave. The itinerary of this purity project is, thereby, irresolvable and structurally violent.

As a social and historical form of identification, “white people” always already exist by way of the itinerary of race. On one level, there is no contemporary historical or social existence for “white people” outside of the social structures of whiteness. It is, of course, important for white people to see how this settler state brutalizes peoples racialized as non-white, and the way that white capitalism has enriched itself through the exploitation and expropriation of those negatively marked by race. But there is also a way that this looking at keeps the white gaze from returning to itself. Rather than evade the return of the white gaze, I focus on the incoherence of whiteness – on what Long refers to as “the otherness within.” Thus, I want to think towards how white people can live into being contaminated, to live into the ways we are always already more than white.

This entry happens by way of white folks recognizing that, as Fred Moten says, “this shit

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is killing you, too, however much more softly.” In this way, “white people” might enter into co-struggle with those negatively marked by racialization, wherever that struggle occurs (e.g. the labor movement, movements for prison and police abolition, prison strikes, Black Lives Matter, occupy ICE, sanctuary for undocumented people, and many, many more). This approach does not offer another anchor for white identity, or clear path of becoming. It’s not about being able to say what white folks can become better white people, but about living into the “otherness” that is always already inside of any identifiable whiteness. If we are living in a moment of the weaponized melancholia of whiteness, the weaponized mourning of the loss of whiteness, what does it mean to mourn the loss of a self that has no depth?

Finally, we can ask why I have chosen to foreground whiteness in my analysis of capitalism. On the one hand, we have never known any form of capitalism that is not racial capitalism. As such, critique of political-economy must explicitly critique white supremacy, as the social formation on which capital’s modes of production have been cultivated. But more than this, I am interested in engaging with how whiteness thwarts other-wise possibilities of solidarity, not only by dividing a base of laborers on whom the accumulation of capital depends, but by being the unmarked ground by which the terms of both exploitation and resistance to exploitation have been constructed. Or, to put this differently, how the figure of the Slave remains unthought or underthought in the theory and praxis of the left (more will be said about this below).

Take, for example, how religion and class are often addressed by the field of religious studies, as well as in liberation theologies. The question of whether religion functions for the interests of the dominant, or inspires resistance from the bottom up, is the right question. However, the internal limit of putting the matter this way leaves the terms of the discourse intact.
Instead, when we foreground how the category of religion is organized by what Wynter calls the bio-economic form of Man, we can understand how the religion/economic division functions to institute the West’s conception of alterity and Same-ness. The point here is about extending the horizon of struggle, as well as the horizon of freedom. Wynter argues our struggle is against the “genre of Man,” which racism and class exploitation function to institute materially.453

The horizon of struggle and of freedom are expanded when we enter the dialectic from the history of chattel slavery, anti-blackness, and coloniality. As I have argued throughout, capitalism’s modes of production have been made natural by distinguishing categorically the religious and the economic. We find ourselves, again and again, having to begin from the premise that this distinction is what has to be explained. Thus, though we insist that religion and economics are inseparably connected, the discursive economy of the terms maintains their difference categorically (which is to say, we broach in this way questions of ontology, or of the ground of their difference).

Whiteness, I have argued, has been assembled by a constellation of Christian theological categories. Quite apart from any confessional claims, these categories and logics animate the cultural logic of the modern. Western civilization names itself in relation to its religious heritage, whether that heritage is understood to be a past from which the present has emancipated itself, or whether that past must be recuperated and reclaimed. The discursive play here obscures the Christian theological logics that structure the West’s political, economic, and social life. Whiteness’ production of itself through racializing its non-white others, is its religious

453 “I am trying to insist that ‘race’ is really a code-word for ‘genre.’ Our issue is not the issue of ‘race.’ Our issue is the issue of the genre of ‘Man.’ It is this issue of the ‘genre’ of ‘Man’ that causes all the ‘-isms.’” Greg Thomas, “PROUD FLESH Inter/Views: Sylvia Wynter,” PROUDFLESH: A New Afrikan Journal of Culture, Politics and Consciousness. Issue 4, 2006.
production of itself through an immanent transcendence. This theological heritage lies behind whiteness’ paranoid being-under-threat, and its racial anxieties.

**Contributions**

**Pedagogy**

Several years ago, when I first read Tomoko Masuzawa’s *The Invention of World Religions*, I remarked to a colleague, “this book changes everything.” Recently, in a conversation with another colleague about teaching introductory religion classes I commented, “I don’t understand why Masuzawa’s book didn’t change everything.” Although many exceptions to the rule can be found, a brief survey of “Introduction to Religions” syllabi reveals that we are still unsure how the proliferation of critical research on the category of religion itself affects our pedagogy. Furthermore, we are under more and more pressure to assure the neoliberal university that our introductory classes matter, if not our entire discipline itself. Thus, we find ourselves feeling uncertain about how and what to teach, and the pressure to form religiously literate students who can draw on their religious literacy to promote their own human capital to the state and employers.

If, as I have argued, whiteness is the organizing ground of religion(s), then one of my major proposals is that whiteness has to be brought to the foreground as a theme and subject of our teaching. Take, for example, the pedagogical goal of improving “religious literacy.”

According to the Religious Literacy Project, the need for religious literacy is explained as follows:

> [Religious influences] remain potent at the dawn of the twenty-first century in spite of modern predictions that religious influences would steadily decline in concert with the rise of secular democracies and advances in science. Understanding these complex religious influences is a critical dimension of understanding modern human affairs. In
spite of this awareness, there remains a widespread illiteracy about religion that spans the
globe. There are many consequences of this illiteracy, but the most urgent is that it fuels
conflict and antagonisms and hinders cooperative endeavors in all arenas of human
experience.\textsuperscript{454}

This way of putting the problem repeats the familiar Enlightenment conviction that our most
pressing social, economic, and political problems are rooted in a lack of knowledge. To be clear,
I do think that informing students about the diversity of religious traditions, and how those
religions are lived, can open space for the development of critical consciousness and destabilize
the foundations of Western knowledge-power. However, if our students’ knowledge about
religious difference is put to use to better strategize U.S. military missions, or sponsor
entrepreneurial endeavors, we have done very little to unsettle the relations of power currently
devastating this planet. As our students are increasingly formed to think of themselves as
investment portfolios, and of education as essential to building human capital in a neoliberal
political economy, the pedagogy of religious literacy needs to offer more than an enhancement of
students’ market value.

In the definition of the RLP’s mission, it seems to me that “ignorance” and
“misrepresentation” substitute for one another, such that it is unclear what is the problem. By
reframing the problem as one of ignorance, we misrepresent the problem of misrepresentation.
Ignorance indicates a lack of knowledge; misrepresentation indicates a problem with the
knowledge we have. As I have described it, the problem is not so much that we do not know, but
with how we know. And there is no way to get at that problem which does not, to reframe
Wilderson’s question, lead us back to the paradigm of power.\textsuperscript{455}

\textsuperscript{454} See “Explanation of Need,” \textit{Harvard Divinity School: Religious Literacy Project.}
rlp.hds.harvard.edu/about. Accessed 20 August 2018.

\textsuperscript{455} See Frank B. Wilderson III, \textit{Red, White, and Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms}
That is, the problem of whiteness is not solved by “religious literacy.” Learning about “other religions,” other cultures, and so on, can work to conceal whiteness in white innocence or ignorance. The problem, rather, is that white people do not understand and know enough about whiteness. Whiteness is constituted by this overlooking, this not seeing, that is paradoxically constituted through noticing what Judith Weisenfeld calls religio-racial difference. It seems to me that it would do us well to explicitly name the hegemony of whiteness and racial capitalism, and that our “religious illiteracy” - which co-exists with a nearly two decade “War on Terror” mobilized precisely around a proliferation of discourses on the threat of Islam to Western democracies – is a function of reproducing the social, political, and economic interests of a small group of largely white, obscenely wealthy capitalists.

Why do we know what we know, and how do we come to know it? To pose this question, we must attend to how whiteness frames many of the issues attended to by the study of religion. In this way the problem of religious illiteracy can be tackled as a function of instituting historically specific regimes of white racial terror, racial capitalism, and Western imperialism. In order to make whiteness the problem, not white ignorance, we have to move beyond the multicultural learning-about-different-cultures model of religious literacy, and to the relations of power by which the hegemonic common sense of religion is upheld and reproduced.

In this regard, efforts to help students understand the internal diversity of specific religious traditions has its own internal limitations. Steven Ramey has argued that introductory courses on religion ought to (1) cultivate an understanding of the diversity “between religions and within each religion;”456 (2) cultivate an understanding of religion in its everyday, lived

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embodiment; (3) to cultivate critical thinking skills to be applied to any representation of religion or religious traditions.\textsuperscript{457} I do not take issue with these objectives in and of themselves. But they are not sufficient for attending to the problems I have argued we face. Why do we have idealized or derogatory views of other religions? To gloss Asad, what are the forms of power that produce, authorize, and circulate both representations of specific religions, as well as the definition of “religion” itself? As I have described it, our challenge is not white ignorance about “world religions.” Rather, our challenge is how knowledge about is organized by whiteness. It’s not just that religion is emplaced and embodied, but how that emplacement and embodiment are differentially positioned in relation to whiteness. Bodies and embodiment have always been the constitutive objects of the racialized taxonomy of religion.

I do not have exhaustive solutions for how we might re-think introductory syllabi. Indeed, how we might foreground whiteness seems to me a question that requires more experimentation and critical conversations. One way of doing so would be to introduce students to a range of critical ways religion has been thought about. This approach could begin with figures like Kant, Durkheim, and Weber, but move quickly to more interesting ways of thinking about religion: religion and colonialism, religion and labor, religion and feminism, religion and film, and so on.\textsuperscript{458} Furthermore, the material in Tomoko Masuzawa’s chapter on Islam may serve as a helpful way of orienting students to these questions.\textsuperscript{459} Take, for example, how Masuzawa tracks the racialization of religion in the nineteenth century discourse of World Religion’s. It was

\textsuperscript{457} Ramey, “Critiquing Borders,” 213.

\textsuperscript{458} See also the upcoming book edited by Meredith Minister and Sarah J. Bloesch, Bloomsbury Reader in Cultural Approaches to the Study of Religion (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018).

\textsuperscript{459} Tomoko Masuzawa, The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 179-206.
through the science of philology that Europeans traced their linguistic-racial lineage to Greece, and in so doing represented themselves as the inheritors of the Aryan legacy. Much of this philological speculation had to do with the capacity of the Aryan languages for *inflection*. Inflection was taken to be a sign of a racial capacity for innovation and development. The creative capacity signified by inflection was considered inherent to the cultural genius of Europe’s Aryan lineage.

On the other hand, European philologists argued that the lack of inflection in Semitic languages explained the racial and religious lack of Semites for universality. Trapped in their ethnic and nationalistic particularity, Semites were traditional and unchanging in their very being. For example, it was exactly this alleged nationalistic character of Islam, as a religion of the Arabs, which explained why Islam could not be considered a (universal) world religion. Masuzawa points out that some scholars argued that Islam’s backwardness was to be explained by its combination of the universalizing kernel of the prophetic biblical tradition with the ethno-nationalistic particularity of its founder, Mohammed. By claiming to be the fulfillment of the biblical tradition, Mohammed’s racial particularity ensured that the universal prophetic core would be stymied and corrupted. In this way, Islam’s religious lack was explained by its inferior racial stock. As effects of this racial inferiority, the Arab was inherently opposed to change, backward, and naturally violent.460

The Muslim was considered to be a contagion, a persistent threat of infection in European civilization, and therefore a danger in need of surveillance and containment. It is precisely as Islam is racialized that this threat of infection is taken up in the very processes of governmentality, directed towards the purification of the social body. Over and against this lethal

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460 Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*, 195.
contagion, Europe articulates its own civilization and identity. The point, then, is not just that world religions ranks superior and inferior religions; the point is what is the basis for the ranking, what ground organizes their difference. Because religion is always already racialized, Richard Dawkins, for example, can opine that all religion is inherently regressive, while at the same time tweet about the grandeur of church bells in contrast to the “aggressive-sounding ‘Allahu Akhbar.’”

We can also explore this point around legal protections of freedom of religion. Tisa Wenger’s recent book is exemplary in this regard. But to stay with the example of secular Europe, this freedom is frequently denied to embodied religion that violates European cultural identity. In his analysis of British multiculturalism, Talal Asad argues that Islam has a problematic status in British society because British identity and culture is constituted with Islam as its foil. To be British is not to be Islamic. And the path of multiculturalism accommodates Islamic immigrants to the extent that they are willing to undergo a certain religious and cultural obliteration. Similarly, in France the hijab is translated as both a particular sign of non-white immigrants’ unwillingness to assimilate to French culture, but also as a general sign of the social or cultural backwardness of Islam. The ideological borders of the nation are defined by a conception of British-ness or French-ness. Freedom of religion only extends to religious difference that can be assimilated or enhance the existing national identity.

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461 @RichardDawkins. Listening to the lovely bells of Winchester, one of our great mediaeval cathedrals. So much nicer than the aggressive-sounding ‘Allahu Akhbar.’ Or is that just my cultural upbringing?” Twitter, 16 July. 2018, 2:00 p.m., twitter.com/RichardDawkins/status/1018933359978909696/photo/1


Closely related to questions of pedagogy is the question of religious studies’ relation to the neoliberal university. As Wendy Brown describes it, under the neoliberal project education has been reformulated “as primarily valuable to human capital development, where human capital is what the individual, the business world, and the state seek to enhance in order to maximize competitiveness.” Brown argues that the neoliberal university drives and entrenches class inequality. Under these conditions, the “future of liberal arts education” is imperiled by, on the one hand, academic market metrics that sever research from teaching or public purposes, and, on the other hand, nonacademic market metrics that value scholarly endeavor according to its commercial uptake or attractiveness to would-be investors. Only among the every-growing, woefully paid casual academic labor force does teaching quality matter. Yet here, precisely because teaching is delinked from research, that quality is increasingly measured according to consumer satisfaction, that is, popularity with students, themselves increasingly oriented by return on investment, whether in the form of entertainment or the enhancement of human capital.

Our value to the university is measured according to how we can improve its ranking. We have to argue that what we do, and that the faculty and staff who do the work, are a worthwhile investment. Furthermore, unlike engineering departments it is difficult to measure or quantify the value of religious studies to university administrators. Critical genealogies have seemingly compounded these problems by posing serious questions about the viability of the category of religion itself. University administrators, and the algorithms they rely on to measure the value of their brand, do not care much for nuance and complexity. The question of how to defend our existence to the neoliberal university is one we cannot avoid. But it is a question that should also be oriented by a desire to escape the regulatory logic of disciplinarity; more polemically, to


abolish the status quo and the role of the university in reproducing it. It is within this tension that we will have to strategize, to organize, and plan.

If we take the university on its own terms we lose. We do not exist to demonstrate our investment value or potential for future returns; nor to demonstrate how the skills we cultivate directly translate into specific jobs. One way we can meet contemporary challenges is by turning our focus from the imperatives of the neoliberal university to labor. Such a turn would also mean a broader, more general challenge to the neoliberalization of the university itself, and towards a radical transformation of the university. Given the precarity induced by adjunctification – lack of jobs, lack of job security, low wages and increasing demands on the work of faculty, staff, and graduate students – we should support and expand existing efforts to unionize contingent faculty. The recent union victory at Fordham University may provide a template for achieving other victories.\(^{466}\) Not only do these efforts affect the immediate material conditions of faculty, but also provide bases from which to build broader based movements which can challenge the neoliberal takeover of universities. Because whiteness is being mobilized to defend the neoliberal project, an analysis of neoliberalism absent an analysis of whiteness will not do.

In this regard, we ought to pay careful attention to the ways the political-economies of universities maintain the status quo by incorporating resistance from those on the underside. Two of the predominant modes of this incorporation are through diversity and reconciliation initiatives. To be clear, diversity initiatives are an essential strategy for redressing the violence done to peoples subjugated by Western colonialism and imperialism. My point is only about the way diversity is used as an incorporative gesture to pacify radical theory and praxis. This is

especially important for white people, for whom the constructive point needs to be about abolishing whiteness. The logic of “diversity” is frequently deployed by white people to keep our focus on racial objects, and to avoid naming whiteness as the problem to be addressed. My work contributes to this by drawing out and critiquing how our field is organized by whiteness.

By way of example, we can take Sylvia Wynter’s argument in her essay, “On How We Mistook the Map for the Territory, and Re-Imprisoned Ourselves in Our Unbearable Wrongness of Being, of Désetre.” Wynter argues that the insurgent thrust of Black Studies was not the demand to be integrated within the conceptual field of Man, but to call that entire field into question. According to Wynter, the degradation of black peoples is a function of instituting the being of Man, and the “systemic revalorization of black peoples can be fundamentally effected only by means of the no less systemic revalorization of the human being itself, outside the necessarily devalorizing terms of the biocentric descriptive statement of Man.” For this reason Wynter is critical of the ways Black Studies has been institutionalized in the university as African American studies, a subset of already authoritative modes of knowledge. The co-optation of Black Studies into the institutional episteme of this order, as a subset of its presumed universalism, functions precisely to auto-institute the being of Man. In this way, “minority concerns” can be characterized as pointing out insufficiencies of what is an otherwise solid, universal project of Man. Yet, since Man is over-represented as the human itself, it cannot allow the challenge of Black Studies to be anything more than a structural adjustment of its own sociogenic code.

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These incorporative gestures become ways universities forgive themselves, or render themselves innocent of their class character and their role in domination. If we needed any more evidence of the Protestant Christian structure of liberal secular ethics, we have it aplenty in these practices of atonement, by which universities forgive themselves without serious transformation of their structures of power. And because whiteness is always already bound up with capitalism and capitalist class exploitation of labor, it also allows white people to overlook the economic relations by which racialization works.

Public Engagement

As a politically engaged argument, this work (1) links racial capitalism’s expropriative techniques with its exploitative techniques, in the political management of religion, and (2) suggests that religion witnesses an excess or possible sites for imagining and living otherwise than white patriarchal capitalism. That is, I am interested not only in how religion can be a source of resistance to capital, but how this possibility – the exorbitance that the categorical distinction of religion from politics and economics conceals – witnesses a broader refusal of racial capital’s refusals. Such exorbitance is the possibility of other imaginings, of other relations to the earth and one another, by which we may be oriented to the “opacity of existence” in the fight and struggle against racial capitalism.

As Hortense Spillers puts it, the economic, political, and cultural logics of “the human” are structured by theological concepts – what Spillers calls “god-terms.”

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is formed as a sociality of policing. But it is on the basis of this theo-political constitution that the libidinal economy of whiteness operates. Capitalism itself is bound up with this religious constitution of modern-coloniality. My point is that we need to understand not only how modern-coloniality is constituted by political, economic, and juridical rationalities, but how these rationalities are constituted as a religious imaginary.

Martinot and Sexton argue that to grant white supremacy a tactical or ideological role is to attribute a reason where no reason exists. To explain white supremacy as a divide and rule strategy is to give it a content, a depth, that it does not have. There is no secret that lurks behind its performance; its gratuitous, excessive, unrepresentable violence is all it is. According to Martinot and Sexton, white supremacy is its practices, whose “excess hides” in every attempt to make its violence representable (i.e. to explain it or give it depth). It is the excess of the power to impose “social death,” to impose a juridical sentence of “living death,” or to dominate those who a priori to any actual encounter have been socially categorized as a denigrated object to be regulated.

This, in part, is because of what I take to be whiteness’ theo-political logic. As an inheritor of secularized Christian concepts of the redeemed and the irredeemable, whiteness is structured by a logic of policing. If we follow Martinot’s analysis of whiteness as an “intermediate control stratum,” policing is freighted with theological weight. Martinot and Sexton further argue all white people are de facto deputized (all white people are empowered to police the borders of civil society). Thus, although political and economic power are increasingly concentrated at the top, the power whiteness affords over racial subalterns is diffuse. In chapter

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four I refer to this as the democratization of despotism. We get glimpses of this with the string of news stories about white people calling the cops on black people for simply existing: black people barbecuing in a park, black children selling water, a black man relaxing at his pool, or a black woman canvassing for her own electoral campaign, and so on; we also see this in the stories of white people and business owners calling ICE, or schools that have turned over students to the agency. Whiteness democratizes domination-power. Each and every white person may exercise a policing power over non-white peoples.

Furthermore, whiteness/white supremacy does not have the same rationality as capitalist exploitation of wage labor. This is why I have not foregrounded the ways racism works to divide the working class. Focus on this divide and rule strategy misses how essential race is to the construction of all that goes by the name “Western modernity.” It also misidentifies the source of racism’s power. If we tackle this divide and rule strategy by the elite, we can get at a strategic use of racism (by the elites to divide potential or real opposition of the working class) but we miss how whiteness is constituted as a relation of irrational domination. Of course, whiteness is used to divide and rule, but its structural logic does not lie here; rather, its structuring logic is much closer to “irrational despotism.” Hence, throughout the dissertation I have emphasized whiteness’ libidinal economy. This despotic common sense is difficult to get a hold of because it has no simple utility or source.471

This is why a critique from the vantage of religion is productive. Whiteness, it seems to me, is especially visible in white people’s investment in the police, prison, and the military industrial complex – as a religious investment. For white people, we need more connections

471 Some of these comments in this section were developed in correspondence with Dr. Joerg Rieger via email. 17 July 2018.
made between the exploitation of wage-labor, and the expropriative techniques that have been primarily reserved for non-white people. That is, how the exploitation of the wage depends on these racialized techniques of expropriation; what Jackie Wang calls racialized accumulation by dispossession.472 I make these connections by thinking about policing as a ritual, and whiteness as ritualized violence. The specificity of this violence in the twenty-first century is institutionalized in the neoliberal security state. Policing is the religion of whiteness, as a religious investment in the always already racialized proper form of the human. Whiteness regulates white people’s relation to alternative social life, what Fred Moten terms the social life of blackness.473

**Labor and Carcerality**

To clarify, I am not only interested in how the places where we labor work in tandem with these carceral technologies. Rather, I am also interested in what happens when we foreground the logic of carcerality, or more abstractly the logic of regulation. How is the work place itself formed by carceral practices? How do the forms of surveillance and regulation, which increasingly structure the workplace, shape our relations to ourselves and others in our labor? How do these regulatory technologies normalize and alienate us from the radical otherwise – the “wild outside” - which is ontologically prior to regulation? That is, whiteness kills white people by regulating the practices of care, the alternative economies in our midst, as an imperative of whiteness. White belief in prisons has built prisons.

With such an approach, rather than seeking a return to the political rhetoric of regulated

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472 See Jackie Wang, *Carceral Capitalism* (South Pasadena: Semiotext(e), 2018).

473 Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (New York: Minor Compositions, 2013), 47-57.
markets, as the opposition to unregulated neoliberalism, we can foreground how neoliberalism requires hyperbolic forms of political, economic, and cultural regulation to function. For example, the surveillance technologies designed to police black and brown people are being implemented into the workplace, as a way to control the rhythms of workers.\textsuperscript{474} The different pressures this puts on the labor movement means that we have to contend not only with the power of employers over employees, but with the surveillance of workers, given over to the transcendent force of the algorithm. The algorithm oversees the choreography of bodies in the workplace, the regulation of movement by the digital timer on the wall, creating data which will be logged, accumulated, and run through other algorithms to “increase productivity.”

To summarize, by overlooking the specificity of the sources and ontological dimension of racialized suffering, whiteness remains at best unchallenged (out of view), or at worst, focus on the specificities of racism is seen as divisive. A radically anti-capitalist movement can proceed by foregrounding the ways the logics of race is essential to all that can be named as modern-colonial: modern forms of identification, conceptions of the human, the organization and division of labor, law, the state, and religion. The language with which we speak, imagine, and dream has been forged in the dialectic by which racial subalterns constitute the disavowed condition of intelligibility itself. In short, there is no access to modern consciousness that is not routed through the logics of race. We cannot challenge the hold of the dominant logics of race/racism apart from specifying it, drawing it out into the open, and disrupting its smooth functioning. Not only, therefore, is a practical analysis of anti-blackness crucial to the formation of class solidarity, but it is also essential to understanding the forms of power we are up against. The

White imaginary, not unlike Marx and Engels’ bourgeois sorcerer, has through its racial paranoia given birth to global technologies of social control over which white people have surprisingly little control.\textsuperscript{475}

\textit{What Survives Religion}

By way of a close, I will also give some more depth to what it means to think religion in relation to what survives the installation of the human. My argument in this regard is an immanent critique of the Western left, which has critically reformulated the religious as a resource for resistance to capitalism, colonialism, and Western imperialism. As I have already pointed out, there is something of a limit to this way of critically reformulating the ways religion can support and reproduce dominant power. To say that religion has been a resource of resistance is true, but it also demonstrates the bind I have been describing. For precisely the practices, institutions, and beliefs that have been assembled as discrete religions are not mere negations of racial capitalism, colonialism, and imperialism. They are anterior to, and exorbitant of, racial capitalism’s carceral technologies and organization of labor. That is, though undoubtedly a refusal of capitalism, they are much more. And it is this “much more” that offers other possibilities for living in common with one another that contribute to what Smith describes as “creating that which we cannot now know.”\textsuperscript{476}

For example, when the Water Protectors in North Dakota declared that “water is sacred,” they deployed “religious language” not first as a simple opposition to the Dakota Access pipeline, but as an affirmation of indigenous relations to the water and the land, which continue


\textsuperscript{476} Smith, “The Problem with ‘Privilege.’”
to be besieged by the U.S. settler state. That is, the Water Protectors did not cede ontological priority to the logic of capital and the settler system of private property. Instead, they affirmed an alternative way of life in which the sacred/secular split does not function to depoliticize the realm of the economy and the state. Take, for example, the following description of the sociality of the Water Protector camps:

In that first camp, [Lew Grassrope, member of the Lower Brule Sioux tribe,] said, there were “wolf spiders galore. I'd pray with them and make them my protectors,” he said. As the camps grew over the summer, they evolved into a complex economy, with teams of sawyers; a free medical corps, which included acupuncturists, masseuses, herbalists, and prescription-writing MDs; and a team of chimney sweeps who cleaned out the flues of the ubiquitous wood stoves installed, gratis, by volunteer construction crews. Central to all, of course, were volunteer chefs such as Rachel Wheatley, a Maidu from near Orrville, California. Wheatley was a long-haul trucker before she arrived at Standing Rock. In the summer her kitchen had served 600 a night.\footnote{Saul Elbein, “These Are the Defiant ‘Water Protectors’ of Standing Rock,” National Geographic. 26 January 2017. news.nationalgeographic.com/2017/01/tribes-standing-rock-dakota-access-pipeline-advancement/. Accessed 16 August 2018}

This alternative social life affirmed as it enacted another economy of the sacred. Now, of course, this enactment of an ontologically prior relation to the land and water is a negation of capitalism and the settler state. But it is a negation precisely because it refuses to concede the truth of the settler paradigm. It also radicalizes the desires and aims of anti-capitalist movements.

Or, consider how Cedric Robinson describes the Black radical tradition as “a specifically African response to an oppression emergent from the immediate determinants of European development in the modern era and framed by orders of human exploitation woven into the interstices of European social life from the inception of Western civilization.” This “specifically African response” is grounded on the fact that the “cargoes of the slave ships were real human beings” with “African cultures, critical mixes and admixtures of language and thought, of cosmology and metaphysics, of habits, beliefs, and morality.” Thus, it should not be surprising
that one of the earliest methods of slave resistance was to runaway and resettle, wherein ‘‘the
slaves retained and developed concepts of family and kin quite beyond the comprehension and
control of the master class.’’\textsuperscript{478} These maroon communities were experiments in social life that
bear similarities to contemporary ‘‘taking power by making power’’ practices in Latin
America.\textsuperscript{479}

Recall that as Wynter frames the issue, capitalism names the specific material mode of
provisioning the bourgeois, bio-economic conception of the human. The social alternatives of the
Water Protectors and the Maroons practice other material conceptions of being and belonging
that emerge in the social life of ‘‘the oppressed,’’ those who constitute the ‘‘underside of
modernity.’’ They move against the coordinates of capitalism and class, and generate powerful
alternative conceptions or genres of being and belonging. They do not take the objective
conditions of domination as true, but as the refusal of life itself. In these alternative economies,
the social life of the undercommons beckons us.

\textsuperscript{478} Cedric Robinson, \textit{Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition} (Chapel Hill: University

\textsuperscript{479} Andrea Smith explains, ‘‘These models, which are deeply informed by indigenous peoples’ movements,
have informed the landless movement, the factory movements, and other peoples’ struggles. Many of these models
are also being used by a variety of social justice organization throughout the United States and elsewhere. The
principle undergirding these models is to challenge capital and state power by actually creating the world we want to
live in now. These groups develop alternative governance systems based on principles of horizontality, mutuality,
and interrelatedness rather than hierarchy, domination, and control. In beginning to create this new world, subjects
are transformed. These ‘‘autonomous zones’’ can be differentiated from the projects of many groups in the U.S. that
create separatist communities based on egalitarian ideals in that people in these ‘‘making power’’ movements do not
just create autonomous zones, but they proliferate them.’’ See Smith, ‘‘The Problem with ‘Privilege.’’”
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