

## DECOLONIZING EVERYDAY PRACTICES: SITES OF STRUGGLE IN CHURCH AND SOCIETY

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### *Introduction*

It is good that we have held this convention in San Juan on the theme of Justice and Mercy, especially during this particular year, with the U.S. Congress failing to agree upon a reasonable response to the current financial crisis that is contributing to Puerto Rico's entrenched patterns of poverty and escalating migration. Not surprisingly, many Puerto Ricans see the responses of the U.S government and its financial institutions as the latest in a long history of colonialist practices. Over the past ten years I have learned face-to-face about similar struggles of Puerto Rican and other immigrant communities in the Bronx, New York from fellow members of my parish, Our Lady of Angels, and through our parish's involvement in broad-based community organizing with groups dedicated to confronting and combatting obstinate patterns of poverty and racism in housing, in employment, in education, and in health care.

As Ada María Isasi-Díaz has taught in her writings and with her life, everyday practices embrace *lo cotidiano*—the concrete realities of family life, economic life, civic life, and the life lived through popular forms of religiosity, always mindful of the commitment to the ongoing historical project of struggle.<sup>1</sup> This paper wrestles with these kinds of everyday realities and this ongoing struggle in Puerto Rico, in the Bronx, and around the world.

Here is my thesis: Today, we in the Catholic theological community urgently need to build on the cumulative analysis of transgenerational poverty and racism advanced by our colleagues over the years by firmly embedding this analysis in a decolonizing framework. Doing so, I argue, can afford us a deeper, more accurate, and more comprehensive theological and ethical grasp of these problems, and help guide and motivate more effective ecclesial and social praxis. Though I cannot explore this in detail today, my argument is oriented by a theology of prophetic discipleship, and an ecclesiology moored in Spirit christology, pneumatology, and trinitarian thought that together, I believe, provide a foundation for addressing honestly and realistically the struggles of everyday life that we face.

### *I. Walter Mignolo's Program of Decolonizing Epistemology*

To advance my argument I will, first, introduce several categories from the work of Argentinian Walter Mignolo, Distinguished Professor in Global Studies and the Humanities at Duke University. Mignolo approaches colonialism mindful of its economic and racist dimensions, and he has been increasingly alert to how gender identities are complicated by colonial dynamics (even though issues of gender and

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<sup>1</sup> See Ada María Isasi-Díaz, *En la Lucha: In the Struggle: A Hispanic Women's Liberation Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1993); and *La Lucha Continues: Mujerista Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004).

sexuality merit much greater attention than they have received in his work to date).<sup>2</sup> I have chosen Mignolo's work also because he gives special attention to sources from the Caribbean and Latin America in developing his post-colonial theories, such as Martinique native Frantz Fanon and Enrique Dussel of Argentina.<sup>3</sup> I find particularly compelling his more recent efforts to develop a program of decolonizing epistemology, which implies and requires a decolonizing pedagogy of psyches, of cultures, of social structures, and of institutions. Three central points made by Mignolo will advance my larger argument.

First, let me introduce Mignolo's use of the term decolonializing.<sup>4</sup> Mignolo began his career as a semiotician and literary theorist by developing a critique of colonialism and its legacy that focused on Latin America. His first major work, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization*, which eventually developed into a trilogy,<sup>5</sup> established Mignolo's reputation within the growing cohort of post-colonial and subaltern theorists across the globe. This first volume, published in 1995, offered a multifaceted critique of Eurocentric, colonial culture-production and its communication by means of the colonization of language, of memory, and of cartography. In it, Mignolo detailed how the impacts of colonialism have distorted, damaged, and in certain instances destroyed cultures and their communicative forms. He described his project at that point using the terms post-colonization or decolonization, aimed at addressing the legacy of historical forms of colonialism. By 2000, however, Mignolo was using the term "decolonizing" to describe not only the ongoing struggle against colonialism's historical consequences, but more importantly the struggle against a still-operative matrix of power linked to a Eurocentric paradigm of modernity and rationality which,

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<sup>2</sup>Besides the work of Isasi-Díaz, see, e.g., María Pilar Aquino, *Our Cry for Life: Feminist Theology from Latin America* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993); Nancy Pineda-Madrid, "Feminist Theory and Latina Feminist/Mujerista Theologizing," *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Latino/a Theology*, ed. Orlando O. Espín (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 347–63; and Robyn Henderson-Espinoza, "Queer Theory and Latina/o Theologizing," *ibid.*, 329–46.

<sup>3</sup> Concentrating on Mignolo's contribution does not mean I value any less the views of other post-colonialist theorists. On the contrary, I believe that the contributions of scholars working in other areas in the global south, shaped by distinctive geographical, social, cultural, religious, and political factors and, by divergent theoretical sources of inspiration, merit our theological attention. See the assessment of Mignolo's work in relation to other post-colonial theories in Susan Abraham, "Postcolonial Hermeneutics and a Catholic (Post) Modernity," in *Beyond Dogmatism and Innocence: Hermeneutics, Critique, and Catholic Theology*, eds. Anthony J. Godzieba and Bradford E. Hinze (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, forthcoming).

<sup>4</sup> Mignolo began using the term decolonizing in *Local Histories / Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), which he acknowledges in the second edition of *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Minnesota Press, 1995, 2003), 437–57.

<sup>5</sup> This trilogy of Walter D. Mignolo consists of *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization*; *Local Histories / Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*; and *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

following the work of Peruvian Sociologist Aníbal Quijano, he had begun to identify with the category of coloniality.<sup>6</sup>

Coloniality designates a subjugating matrix of power, which was initially correlated with Eurocentric colonialism by means of “direct, political, social and cultural domination.”<sup>7</sup> After liberation movements in America, Asia, and Africa, Western imperialism transmuted into “an association of social interests between the dominant groups (‘social classes’ and/or ethnicities [ethnic groups]) of countries with unequally articulated power.”<sup>8</sup> In the aftermath of the widespread demise of Eurocentric colonialism, coloniality, Quijano argues, remains operative through exploitation, domination, and discrimination, not from the outside as it was during the age of colonialist control, but through interactions among unequally-powered races, ethnic groups, and nations. This imperialistic matrix has resulted in “a subordination of cultures” to European and Western paradigms, accompanied by “a colonization of the imagination of the dominated” through internalized forms of “cultural repression.”<sup>9</sup>

So, in Central and South America, the horror of the extinction of roughly sixty-five million people inhabiting Aztec, Mayan, and Incan regions through conquest and disease was accompanied by equally pernicious assaults on indigenous peoples’ imagination, memory, and reason. Over time, “coloniality of power” took shape in social relations based on a “‘racial’ social classification of the world population under Eurocentric world power,” which “pervaded and modulated. . . European capitalist colonial/modern world power” to become coloniality’s “cornerstone.”<sup>10</sup> For Mignolo and Quijano, therefore, coloniality ultimately must be understood and challenged both in terms of how racial and economic inequality reflect and influence culture, imagination, and memory, but also in terms of coloniality’s underlying epistemological assumptions.

Whether we are thinking about conditions in Puerto Rico or in the Bronx, one cannot address economic disparity and racist practices without also considering how the colonial matrix of power is operative, not only in structures and institutions, but also in people’s imaginations, psyches, and bodies in *lo cotidiano*.

Second, for Mignolo decolonizing requires a pedagogy of unlearning coloniality. This pedagogy confronts destructive patterns of thought, feeling, decision-making, and acting that leave their marks on the psyche and the body. Decolonizing is deeply personal, but it is also always geographical and as such cultural, economic, social, and political. Crucial for Mignolo, unlearning coloniality entails decolonizing epistemology—the very conditions of how we think about ourselves, the world, and God. To accomplish this requires epistemological disobedience—that is, challenging

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<sup>6</sup> See Aníbal Quijano, “Coloniality and Modernity / Rationality,” *Cultural Studies* 21 (2007): 168–78, originally published as “Colonialidad y modernidad-racionalidad,” in *Los conquistados: 1492 y la población indígena de las Américas*, ed. Heraclio Bonilla, (Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia: Tecer Mundo Editores; Ecuador: FLACSO: Libri Mundi, 1992); “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America,” *Nepantla: Views from South* 1.3 (2000): 533–80. On Mignolo’s initial encounter with Quijano’s work, *The Darker Side of Modernity*, xx–xxi, xxv, 1–3, 52–53.

<sup>7</sup> Quijano, “Coloniality and Modernity / Rationality,” 168.

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

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

the colonial matrix of knowledge and power, and the ways this matrix (mis)shapes one's ways of understanding one's self, others, and the basic conditions for thinking and acting.<sup>11</sup>

Besides the Latin American and Caribbean sources informing Mignolo's decolonizing method, he also credits Michel Foucault's work on power, specifically, his argument about "the insurrection of subjugated knowledge."<sup>12</sup> Here Mignolo builds on Foucault's view that "'Subjection' signifies the process of becoming subordinated by power as well as the process of becoming a subject."<sup>13</sup> This understanding of subjection in terms of subordination and subject formation has also been pivotal in the work of Judith Butler and Giorgio Agamben, among others.<sup>14</sup>

Third, Mignolo rejects homogenized and overly static views of cosmopolitanism and universality associated with renaissance humanism, the Enlightenment, and modern rationality. Instead he calls for the cultivation of skills required for border thinking and pluriversality. Unlearning coloniality requires facing what Mignolo calls the "Darker Side of the Renaissance," and the "Darker Side of Western Modernity," by which he means the destructive thought-forms and ways of acting that paved the way for (and continue to bolster) the forms of hegemony associated with coloniality, and the suffering of misrecognized, forgotten, and damaged indigenous peoples and the distortion of their traditions that have been coloniality's result.

However, and this point is important, Mignolo does not completely reject the West or everything associated with the Renaissance and modernity. Rather he considers the path of decolonizing to be the only promising future option, in contrast to either programs of Rewesternization that are sometimes espoused in the United States; or of Dewesternization linked to totalizing critiques of U.S. and European

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<sup>11</sup> On epistemic disobedience, see Walter D. Mignolo, "Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and De-Colonial Freedom," *Theory, Culture and Society* 26 (2009): 1–23; *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*, 122–23, 136, 139, 143–44. Mignolo's position on epistemic disobedience merits comparison with my use of the term prophetic obedience in Bradford E. Hinze, *Prophetic Obedience: Ecclesiology for a Dialogical Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2016), xx–xxiii, 91–116, 127–50.

<sup>12</sup> Mignolo says his concept of border thinking is influenced by Foucault's notion of "insurrection of subjugated knowledge." He explains: "my intention. . . is to move subjugated knowledge to the limits of the colonial difference where subjugated becomes subaltern knowledges in the structure of coloniality of power." *Local Histories / Global Designs*, 18–20, at 19 and 20, also see 120–22; cf. *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*, 134–45, 139–40, 144. Foucault comments on his concept biopower in relation to colonialism and racism in, "*Society Must Be Defended*": *Lectures at the Collège de France 1975–1976*, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), 103, 239–63.

<sup>13</sup> This formula is Judith Butler's description of Foucault's position in *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 2.

<sup>14</sup> On subjectification, resistance, and biopower, see Michel Foucault, see *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–1978*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York & Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 183–85; *The History of Sexuality: Vol. 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 140–45; id., "The Confession of the Flesh" (1977) in *Power/Knowledge Selected Interviews and Other Writings*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 194–228. Besides Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, see Giorgio Agamben, *What is an Apparatus? and Other Essays*, trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 1–24.

institutions, policies, and practices.<sup>15</sup> Also important for our purposes, Mignolo rejects a homogenized view of cosmopolitanism and universality in favor of what he calls pluriversality, a global, polycentric vision of the world that contributes to a viable, “pluriversal cosmopolitanism.” To move toward pluriversality, he contends, requires developing border thinking. We have heard similar themes and arguments developed by Orlando Espín on interculturality and Roberto Goizueta on borderland ecclesiology.<sup>16</sup> And, as I will now discuss, we are also seeing some of these same threads in the contributions of Pope Francis.

## II. Pope Francis on Colonialism in Society and the Church

Since Francis, the Argentinian-born Jorge Bergoglio, is the first pope from the global south, his emerging critique of the legacy of historical forms of colonialism and of the threats of new forms of colonialism merit our attention. In important ways, his views of colonialism intersect with his critiques of triumphalism, centralization, and clericalism in the church.<sup>17</sup>

Pope Francis’s views on the subject of colonialism build on the deepening analysis of this problem by popes, bishops, and theologians since the mid-twentieth century. As liberation movements began to speak out against various forms of colonialism in Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia, and Africa, the popes also began to address the issue, initially at the end of the papacy of Pius XII in the mid-1950s.<sup>18</sup> Papal teachings on colonialism since Pius XII, John XXIII, Paul VI, John Paul II, and Benedict XVI have been gradually deepening the church’s diagnosis of the ongoing consequences of colonialism for the global south, and by implication on immigrant populations around the world, and of ways colonialism exacerbates poverty, economic injustice, racism, ethnic and tribal conflicts, and has adverse affects on the cultures and religious beliefs of indigenous peoples.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Mignolo describes these three main options—Rwesternization, Dewesternization, and Decolonization—along with various Western and Non-Western Progressive Reorientations and Spiritual options in *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*, 27–76.

<sup>16</sup> Orlando O. Espín, *Grace and Humanness: Theological Reflections Because of Culture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007); Roberto Goizueta, “Corpus Verum: Toward a Borderland Ecclesiology,” in *Building Bridges, Doing Justice: Constructing a Latino/a Ecumenical Theology*, ed. Orlando O. Espín (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009).

<sup>17</sup> I will not consider here Pope Francis’s positions on gender and sexual orientation; these have raised legitimate theological questions, which merit fuller analysis and evaluation.

<sup>18</sup> Pope Pius XII addressed colonialism in his “Christmas 1954 Message,” AAS 47 (1955): 15–28; and “Christmas 1955 Message,” AAS 48 (1956): 26–41.

<sup>19</sup> For statements on colonialism in papal teachings, see John XXIII *Mater et Magistra*, 49, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_j-xxiii\\_enc\\_15051961\\_mater.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_15051961_mater.html) (accessed June 21, 2016), all Vatican URLs accessed on June 21, 2016); and *Pacem in Terris*, 42–43, 63, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_j-xxiii\\_enc\\_11041963\\_pacem.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_11041963_pacem.html); Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, 7, 52, 63, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_enc\\_26031967\\_populorum.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_26031967_populorum.html); and *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 30, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_exh\\_19751208\\_evangelii-nuntiandi.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi.html); John Paul II in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 21–22, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_30121987\\_sollicitudo-rei-socialis.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30121987_sollicitudo-rei-socialis.html), and Benedict XVI, in *Caritas in Veritate*, 33,

While papal statements on colonialism have provided crucial leadership on the topic, the Conference of Bishops from Latin America and the Caribbean (identified by the Spanish acronym CELAM for *Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano*) deserves special mention for their important statements at their General Conferences at Medellín in 1968 and at Aparecida in 2007.<sup>20</sup> Over time the popes and bishops have developed a broader and deeper analysis of the impacts of colonialism in terms of structural injustice, economic disparity, poverty, racism, and the denigration of indigenous culture and popular religion, but also in terms of internal colonialism and its influence not only on social structures, cultures, and group relations, but also in the trauma and wounds left on bodies, psyches, and relationships, which have left lasting problems for spirituality and challenges for the church's ministry. Following the pioneering statements by John Paul II, there has also been a new willingness to acknowledge the church's role as a collective institutional actor in colonialism, a point asserted clearly by Francis in 2015, as we shall shortly examine.

To shed light on Francis's views, it is particularly helpful to study the Concluding Document of the Fifth General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops' Conference held at Aparecida in 2007, which Archbishop Bergoglio, years before becoming pope, played a central role in drafting. Two points in that document merit special emphasis. Like later statements by Pope Francis, Aparecida identifies new forms of cultural colonialism whereby imported, "artificial cultures, spurn. . . local cultures and tend. . . to impose a uniform culture in all realms."<sup>21</sup> More important for my argument, when addressing the problems of racism experienced by people of African descent in Latin America and the Caribbean, Aparecida states that "Present throughout the history of Afro-Americans has been social, economic, political, and especially racial, exclusion, where ethnic identity is a factor in social subordination. . . [T]he decolonizing of minds and knowledge, recovery of historic memory, and enhancement of intercultural spaces and relationships are conditions for affirming the full citizenship of these peoples."<sup>22</sup> Sadly, as Pope, Francis has not yet echoed Aparecida's treatment of racism in society or the church, nor its connections to the legacy of colonialism.

Francis has, however, begun to speak explicitly about colonialism and the problems associated with it—during his January 2015 trip to the Philippines, and in his September 2015 address to the General Assembly of the United Nations. He also broached the subject of colonialism, first indirectly in his October 2014 address to

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[http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_enc\\_20090629\\_caritas-in-veritate.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html) (accessed June 21, 2016).

<sup>20</sup> CELAM, *Second General Conference of Latin American Bishops, The Church in the Present-Day Transformation of Latin America in the Light of the Council*, vol. 2, *Conclusions* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1968), 1 (Justice): 13 (p. 63); 2 (Peace): 2–10 (pp. 71–75), 10 (Lay Movements): 2 (p. 165); Cf. 7 (Pastoral Concern for the Elites): 17 (p. 133). References to the Aparecida document follow. The treatment of colonialism by African and Asian bishops conferences merits further attention.

<sup>21</sup> CELAM, *Concluding Documents of the Fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin American and the Caribbean*, <http://www.aecrc.org/documents/Aparecida-Concluding%20Document.pdf> (accessed May 21, 2016): This artificial culture promotes a self-referential individuality that tends to be indifferent toward others "whom one does not need and for whom one does not feel responsible" (p. 45).

<sup>22</sup> *Concluding Documents of Aparecida*, 96.

popular movements of social activists meeting in Rome, and overtly in his 2015 address to popular movements in Bolivia, speeches which contribute groundbreaking papal statements.<sup>23</sup>

Francis's critique of the destructive power of ideologies, which emerged much earlier in his career, sets the stage for his comments on colonialism. An ideology, as he speaks of it, is an idea, theory, or program that is developed and championed by an elitist group and posited as a reliable, all-encompassing, one might say, totalizing truth. Ideology operates as an intellectually pure, rigorist, or a gnostic hermeneutic of reality, developed and wielded by power elites over against less powerful audiences, including the poor, the vulnerable, and the marginalized. The pope contrasts ideological approaches to theory construction and positions based on a pastoral approach and social strategy that seeks to gaze upon reality with the eyes of disciples, attending receptively to the lived practices of people and listening to the sense of the faith of the people of God.<sup>24</sup> Francis speaks of certain economic positions ("market-based, consumerist"), cultural viewpoints ("throwaway culture"), and certain gender theories as ideologies.<sup>25</sup> Against this backdrop, and without exploring the questions and difficulties raised by Francis's critiques of "gender theories" as ideological colonialism, we now briefly consider select papal references to ideological colonialism.

In the Philippines, Francis exhorted: "Let us be on guard against colonization by new ideologies." He continues: "Just as our peoples, at a certain moment of their history, were mature enough to say 'no' to all forms of political colonization, so too in our families we need to be very wise, very shrewd, very strong, in order to say 'no' to all attempts at an ideological colonization of our families."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Also see Pope Francis, "Christianity not a colonial enterprise," interview with Guillaume Goubet and Sébastien Maillard in *La Croix*, May 17, 2016. <http://www.globalpulsemagazine.com/news/interview-with-pope-francis-by-la-croix/3184> (accessed May 20, 2016).

<sup>24</sup> Austen Ivereigh seeks to demonstrate that Bergoglio's treatment of ideology can be traced back to the early 1970s when he was influenced by the "teología del pueblo" developed by Lucio Gera, Rafael Tello, and Juan Carlos Scannone as an alternative to liberation theology, which profoundly shaped his work beginning with his years as provincial (1973–1979); see Austen Ivereigh, *The Great Reformer: Francis and the Making of a Radical Pope* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2014), 111, 115–16, 121–22, 183–84. Ivereigh's sharp contrast between such a theology of the people and liberation theology merits scrutiny and evaluation. Moreover, Francis's use of the term ideology needs assessment in relation to alternative views of ideology in sociology and philosophy.

<sup>25</sup> For an analysis of Pope Francis's views on gender ideology, see Cristina L. H. Traina, "Whose Sensus? Which Fidelium? Justice and Gender in a Global Church," in *Learning from All the Faithful: A Contemporary Theology of the Sensus Fidei*, eds. Bradford E. Hinze and Peter C. Phan (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, forthcoming).

<sup>26</sup> See Pope Francis, "Meeting with Families, Manila, Philippines," January 16, 2015, <http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/january> (accessed May 21, 2016). The quote continues: "While all too many people live in dire poverty, others are caught up in materialism and lifestyles [that] are destructive of family life and the most basic demands of Christian morality. These are forms of ideological colonization. The family is also threatened by growing efforts on the part of some to redefine the very institution of marriage, by relativism, by the culture of the ephemeral, by a lack of openness to life."

In his address to the General Assembly of the United Nations the pope offers one of his most pointed statements on ideological colonialism:

Without the recognition of certain incontestable natural ethical limits and without the immediate implementation of those pillars of integral human development, the ideal of “saving succeeding generations from the scourge of war” (Charter of the United Nations, Preamble), and “promoting social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom” (*ibid.*), risks becoming an unattainable illusion, or, even worse, idle chatter which serves as a cover for all kinds of abuse and corruption, or for carrying out an ideological colonization by the imposition of anomalous models and lifestyles which are alien to people’s identity and, in the end, irresponsible.<sup>27</sup>

In Francis’s two addresses to world gatherings of popular movements the pope evokes themes resonant with Mignolo’s decolonizing agenda. He commends those who have learned to reject and resist the lies and ideologies of powerful elites. In his own words: “you are not satisfied with empty promises, with alibis or excuses. . . You want to be protagonists.” To do so, “You get organized, study, work, issue demands and, above all, practice that very special solidarity that exists among those who suffer, among the poor, and that our civilization seems to have forgotten or would strongly prefer to forget.”<sup>28</sup>

In this regard, Francis clearly acknowledges that to resist lies and confront powerful elites requires struggle and conflict. He repeatedly returns to the elements of conflict and struggle involved in facing concrete realities in society, and in other contexts he speaks about conflicts within the church. Here, in this text, he praises members of popular movements for, “making your voices be heard even though they cause embarrassment” and “are bothersome, no doubt because people are afraid of the change that you seek.” This, Francis declares, is what is required to “revitalize democracy” and to move “beyond paternalistic forms of assistance”<sup>29</sup> in order to “fight . . . against the structural causes of poverty and inequality. . . It means confronting the destructive effects of the empire of money: forced dislocation, painful emigration, human trafficking, drugs, war, violence, and all those realities that many of you suffer and that we are all called upon to transform. Solidarity, understood in its deepest sense, is a way of making history, and this is what the popular movements are doing.”<sup>30</sup>

Without a doubt, combatting new forms of colonialism requires critique, conflict, and protest, but it also demands creativity and social innovation. As Francis puts it: “You are social poets: creators of work, builders of housing, producers of food, above

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<sup>27</sup> Pope Francis, “Address to the General Assembly of the United Nations,” September 26, 2015,

[http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/september/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150925\\_onu-visita.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/september/documents/papa-francesco_20150925_onu-visita.html) (accessed May 23, 2016).

<sup>28</sup> Pope Francis, “Address to the Participants in the World Meeting of Popular Movements,” October 28, 2014, 1,

[https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/october/documents/papa-francesco\\_20141028\\_incontro-mondiale-movimenti-popolari.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/october/documents/papa-francesco_20141028_incontro-mondiale-movimenti-popolari.html).

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

all for people left behind by the world market.”<sup>31</sup> He calls upon his audience to acknowledge that the creative imagination is the wellspring for real change in the domains of land, lodging, and labor (the famous three Ts: *tierra, techo, y trabajo*). “Let us not be afraid to say it: we want change, real change, structural change.”<sup>32</sup> Francis describes the diverse communities of the world as desiring to be “artisans of their own destiny,” seeking to claim “the full exercise of their sovereignty” against “the rise of new forms of colonialism.”<sup>33</sup> This invocation of the doctrine of sovereignty echoes his address to the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace in 2014 when the pope called for “the redistribution of sovereignty, on both the national and supranational planes.”<sup>34</sup>

In his 2015 address he identifies several new forms of colonialism: one associated with money—corporations, loans, “free trade” treaties—that disproportionately affect workers and the poor; a second associated with the coordinated international action against corruption, drug cartels, and terrorism that too often prove ineffective and can “make matters worse.” And a third form is identified with an ideological colonialism that promotes “the monopolizing of the communications media, which would impose alienating examples of consumerism and a certain cultural uniformity.” He challenges his audience, which includes many who are not Catholic or Christian or believers, to “say NO . . . to forms of colonialism old and new. Let us say YES to the encounter between peoples and cultures . . .”<sup>35</sup>

Near the end of his remarks in Bolivia, the Pope’s argument shifts as he turns from colonialism in civil society, to the role of the church in colonialism. “Here,” he says, “I wish to bring up an important issue. Some may rightly say, ‘When the Pope speaks of colonialism, he overlooks certain actions of the Church.’” I say this to you with regret: many grave sins were committed against the native peoples of America in the name of God.” Francis mentions Pope John Paul II’s and CELAM’s acknowledgements of the church’s participation in colonialism, as he declares “the need to make a public confession for the many sins.” He elaborates, “I ask that the church—and I repeat what he [John Paul II] said—‘kneel before God and implore forgiveness for the past and present sins of her sons and daughters.’ I would also say, and here I wish to be quite clear, as was Saint John Paul II: “. . . I humbly ask

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<sup>31</sup> Pope Francis, “Address to the Second World Meeting of Popular Movements,” July 9 2015, Bolivia, p. 7, <http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/july/> (accessed June 22, 2016).

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Pope Francis, “Address to the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace,” October 2, 2014, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/october/documents/papa-francesco\\_20141002\\_pont-consiglio-giustizia-e-pace.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/october/documents/papa-francesco_20141002_pont-consiglio-giustizia-e-pace.html):

“Another problem arises from the persistent inequalities in economic sectors, in wages, in commercial and speculative banks, including institutions and global problems: it is necessary to maintain deep concern for the poor and for social justice (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 201). It requires, on one hand, significant reforms that provide for the *redistribution of the wealth* produced and universalization of free markets at the service of families, and, on the other, *the redistribution of sovereignty*, on both the national and supranational planes” (emphases added). This can be viewed as Pope Francis’s response to the issues raised by John Paul II’s in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 37 and 47, about the “desire for profit and thirst for power” [and the] . . . “desire for excessive profit and power.”

<sup>35</sup> Pope Francis, “Address to the Second World Meeting of Popular Movements,” 9.

forgiveness, not only for the offenses of the Church herself, but also for crimes committed against the native peoples during the so-called conquest of America.”<sup>36</sup>

In his critique of European colonialism, Pope Francis publicly acknowledges the complicity of the Roman Catholic Church in colonizing behavior toward indigenous peoples in Latin America. I submit that this introduces a connection and merits a comparison with his critiques of the ongoing legacy of triumphalism, centralization, and clericalism within the church. Do these sites of struggle within the church represent ecclesial manifestations of colonialism? At minimum, are they phenomena that call for something analogous to an anticolonial pedagogy, and decolonizing practices of resistance and the reformation of subjects?

Pope Francis has repeatedly criticized centralization and triumphalism in the church, as well as clericalism and the infantilizing of the laity. His alternative is to promote “a sound decentralization,” (*EG*, 16) more active participation of laypeople through greater consultation, and more widespread development of synodal styles of discernment, all in service of what he describes as a polyhedronic, polycentric vision of the catholicity of the church.

Admittedly, Francis’s remarks on colonialism and on the church’s failings leave a variety of questions unanswered. What are the origins of these social sins and ecclesial temptations? How, specifically, ought they be confronted and addressed? Francis’s use of the examination of conscience with bishops in numerous addresses, in his comments to pastoral workers in *Evangelii Gaudium*, and in his Christmas Eve address to the curia in 2014, demonstrate that he seeks to hold individuals accountable for their involvement in these patterns of behavior.<sup>37</sup> He also calls groups to account and to reform: the curia, episcopal conferences, bishops in particular regions, and the church in particular archdioceses, dioceses, and parishes. And he frequently decries the kind of corruption that is manifest in aloof, judgmental attitudes and behavior, often coupled with the misguided pursuit or misuse of power and money.

Were we to engage in an examination of conscience using Mignolo’s categories, might we detect within the church, as in society, a corrupting matrix of power? To what extent might intra-ecclesial corruption be traceable to or influenced by a Eurocentric colonialist mentality, rooted in the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, or western modernity? Would not a fuller genealogy of these failings take us back even further, to the pernicious imperialism of the medieval period before and after the fall of the Roman Empire?

Without resolving these historical issues, what Pope Francis proposes can be described as “decolonizing” in the sense that he is calling individuals and communities to struggle with and against the pernicious legacies of triumphalism,

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, Francis cites John Paul II, Bull of Indiction of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 *Incararnationis Mysterium* (November 29, 1998), 11: AAS 91 (1999), 139–141.

<sup>37</sup> Pope Francis, “Address to the Leadership of the Episcopal Conferences of Latin America,” July 28, 2013, [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/july/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130728\\_gmg-celam-rio.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/july/documents/papa-francesco_20130728_gmg-celam-rio.html); *Evangelii Gaudium*, nos. 36–109; Pope Francis, “Presentation of the Christmas Greeting to the Roman Curia,” December 22, 2014, [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/december/documents/papa-francesco\\_20141222\\_curia-romana.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/december/documents/papa-francesco_20141222_curia-romana.html); Pope Francis, “Address to the Bishops of Mexico,” February 13, 2016, <http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/february>.

centralization, clericalism, and infantilization in the church. Francis's advocacy of decentralization in the church by means of greater synodality and his call for greater democracy in civic society converge in his summons for the "redistribution of sovereignty."<sup>38</sup>

### **III. What can Theology Contribute to Decolonizing the Church and Society?**

If I were to attempt to provide an adequate answer to this question I would begin by exploring various dimensions of a theology of the prophetic office of the people of God as introduced at Vatican II. In this limited space, however, I will highlight only three specific features of the Christian call to prophetic discipleship that bear upon the project of decolonizing the church and society.

First, prophetic disciples are summoned to heed laments. Theology advances decolonizing practices by exploring how prophetic discipleship entails being receptive and responsive to the voice of the Spirit in the laments of the poor, the subjugated, and a wounded world.

Vatican II gave new attention to the prophetic character of Christian discipleship in terms of the baptismal anointing of the Spirit that "arouses and sustains" the sense of the faith of all the people of God in their reception of the word of God and in their witness to the truth of the gospel in word and deed. As a result the baptized adhere to the faith, penetrate it more deeply, and "appl[y] it more fully in daily life" (*Lumen Gentium*, 12). Consequently the faithful should be consulted on matters of doctrine and mission, and their authority as prophetic guardians and advocates of a living pilgrim faith respected.

The significance and practical repercussions of this conciliar teaching have at times been overlooked and undermined in subsequent theology, canon law, and pastoral practice, in the interest of bolstering the authority of the clergy, the prophetic office of bishops, and the primacy of the papacy. The tide has turned for the time being with Pope Francis, who reaffirms the importance of the prophetic office of the faithful and its connection to the doctrine of the *sensus fidei* of the people of God. This is a cornerstone of his summons to missionary discipleship and his promotion of consultation with the laity in synodal modes of discernment at all levels of the church. In light of this essay's thesis we might then ask, what can prophetic disciples learn from the sense of the faithful about decolonizing practices?

As *Lumen Gentium* taught, all the baptized are anointed with the Spirit to share in the prophetic office of Jesus Christ: to recognize, receive, and witness to the living word of God, and by so doing to follow the way of Jesus. To follow in the pathway of Jesus' prophetic mission, communities of disciples must learn how to follow the lead of the Spirit as Jesus does in the gospel narratives. This involves wrestling with one's identity and mission in the wilderness and in everyday life; and it requires learning to

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<sup>38</sup> Pope Francis's call for the redistribution of sovereignty in civil society and his parallel summons for a healthy decentralization of the Catholic Church recalls Hermann Joseph Pottmeyer's analysis of the doctrine of papal primacy and sovereignty among the ultramontanists in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. See Hermann J. Pottmeyer, *Towards a Papacy in Communion: Perspectives from Vatican Councils I & II* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1998), 51–61; based on his work, *Unfehlbarkeit und Souveränität: Die Päpstliche Unfehlbarkeit im System der Ultramontanen Ekklesiologie des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald-Verlag, 1975), 346–428.

heed and respond to the voice of the Spirit in the aspirations and laments of people suffering from the ravages of sin and destructive powers at work in the world.

This means, especially in our time and place, being attentive to those who suffer under the legacies of colonialism, practices of neo-colonialism, and the dynamics of power associated with coloniality. Theology advances decolonizing practices when it engages with the faithful and people of other faiths and worldviews, not only in classrooms but in public civic forums and in pastoral assemblies, to mourn and to reflect upon the laments of communities damaged by colonialism and by coloniality's continued power. Theologians ourselves also must undergo and seek to contribute to pedagogical processes of unlearning the lies and half-truths that coloniality and neocolonialism transmit. Moreover, theologians should learn and advance communal practices that foster the development of empowering local social imaginaries and grassroots decision-making.

Second, a theology of prophetic discipleship provides a rationale for the importance of conflict and struggle in civic and ecclesial life. Such a theology can contribute to decolonizing by helping to inform those who seek to discern God's Spirit at work in the conflicts and struggles with destructive powers that beset a sinful church and society.

The church's growing understanding of social sin and structures of sin has been one of the most significant areas of doctrinal development in our age. This dramatic development has brought into clearer relief the role of struggle in social and ecclesial contexts. As a result older moral and spiritual frameworks for understanding the struggle against sin are being recalibrated and enhanced, but often without sufficient attention to the role of conflict. One aim of this essay is to explore what contribution an analysis of colonialism, and particularly Mignolo's approach to decolonizing, might make to an analysis of the role of struggle and conflict in confronting situations of social sin and structures of sin, and specifically by fostering democracy and synodality.

It is widely acknowledged that Latin American bishops and theologians began to use the categories sinful situation, situation of injustice, and institutional violence in the documents from the Second General Conference of CELAM held in Medellín in 1968, followed by references to social sin and structures of sin subsequently at their Third General Conference in Puebla in 1979.<sup>39</sup> During the 1980s, the critical engagement of Joseph Ratzinger and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on the teaching of liberation theology elicited deeper reflection in this area.<sup>40</sup> The

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<sup>39</sup> CELAM, Second General Conference, *The Church in the Present-Day Transformation of Latin America*, 1 (Justice): Justice, 16–23 (pp. 64–67); 2 (Peace), 1–7, 16 (pp. 71–73, 78); CELAM, Third General Conference, in *Puebla and Beyond*, eds. John Eagleson and Philip Scharper, trans. John Drury (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979), 123–285, 128 (nos. 28–30), 132 (no. 73), 191 (no. 487).

<sup>40</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Instruction on Certain Aspects of the 'Theology of Liberation,'" 1984, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_19840806\\_theology-liberation\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19840806_theology-liberation_en.html).

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation," 1986, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_19860322\\_freedom-liberation\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19860322_freedom-liberation_en.html).

1983 synod of bishops devoted to Penance and Reconciliation in the Mission of the Church provided the catalyst for John Paul II to address the issue of social sin, first, in his apostolic exhortation *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* in 1984 and again in his 1987 encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*.<sup>41</sup>

A recurring issue that has been raised in response to Pope John Paul II's treatment of social and structural sin is that, in keeping with his phenomenological approach to personalism, it emphasized personal intentionality and personal responsibility in the exercise of human freedom. As he puts it, "it is not out of place to speak of 'structures of sin,' which . . . are rooted in personal sin, and thus always linked to the concrete acts of individuals who introduce these structures, consolidate them and make them difficult to remove."<sup>42</sup> As a result, Gregory Baum argues, John Paul II's statements in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, "are not as sensitive as the teaching of Medellín to the unconscious, nonvoluntary dimensions of social sin—the blindness that prevents them from recognizing the evil dimension of their social reality."<sup>43</sup> Baum concludes, "John Paul II is aware of the unconscious, nonvoluntary, quasi-automantic dimensions of social sin . . . At the same time, the greater emphasis in his analysis of social sin lies on personal responsibility."<sup>44</sup>

We should not overlook the work of those who have sought to overcome the limitations of the intentional analysis operative in John Paul II's phenomenological personalism, and comparable Continental approaches to transcendental subjectivity, phenomenology, and hermeneutics as they have been used to analyze social sin and structures of sin. With these critics, I believe we must be especially attentive to the inherent weaknesses in these phenomenological and transcendental approaches to address the pernicious, or to use Mignolo's expression, "the darker side" of the bourgeois subject and problems of persistent racism and economic disparity, as well as issues surrounding gender and sexuality.<sup>45</sup> Alongside Johann Baptist Metz's

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<sup>41</sup> John Paul II, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, 15–16, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_02121984\\_reconciliatio-et-paenitentia.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_02121984_reconciliatio-et-paenitentia.html) (accessed June 23, 2016); *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 36–40, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_30121987\\_sollicitudo-rei-socialis.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30121987_sollicitudo-rei-socialis.html), the formula structures of sin is used in this section, yet note 65 quotes the passage on social sin in *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*.

<sup>42</sup> *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 36.

<sup>43</sup> Gregory Baum, "Structures of Sin," in *The Logic of Solidarity: Commentary on Pope John Paul II's Encyclical "On Social Concern"*, eds. Gregory Baum and Robert Ellsberg (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989), 110–26, at 113. For my original analysis of social sin, see Bradford E. Hinze "Ecclesial Repentance and the Demands of Dialogue," *Theological Studies* 61 (2000): 207–38.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>45</sup> For an important alternative approach to structures of sin, see Daniel Finn, "What is a Sinful Social Structure?" *Theological Studies* 77 (2016): 136–64. Finn follows the lead of Benedict XVI by treating structures of sin in relation to the doctrine of original sin, which he further develops drawing on critical realist sociology as developed by Douglas V. Porpora and Margaret Archer, among others. He defines social structures as "systems of human relations" that "have causal impact in the life of persons through the restrictions, enablements, and incentives which structures present to individuals who operate with them" (151). This approach contrasts with John Paul II's intentionality-based and act-centered phenomenological personalism. How this critical realist sociology might be brought into dialogue with post-

critique of Karl Rahner's transcendental anthropology, we have all benefited from the restless labor of Shawn Copeland and Bryan Massingale. Significantly, while honoring the lasting contributions of Bernard Lonergan on bias, cycles of decline, culture, and the possibility of conversion in flawed and destructive cultures, Copeland and Massingale have devoted considerable attention to studying alternative sources of wisdom: the history of black people and black theology in North America, and the contributions of theorists who aid in heeding and honoring the depth of laments, frustrations, and anger of black persons in the U.S. Informed by the work of such figures as Frantz Fanon, Toni Morrison, and Malcolm X, Copeland and Massingale have insisted it is not enough to lament: one must acknowledge the role of conflict that serves as a catalyst for accountability, conversion, and change.<sup>46</sup> Motivated by analogous aims, Latino scholars Fernando Segovia and Jean-Pierre Ruiz have drawn upon post-colonial theories in biblical studies;<sup>47</sup> Latina theologians Isasi-Díaz and María Pilar Aquino have searched for resources to address gender inequalities;<sup>48</sup> and Ignacio Ellacuría, Enrique Dussel, and Raúl Fonet-Betancourt have explored deeper philosophical issues implicated in these problems.<sup>49</sup>

### Conclusion

My argument has been that, as a necessary complement to the contributions of these and other theological colleagues and predecessors, we need to consider problems of social sin in light of the resources provided by post-colonial critical theories from various geographical locations in the global south, and Mignolo's approach to decolonizing in particular.<sup>50</sup>

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colonial theories pertaining to the analysis and function of struggle and conflict in arenas of social injustice merits further consideration.

<sup>46</sup> M. Shawn Copeland, "Turning the Subject," in *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010), 85–106, originally published in *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 53 (1998): 25–47. Bryan M. Massingale, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), 1–42, and "Vox Victimarium Vox Dei: Malcolm X as Neglected 'Classic' for Catholic Theological Reflection," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 65 (2010): 63–88.

<sup>47</sup> Fernando Segovia, *Decolonizing Biblical Studies: A View from the Margins* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000); Jean-Pierre Ruiz, *Readings from the Edges: The Bible and People on the Move* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011).

<sup>48</sup> Ada María Isasi-Díaz, *En La Lucha*; Mari Pilar Aquino, *Our Cry for Life*.

<sup>49</sup> Ignacio Ellacuría, *Essays on History, Liberation, and Salvation*, ed. and intro. Michael E. Lee, commentary by Kevin F. Burke (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013); Enrique Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985); Raúl Fonet-Betancourt, *Lateinamerikanische Philosophie zwischen Inkulturation und Interkulturalität* (Frankfurt, Germany: Verlag für Interkulturelle Kommunikation, 1997).

<sup>50</sup> Inevitably, engaging these resources will also require attention to power dynamics as treated by Foucault, Agamben, and Butler, among others. Jeffrey Stout offers a valuable critique of the limits of Michel Foucault's views of how power operates in society in light of the work of broad-based community organizing, yet concedes that organizers can accept Foucault's insights without relinquishing their own way of proceeding. See Jeffrey Stout, *Blessed Are the Organized: Grassroots Democracy in America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), n. 33, pp. 302–03.

Third, and finally, prophetic disciples' discernment of laments and conflicts must be combined with attentiveness to God's abundant gifts, even amidst scarcity and injustice. A prophetic theology of lament, conflict, and gift can provide an impetus for recognition and negotiation amidst disagreement and provide a rationale for an agonistic approach to synodality and democracy.

The pedagogy of unlearning coloniality requires public spaces for encounter and conflict, sites where the arduous work of intercultural learning and unlearning can foster a deeper renaissance for persons and communities. Those of us undergoing this pedagogy learn from laments, and learn through conflict, but we are also invited to contemplate and learn about the abundant ways we have been gifted by God through laments and conflict, in struggle and resistance on pilgrimage together. Because this learning and unlearning is a life-long curriculum, grassroots democratic communities and synodal communities would do well to chronicle and map the personal, social, and cultural gifts, graces, and assets both indigenously present and achieved through processes of collaboration and mutual accountability over time.<sup>51</sup> Such practices can contribute to a realistic assessment of the abundant resources that reside amidst the precarious lives of those in profound need. By tapping into this abundance, a prophetic theology of gift provides the means for resistance, courage, and hope.

In today's fraught political and ecclesial climate, it seems fitting, finally, to return to the theme of conflict. Just as we need to learn how to discern our ways in life through lamentations, so too we need to recognize that there is no decolonizing without conflict. As a result we must realize that both civic democracy and ecclesial synodality have an agonistic character that we must learn to engage. To speak of the agonistic is to affirm the constructive role of disagreement in the deliberation process. Here our theological efforts will benefit from consideration of the work of William Connolly, Bonnie Honig, Chantal Mouffe, among others who grapple with the agonistic character of democracy.<sup>52</sup>

Yes, in both church and society, we strive to listen to and learn from each other. We promote collaboration and collective deliberation. We advance one-on-one dialogue and group conversation. We seek approaches to prophetic discernment and action that reject "a politics of contempt," as Cathleen Kaveny has recently argued, and which, as political theorist Bonnie Honig argues, "enlist[s] the power of lamentations *for politics* without allowing that politics of lamentations to collapse into a lamentation *of politics*."<sup>53</sup> In facing one another across differences, we aim for

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<sup>51</sup> My inspirations for this prophetic theology of God's abundant gifts amidst scarcity include Rev. Addie Banks and Fr. Tom Lynch of the Clergy Caucus in the Bronx; Yorman Nunez and Nick Iuviene of the Bronx Cooperative Development Initiative advancing economic democracy, and Allison Manuel, community organizer from the Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition.

<sup>52</sup> William Connolly, *Identity | Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2002); *The Ethos of Pluralization* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1995); Bonnie Honig, *Antigone Interrupted* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London, Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2005); *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically* (London, Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2013).

<sup>53</sup> Cathleen Kaveny, *Prophecy Without Contempt: Religious Discourse in the Public Square* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016); Bonnie Honig, *Antigone Interrupted*, 69 (accent added).

respectful recognition and honest negotiation, and work toward an emerging consensus, a differentiated consensus that allows for truthful dissensus as we attempt to create conditions for peace and reconciliation. Yet none of these take place without making room for what Michel de Certeau called “the law of conflict,” that inevitability of conflict and struggle in interpersonal, civic, and religious life.<sup>54</sup>

Pope Francis has spoken on numerous occasions about this need to make room for conflict,<sup>55</sup> and for *parrhesia*,<sup>56</sup> for open and honest discussion, with no self-censoring and no stifling of public opinion. Communities of prophetic discipleship train individuals and groups not to shy away from conflict in either church or society, but to attend and respond to contentious, divisive issues, especially in intercultural encounters at communal borderlands. Prophetic disciples are dedicated to discerning places where people from the periphery and margins can encounter one another, and advance polycentric dynamics that mark both a robustly democratic civic polity, and a pluriversal understanding of a richly universal catholic church.

The struggle to decolonize our theological thinking and practices, to unlearn coloniality is arduous and, most likely, always-incomplete. But it is also redemptive and sanctifying, both liberating and necessary, if we are to create the conditions for genuine communities-in-diversity that are attuned and responsive to the senses of the faithful and the needs of the world. Advancing this agenda requires a theology of prophetic discipleship, rooted in an understanding of the Triune God who heeds, receives, and responds to the cry of the poor and the groans of the earth. This Triune God is encountered in the prophetic identity and mission of Jesus and the life-enabling Spirit bestowed on Jesus and his disciples. This God is active in the lives of individuals and communities who labor every day to carry forward this mission of justice and mercy.

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<sup>54</sup> Michel de Certeau, “La loi du conflit,” *L'Étranger ou l'union dans la différence* (Paris: Desclé de Brouwer, 1969), 21–38.

<sup>55</sup> On conflict, see, e.g., Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 26–30; and in his two addresses to popular movements in 2014 and 2015.

<sup>56</sup> Pope Francis, “Greeting to the Synod Fathers During the First General Congregation of the Third Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops,” October 6, 2014, [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/october/documents/papa-francesco\\_20141006\\_padri-sinodali.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/october/documents/papa-francesco_20141006_padri-sinodali.html); cf. Michel Foucault, “Discourse and Truth: the Problematicization of Parrhesia,” Six lectures at the University of California at Berkeley, October–November, 1983, <http://foucault.info/doc/documents/parrhesia/index-html> (accessed on July 11, 2016); and Torben Bech Dyrberg, *Foucault on the Politics of Parrhesia* (UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).