RACE, RELIGION,
AND POETICS OF
WORLD-MAKING

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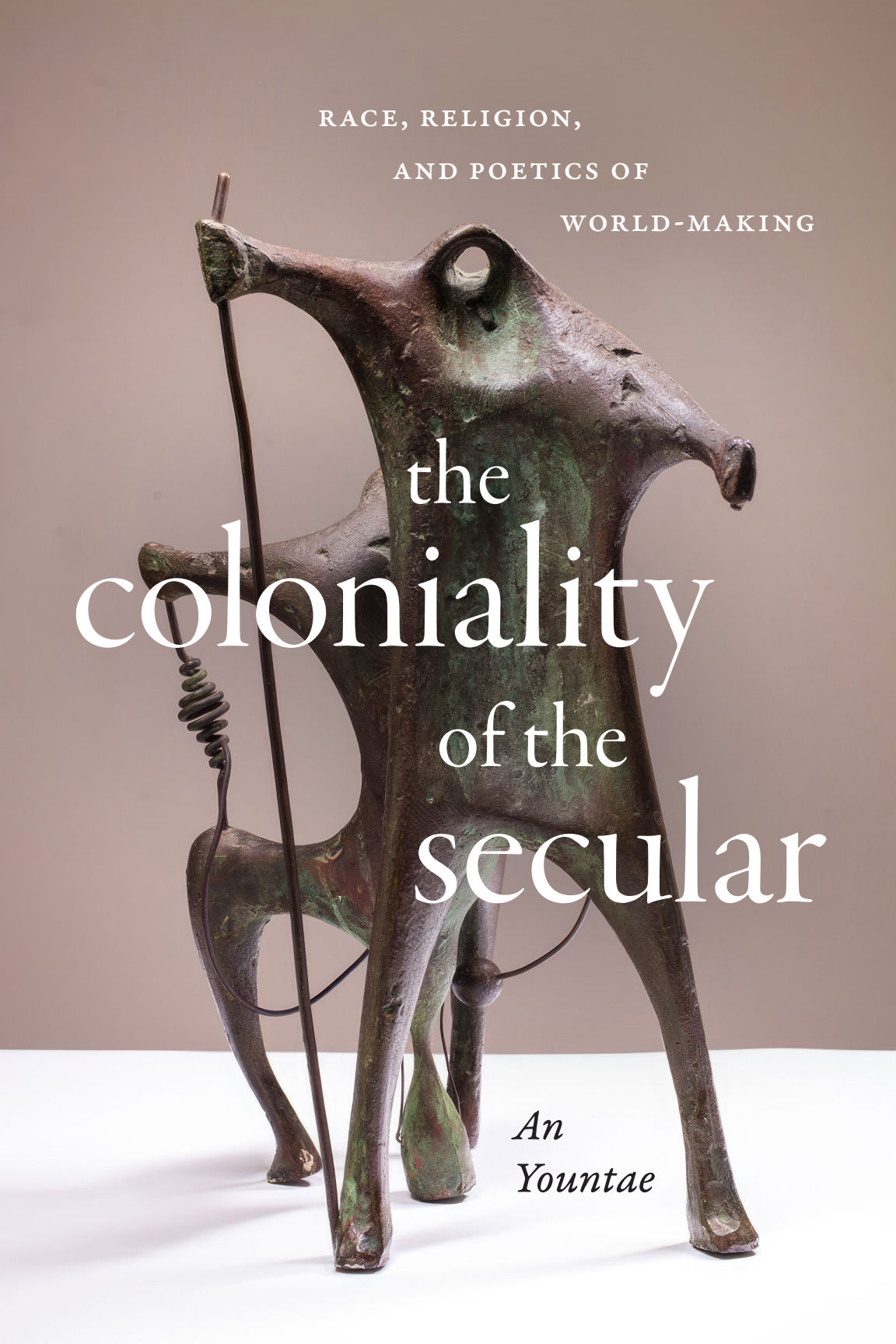

An Yountae

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Where are your monuments, your battles, martyrs?
Where is your tribal memory? Sirs, in that gray vault.
The sea. The sea has locked them up.
The sea is History.
First, there was the heaving oil,
heavy as chaos;
then, like a light at the end of the tunnel,
the lantern of a caravel,
and that was Genesis.
Then there were packed cries,
the shit, the moaning.

—DEREK WALCOTT, "The Sea Is History"

INTRODUCTION

A Decolonial Theory of Religion

Hailed as a landmark text in twentieth-century anticolonial thinking, Aimé Césaire's *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* (*Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*) is an epic poem that denounces the devastating historical reality of colonial violence. Written in a caustic tone, the poem calls for the old colonial order, with its "Aged poverty rotting under the sun, silently . . . [that points at] the awful futility of our raison d'être," to be destroyed. The call for abolishing the existing order ushers in, at the same time, the possibilities of imagining a new order. As the Saint Lucian poet Derek Walcott observes, Césaire's poignant cry is preserved as a poetic sensibility, a "sensibility of walking to a New World."[1] Discussing the differences between the Guadeloupean poet Saint John Perse and Aimé Césaire, Walcott brings attention to the shared sensibility of these two Caribbean poets. Despite their different views of the colonial Antilles, Walcott writes, "The deeper truth is that both poets perceive this New World through Mystery."[2] If religion, in its dominant

form, has historically accommodated systems of colonial and racist ideology, these poets signal how there are unnamable experiences, affective registers, and imaginaries—often akin to religion—that play an instrumental role in undoing the unjust order and envisioning a new world. These registers elude words and concepts. The poets often struggle to find a name for them. With the term *religion* not being an option, they recurrently turn to the figure of the sacred. In their view, mystery or the mystical does not signal a simple retreat to the inner world (or the otherworldly) but the undoing of the self that necessarily involves the dissolution of the old world and the rebuilding of a new world, new modalities of being and relationality.

The Coloniality of the Secular probes the wide-reaching influence of religion that constitutes the historical sediments of culture and mobilizes sociopolitical institutions, norms, and practices. We witness religion's broad implication in the world not only as a system of power that sanctions violence but also as the driving motor behind counterhegemonic forces that seek to build a new order. I want to bring attention to the latter, because the various alternative figures substituting the category of religion are often mislabeled as secular iterations of the sort, distinctive from religion. The presumably secular thinkers I read in the following do not simply turn away from religion, nor do they hastily attempt to rehabilitate it as a countersecular recipe. They do, however, signal that their decolonial ideas and visions persistently attend to the efforts to reconceive the sacred, often regardless of their intention and awareness. I pay close attention to the underelaborated link between these thinkers' decolonial visions and their efforts to resignify the sacred. In doing so, I seek to incorporate the work of decolonial thinkers, who were heretofore unconsidered, into the archive of the study of religion.

Césaire's work points to the complex imbrication of religious and secular sediments that jointly form the historical layer of colonial modernity in the Americas. Theorizing colonial modernity requires thinking beyond the boundaries set by binary categories of the secular and the religious. In both *Discourse on Colonialism* and *Notebook*, Césaire draws on numerous theological metaphors to diagnose colonialism as symptomatic of political theology. The deep roots of colonialism, in Césaire's analysis, lay in the religious foundation underpinning the modern West. For Césaire, religion anchors the genesis of the modern colonial world by facilitating the dialectical sublation of the colonial other.[3] If the colonial world is predicated on a certain political theology, countercolonial discourse must attend to the problem of religion underpinning the colonial order. In this sense, Césaire's

decolonial poetics carries significant religious dispositions. The second half of *Notebook* displays a sudden change of tone in which the narrative takes an overtly religious character. The progression of the poem suddenly shifts into a confession and a manifesto in which Césaire claims his negritude to be an incorrigible dissent of the Christian-colonial worldview: "I declare my crimes and that there is nothing to say in my defense. Dances. Idols. An apostate."[4] Negritude and the colonial abject signify refusal: a refusal of the Christian-colonial world and its metaphysics. However, the reconstruction of a countercolonial order does not take a secular path for Césaire. Bringing down the colonial political theology calls for a counterpolitical theology. The remainder of the poem walks the reader through Césaire's ritual of re-creating himself (negritude) in which the newly cast self eventually displaces the metaphysical edifice of the old colonial order. That is, Césaire's poetic journey of becoming, his *poiesis*, takes place through the reconstruction of the symbolic and religious foundation underlying the colonial order. Césaire's decolonial poetics, aimed at theorizing of the new being, winds up, in a way, reconceptualizing religion.

Aside from Césaire, many important thinkers invested in decoloniality have suggested that we must traverse the secularist categories that prevent us from reaching down to the deep reserve of aesthetic, spiritual, and affective sensibilities that shape the intellectual traditions of the Americas. The works of Aimé Césaire, Derek Walcott, Sylvia Wynter, Édouard Glissant, Enrique Dussel, and Gloria Anzaldúa all complicate the boundaries of the religious and the secular for theorizing decoloniality. What happens when theory operates and circulates through secularist categories that disregard the religious foundation of colonial modernity? What if the various theories of decoloniality are significantly more informed by religious imaginations than we often think?

Commenting on postcolonial theory and religion, Nelson Maldonado-Torres notes that, despite its important contribution to the study of race, modernity, and colonialism, postcolonial theory "has tended to side with modern secularism in its characterization of religion," thus privileging "Third world secular authors."[5] Theory is often associated with secular categories and worldviews. As Wendy Brown, Judith Butler, and Saba Mahmood write in their preface to *Is Critique Secular?*, the common assumption that critique is secular presupposes that "the secular worldview is altogether different from a religious one" when in reality "secularism is inherently generative and suffused with religious content."[6]

The different voices emerging in the Americas against colonial modernity trouble the binary categories of the religious and the secular. Such categories impede a fuller grasp of the breadth and depth of both decolonial thinking and religion—including the ways they might be mutually co-constitutive. Discussing the genealogy of Caribbean poetics, Sylvia Wynter comments on the sense of Antillean history the Martinican poet and philosopher Édouard Glissant grapples with. Wynter notes that, for Glissant, this history is "nothing less than the struggle against the imposed role, that of the lack of being to the first secular model of being in human history."[7] Caribbean poetics, as Wynter sees it articulated by Glissant, signals the refusal of the colonial-secular iteration of the human. She traces this tradition of decolonial poetics back to Césaire, whose *Notebook* "was the founding counterdiscourse of the Antilles."[8] Both Fanon's and Glissant's works "were the continuation of the act of poetic uprising against" the imposed mode of being in which the Black population represents ontological lack—as the mirroring other of the modern secular mode of being.[9] Wynter and other Caribbean thinkers commonly point to coloniality's collusive link with the secular. What happens when theory, the theory that articulates new being and new order against colonial modernity, is intrinsically critical of the secular? And what if the re-envisioning of the new order entails a spiritual dimension? Whereas contemporary scholarship has been challenging the "myth" of the secular and the secularist categories that reduce religion to a narrow concept, religion is still often misconceptualized by many scholars who theorize race, modernity, and colonialism.

The Coloniality of the Secular explores how decolonial theory can open ways to theorize religion in the Americas. It locates a genealogy of critical inquiries that have challenged the normative and often violent doctrine of the secular in the (post)colonial Americas. Whereas secularism's connection to colonialism has recently become a popular area of academic inquiry, the conceptual category of the secular's role in the constitution of coloniality has been rather underattended—in both the study of religion and the field of decolonial theory more broadly. The tight linkage between the secular and the concept of religion, race, and coloniality, I submit, is crucial for theorizing modern religion.

The purpose of this book is twofold. First, it places religion at the center of decolonial scholarship by reading religion as one of the constitutive

elements of (de)coloniality. Many contemporary decolonial theorists acknowledge religion's place in decolonial thinking, and some elaborate on it to a certain extent. As I show in chapter 1, many of the twentieth-century thinkers who inspired contemporary decolonial scholarship (José Carlos Mariátegui, Gloria Anzaldúa, Gustavo Gutiérrez, Enrique Dussel, Aimé Césaire, Sylvia Wynter, to name a few) viewed religion as a vehicle of both colonial politics and the decolonial otherwise. However, this connection has not yet been adequately explored in contemporary conversations about decolonial theory. This is because religion's substantial role in the historical trajectory of modernity/coloniality is often obscured by secularist epistemic frameworks, often resulting in an awry understanding of religion shared by many outside the field of the study of religion. I pay particular attention to the unmarked predominance of the secularist framework in the academic study of religion that in a way reinforces the Eurocentric episteme. Undoing the intricate tie between modern religion (the secular), race, and coloniality remains an important task yet to further develop. This book is an attempt to reconceptualize religion and clarify its relation to (de)coloniality. I do not offer a prescriptive redefinition of what religion is and what it is not, but I interrogate the narrow conception of religion that misplaces it in both colonial relations of power and various iterations of decolonial thinking. Reconceptualizing religion in broader terms allows me to attune to vital spiritual and affective dynamics fueling decolonial thinking, such as the figure of the sacred that conjures decolonial imaginations in the works of the various poets named above.

Second, *The Coloniality of the Secular* seeks to demonstrate what decolonial thought offers to the study of religion, race, and coloniality in the Americas. It discusses the challenges and insights that decolonial thought provides when considering questions about method, texts, sites, and conceptual frameworks. In other words, *The Coloniality of the Secular* explores the possibility of a decolonial theory for the study of religion by insisting on the need to consider the Americas and the transatlantic historical experience as primary sites for theorizing modern religion.

The study of non-Western religions has been a vital area of inquiry in the study of religion since its founding in the nineteenth-century European academy. But rarely have these studies been crafted with theories and conceptual frameworks produced in the global south. The conceptual and theoretical tools of investigation in modern and contemporary academic discourses are usually reserved for the global north. Theory belongs to the West. In *Out of*

the Dark Night, Achille Mbembe shares his observation of the current geography of reason sustained by "a Yalta-like division of the world between the global North, where theory is done, and the 'Rest,' which is the kingdom of ethnography."[10] The primary function of marginalized geographies in this imperial cartography of reason is "to produce data and to serve as the test sites of the theory mills of the North."[11] Mbembe's analysis resonates with Dipesh Chakrabarty who, more than twenty years ago, pointed out the inherently exclusive Westernness of theory. In *Provincializing Europe*, he writes, "Only 'Europe' . . . is theoretically (that is, at the level of the fundamental categories that shape historical thinking) knowable; all other histories are matters of empirical research that fleshes out a theoretical skeleton that is substantially 'Europe.'"[12] Western theory—that which is presented simply as "theory"—is understood to transcend locale (place).

When considering Western theory's co-constitution or entanglement in the formation of colonial modernity, it is necessary to reconsider its capacity to disarticulate the complex knots of coloniality. Theory, articulated in its secular-colonial iteration, presents us with various inadequacies for aptly grasping the depth and the extent of diverse forms of knowing that precisely contend the very secular-colonial foundations of European modernity. Numerous thinkers outside or at the margin of colonial modernity who articulated a different world (future) did so through conceptual frameworks that are often entirely different from the current Western framework that dominates global knowledge production. The vital geohistoric differences of these heterogeneous narratives are often subsumed by the normative conception of theory and its universalizing categories. The notion of religion and the concomitant category of the secular are among the many problems that surface in contemporary academic conversations, which often tend to apply homogeneous theories and methods to capture radically heterogeneous worldviews and forms of knowing.[13] Rather than taking the secularity of theory (hence, its coloniality) for granted, we need to reconsider theory in its relation to religion's place in the configuration of colonial modernity, including the production of its own presumably secular sciences that inform theory.

The Coloniality of the Secular probes the presumed secularity of theory. Here, I draw a distinction between secularism/religion as a lived experience, and the conceptual category of the secular/religion that informs the modern Western epistemic framework. Religion as a lived experience has persistently inspired anticolonial thinking in various communities of the (pre)colonial Americas, despite the rise and the rule of secularism. Both Indigenous and

Afro-Caribbean intellectual traditions, for instance, have staunchly resisted Western binary categories that segregate religion from the realm of the intellect that mobilizes thinking and imagination. However, the dominant Western epistemic framework that informs both colonial knowing and, to some extent, contemporary decolonial theory tends to subsume the vibrant reality of these various religious (spiritual-poetic-creative) sensibilities to secularist categories. Of course, the field of decolonial theory is vast in its scope and orientation. The term *decolonial theory*, or *decolonial thought*, carries, in this sense, a certain risk of generalization. I must acknowledge that *The Coloniality of the Secular* is particular in its scope and approach. I do not, by any means, seek to represent the vast geography of decolonial thinking in its entirety, nor do I attempt to essentialize particular discourses I engage here as the only brands of decolonial thought.

While this book broadly aims to tackle issues of race, coloniality, and the categories of religion/secular in the Americas, the key thinkers who take the central stage are mostly from the Caribbean intellectual tradition. Also important for my reading is the place of the South American tradition of philosophy and theology of liberation. Overall, the primary analytic framework I employ is based on the discourses that emerged from the conversations between Latin American thinkers and US-based Latin American theorists, often dubbed as "the decolonial turn" or the analytic framework of modernity/coloniality. In chapter 1, I offer a broader map that points to the diverse genealogies of decolonial thought stretching across the Americas beyond the particular conversations I focus on in the remainder of the book.

The modern notion of religion can be viewed as a product of the emergence of modernity/coloniality, with the secular being the mirror twin of modern religion that welds together the two ends of modernity/coloniality. As numerous important works have recently suggested, the modern categories of race and religion are mutually co-constitutive.[14] The invention of race—as a constitutive element of coloniality—cannot be articulated apart from the history of the emergence of the concept of religion as the traditional lines demarcating ontological difference between people shifted from religious language (religious difference) to the secular language of scientific reason (racial difference).[15] In other words, Europe's colonial imaginary was constituted by the newly emerging racial categories that now replaced religion's role of drawing lines of hierarchical difference between diverse populations. From the fifteenth-century Spanish Inquisition to the sixteenth-century Valladolid debates, from the missionary activities in the New World

to the rise of comparative study of religion in nineteenth-century Europe, religion—and its twin mirror, the secular—has been instrumental in marking off ontological differences along the racial lines that aligned with Europe's colonial interests.[16] Put differently, the co-emergence of race and religion in modern Europe required its enterprises in the colonial frontier in which the control (production) of race and religion was crucial for colonial governance.

The works of Willie Jennings and Nelson Maldonado-Torres explore the European construction of religion in tandem with race during the colonial encounters in the Americas by examining early colonial writings and reports about Indigenous religions.[17] The basic premise for my claims here lies adjacent to their works. However, *The Coloniality of the Secular* takes a different route. Many of the materials I engage with are not religious but are "secular" sources. My concern is not limited to the historical sites and archives of knowledge inscribed in precolonial or colonial religions. Rather, my interest stretches to the constructive visions and insights offered by anticolonial thinkers who were writing from outside the parameters of religion. I suggest that these secular-political texts complicate the problematic binaries reified by the modern concept of religion. My reading demonstrates that these thinkers viewed religion as an important metaphysical axis that sustains the colonial worldview and order—despite the alleged secularity of coloniality. Many of these thinkers viewed secular modernity as an ideological platform of coloniality. I demonstrate that their critical reading of colonial modernity harbors important critiques of religion. In their view, the normative universal of secularism imposed by the West signifies, essentially, a transmutation of the hegemonic Western (Christian) worldview. Such critical reading of religion's place in colonial modernity is evident in Wynter's oeuvre, which helps us draw the lines of connection between, race, religion. and colonial modernity in the works of various twentieth-century Caribbean thinkers. Interestingly, she includes Frantz Fanon (along with Glissant) in a Cesairean genealogy of the poetic revolt—a revolt against the imposed violence of the secular. Wynter's reading might seem to conflict with the widespread perception of Fanon as a staunch secular humanist. However, as my reading shows in chapters 3 and 4, Fanon's relationship with religion is much more complex and complicated than we often realize. It is precisely the various secularist categories informing theory—which at times shape Fanon's own views—that lead us into an awry reading of religion's place in Fanon's work. My reading shows that, while Fanon seems to denounce religion and often pits religion

against decoloniality, his critique of religion somehow reveals his attachment to the sacred, rather than its renouncement. Like Césaire, Fanon understood that the re-creating of the self (and of a new order) involves resignifying the symbolic and religious grammar that ratifies the existing order. In this sense, Fanon's decolonial poetics, often associated with secular humanism, winds up reconceptualizing religion.

The Coloniality of the Secular probes the co-constitutive linkage between modernity/coloniality/secularity. To unpack modernity/coloniality/secularity, I navigate a diverse range of academic discourses that span across disciplines. These conversations are not necessarily all connected or adjacent to each other. Bringing these different discourses together, however, allows me to zoom in to the important point of connection that cuts across the compound modernity/coloniality/secularity.

Decolonial theorists call for careful reconsideration of the Eurocentric nature of universalizing epistemic frameworks informing knowledge and knowledge production.[18] Various scholars working from within this tradition take Aníbal Quijano's notion of coloniality of power as the departing point of their analyses. The notion of coloniality highlights the polychronic nature of power operative in colonialism. Coloniality manifests beyond the historical institution of colonialism. Colonialism is tied to the specific historical event and period; coloniality outlasts decolonization.

The decolonial turn has in many ways invigorated the critical study of religion not only by carrying on the critical projects advanced by postcolonial studies but also by revisiting and refining many of the key theses that postcolonial studies has advanced. Acknowledging postcolonial theory's important contributions, Latin American—and US-based decolonial theorists point out some key differences that distinguish the two. First, whereas postcolonial theory's focus tends to be on nineteenth- and twentieth-century European colonialism in Asia and Africa, decolonial theory uses the fifteenth-century colonial encounter in the Americas as the primary point of reference. The former renders colonialism a derivative of modernity while the latter views colonialism (or, rather, coloniality) as constitutive of modernity. Second, decolonial theorists point out postcolonial theory's penchant for European theory. Countercolonial thinking and discourse have existed all along since the first colonial encounter. When considering the importance of knowledge and knowledge production

in the formation and the circulation of coloniality, grounding countercolonial discourse in European theoretical framework presents visible limitations.[19]

Charting the connection between religion and decoloniality is important not only for the study of religion but also for those who investigate coloniality across interdisciplinary boundaries. That religion's place is often omitted or reduced in these academic conversations of decolonial theory indicates that the broad extent of religion's role—however unmarked and understated it may be—in the formation of the colonial regime of power and knowledge has been underattended. As Sylvester Johnson comments in *African American Religions, 1500–2000*, the lack of interest that various theories of modernity show in religion indicates a failure to understand religion's constitutive role in the formation of the mechanism of power.[20] Briefly speaking, the failure to closely probe the link between religion and decoloniality leaves three large blind spots in the ongoing conversations about power and coloniality in the Americas.

First, many writings of "secular" decolonial thinkers often hint at nuanced readings of religion beyond the critique of prevalent colonial religions, as I show through the book in conversation with various Caribbean thinkers (Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, Sylvia Wynter, Édouard Glissant). The generative political visions that these thinkers offer are often intertwined with their attempt to reconfigure religion, or the sacred. In other words, there are diverse forms of religion-making that take place in and through various alternative forms of decolonial critique and imagination. These different forms of decolonial thinking and imagination invite us to reconceptualize the rather narrow notion of religion (as well as the concept of the secular) that pervades many academic conversations.

Second, this aforementioned failure underestimates the role of religion (Christianity, to be more specific) that underpins the secular colonial order. Numerous scholars have already pointed out the inextricable connection between colonialism and secularism by exposing the mechanism of colonial governance and enterprises informed by religious (Christian) worldviews and agendas.[21] But the presence of religion in the colonial Americas extends far beyond the well-known history of Christianity's missionary activities. Since the first colonial encounter, religion has served as the metaphysical backbone of coloniality, not just as an imposition of political structures and cultural norms, but as a cosmological rupture.[22]

Third, a long tradition of anticolonial resistance and critique emerging from religious communities across the Americas has been overlooked.

When these movements are studied, the full depths of their significance are not entirely grasped without properly unpacking the complexities inscribed in (anti)colonial religions. More important, the complex relation between religion and (coloniality of) power raises a more fundamental question regarding the emergence of modern religion. Underlying the historical phenomenon of the interaction between religion and coloniality in the Americas is perhaps the problem of the category of religion, which was conceived in tandem with the emergence (invention) of race in the global colonial matrix of power.[23]

The complex relationship between the categories of religion, the secular, and the problem of power has been articulated by many scholars in the field of the study of religion. Charles Long has articulated lucidly the intricate connection between the construction of religion as a category and the reality of conquered and marginalized people. The signification (invention) of the former is linked with the signification of the latter as the process involves the reification of certain oppositional norms (e.g., rationality versus irrationality) as defining characteristics of each group that is the West and its "Other."[24] In his genealogical study of the modern category of religion, Talal Asad situates the modern category of religion in the historical trajectory of the emergence of Western liberal secularism by tracing the process of privatization of religion.[25] The reification of the category of religion is predicated on its compatibility with the universalizing norm of secular rationality. Many argue, after Asad, that the construction and essentialization of the category of religion (as opposed to the secular) is itself a problematic endeavor that reinforces the colonial regime of knowledge.[26] More specifically, the emergence of the modern category of religion was directly informed by the colonial encounter in which the notion of religion played a key role in the anthropological enterprises that served Europe's colonial interests.[27]

Recent debates about secularism question the rigid binary of the religious and the secular by pointing toward the mutual imbrication between modernity and secularism. These conversations interrogate the modern concept and category of religion, probing the enduring influence of religion in the formation of Western modernity. These critical voices complicate the classical secularist discourse that traces its roots back to Karl Marx and Max Weber's claim of the disenchantment of modernity.[28] In his influential work *A Secular Age*, Charles Taylor charges the mainstream secularist discourse for its reductive tendency. The secular age, Taylor argues, does not indicate the decline or emptying of religion from the public space. Rather,

it points to the change in the condition of belief: the transition from a society where belief is unchallenged to one in which it is viewed as one option among others. The traditional secularization thesis subscribes to the binary that positions religion as the opposing concept of Enlightenment rationality and progress while reinscribing a privatized notion of religion. Taylor and his interlocutors point out that the ongoing presence of religion, regardless of its visibility, troubles the simplistic association of modernization with secularism. For some, critical intervention in the (post)secular debate rests on unsettling its simplistic narrative, that is, the actual reality of the transition or prominence of one (either religion or the secular) over the other (Jürgen Habermas, Charles Taylor); others attend to the ideological mechanism of the secular that accommodates certain universalizing normative claims (José Casanova, Talal Asad, William Connolly). As William Connolly summarizes, the problem of secularism "is not merely the division between public and private realms that allows religious diversity to flourish in the latter. It can itself be a carrier of harsh exclusions. And it secretes a new definition of 'religion' that conceals some of its most problematic practices from itself."[29] Many contemporary critics of secularism point out that, historically, secularism has been more often about policing religious difference than fomenting it.[30] They argue that advocates of secularism overlook the strong Christian roots of the normative categories it has reinforced. Historically, secularism often regulated religious difference with its normative categories, a process that played a formative role in Europe's colonial enterprises. Some of its key critics (such as Taylor and Habermas), however, treat secularism largely as an inner-European phenomenon, thus disregarding the inseparable link between secularism and colonialism.

The broad extent of secularism's significance cannot be grasped without considering its role in the constitution of the modern colonial world. Many scholars insist that a critical study of secularism must attend to the structure of power configuration and exchange in (neo)colonial governance. These power exchanges both inform the construction of the secular and obscure the normativization of Western liberalism at the same time. Their works demonstrate how the secular has been employed as a device to police and suppress colonial difference, whereas Europe's understanding of secularism has been substantially informed by the colonial encounter and governance. Put differently, the secular has been serving as the ideological banner of modern Western universalism by preserving the Western/Christian hegemony while depoliticizing (the notion of) religion.[31]

The modernity/secularity constellation is further complicated when we extend the analytic lens from secularism to the conceptual category (and imaginary) of the secular. The discourse of political theology that emerged alongside the critical study of secularism probes the genealogical trajectory of the secular, a category that is distinctive from secularism and secularization. Overall, the resurgence of political theology in recent academic conversations tends to take on a particular conception or stream of political theology, one that developed from the work of the early twentieth-century German jurist Carl Schmitt. Schmitt placed the concept of sovereignty at the heart of the modern political system and political life, a concept that he attributes to Western theological roots. Political theology, for Schmitt, probes the ways in which old theological concepts condition secular political ideas and systems.[32]

The most relevant and pressing insight that political theology brings to the decolonial study of religion is its focused attention on the tight connection between violence and sovereignty. Contemporary debates in political theology are broadly centered around the critique of the political system that legitimizes the violence sanctioned by the said system. To draw a typological contrast, critical study of secularism dislocates the dominant narrative of secular modernity as the guarantor of religious difference (freedom) by pointing out that secularism regulates difference rather than fomenting it and that it regulates violence rather than eliminating it. Political theology takes a step further and argues that the secular *enacts* violence (a violence rooted in the sacred), that violence is constitutive of the political. It insists on the inseparable nexus of theology/modernity. Despite its important contribution to the critical examination of secular modernity, however, political theology (at least in accounts advanced by continental philosophy and radical theology) has rarely extended its analysis toward historicizing of secular modernity outside of the Western (Euro-American) framework. These dominant streams (largely Schmittian) of political theology have overlooked the colonial-modern nexus (hence, the analytics of race) in the past. As a result, their analyses of violence often leave out the abjects of political life, those whose existences do not register in the index of Western political life. Whereas political theology's inquiry offers an incisive understanding of the intricate tie between modernity and the secular (modernity/secularity), it has overlooked the nexus of modernity/coloniality. Likewise, the important analytics of modernity/coloniality advanced by decolonial theorists largely overlook the nexus of modernity/secularity as many take the presumable

secularity of modernity for granted. I argue that modernity, coloniality, and secularity (the secular) must be examined in relation to each other.

I do not situate my approach in the early twentieth-century European genealogy that traces its origin back to Carl Schmitt and his interlocutors such as Karl Lowith and Hans Blumenberg. Nor do I take on the conversations about political theology initiated by contemporary continental philosophers such as Jacques Derrida, Giorgio Agamben, or Slavoj Žižek. I don't want to offer yet another genealogical study of the secular, a genealogy that often traces its origin to the aforementioned European thinkers. Rather, *The Coloniality of the Secular* follows the various critical interventions that emerged in the Americas. These thinkers do not offer a coherent intervention on the problem of political theology. In this sense, the focus of *The Coloniality of the Secular* does not center narrowly on the thematics of political theology. Rather, it proposes a broader theory and method for the study of religion, a theory of religion that is situated in decolonial thinking and method. Therefore, my intention is not to borrow the insights from decolonial thinkers to offer a better answer to the ongoing conversations in political theology and vice versa. Rather, I borrow from political theology the insights born out of its focused articulation of the conceptual problem of the secular, a problem that carries critical implications for a decolonial study of religion. In other words, this book is *not* a book about political theology in that it does not engage primarily with the writings of political theology, Schmittian or otherwise. Yet this book *is* about political theology to the extent that it attends to the large problem of the theology (a secular theology of coloniality and whiteness) that organizes the modern-colonial worldview and mobilizes political concepts. In doing this, I follow the grammar of political theology and unfalteringly call the secular a *theology*—as must be evident from my previous sentence. The secular is as theological as any confessional Christian theology in that it is equally as normative, doctrinal, sectarian, exclusionary (and simultaneously universalizing), and redemptionist (messianic). Secularism is the name of the concrete juridico-political manifestation and political theology that the secular enacts. Beyond Schmitt and the conversations that grew out of his work, the politico-theological problem, in the broad sense that I articulate, largely looms in colonial modernity, and my argument is that numerous anticolonial thinkers articulate this problem in different forms—and often not in the name of political theology as I demonstrate with Frantz Fanon, for instance.

A slightly different yet useful way to situate this book in the ongoing conversations about the modern concept of religion and the secular would be to draw on the typology that Markus Dressler and Arvind-Pal Mandair offer in their introduction to *Secularism and Religion-Making*. The editors classify contemporary postsecular scholarship in three different strands: (1) social philosophers who examine liberal secularism (Taylor and Habermas); (2) philosophical and theological critique of ontotheology (political theology); and (3) a historical approach (and discourse analysis), associated with Asad, that focuses on genealogies of power. Discussing the first two groups that draw on the philosophical method, Dressler and Mandair point out that these two groups share a common assumption, that is, religion as a cultural universal.[33] The important debates these two groups advance are at times partly eclipsed by their adoption of universalizing categories of religion that confine religion to the realm of belief and thought. More important, the editors of *Secularism and Religion-Making* raise critical questions regarding the historical formation of secular modernity, a question I echo and also use as the departing point of this book. My observation about the crucial place of coloniality in the critical study of secular modernity finds a significant resonance in Dressler and Mandair's articulation of secular modernity as a comparative imaginary of the modern West vis-à-vis its colonial other.[34] The third group in their typology includes scholars who historicize the central place of colonialism in the formation of secular modernity. These scholars have contributed to a growing stream of conversations that complicate various normative assumptions about the category of religion. Central to their analysis is the problem of power. The study of religion cannot be done without a critical analysis of power from which it emerges. Religion in this sense is, at least to a certain extent, a product of production and regulation. These scholars provide crucial insights about the intricate relationship between power, colonialism, and the study of modern religion.[35] *The Coloniality of the Secular* builds on many of the important theoretical contributions these scholars of religion and history have made (that is, those who belong in the third group). At the same time, many of these works point toward eighteenth- and nineteenth-century colonialism as the primary reference for understanding the connection between colonialism and the study of religion. Although the modern discipline of the academic study of religion was deeply informed by the more recent imperialist enterprises of Europe, there is a much older and more important point of reference for understanding

the symbiotic relation between the simultaneous invention of the colonial other and the modern imaginary of the West: the colonial encounter of 1492.

The Coloniality of the Secular is situated between the two different conversations I discussed above, that is, scholars of religion who historicize modernity and colonialism, and those who theorize diverse iterations of decoloniality in the Americas. These two important streams share significant differences as well as similarities. Aside from the different historical reference between the two, one probes colonial modernity from the Americas (decolonial theorists) whereas the other one does so primarily with a focus on Asia and Africa (scholars of religion and colonialism). Both groups theorize alternative modernities beyond the narrow confines of Europe, and they both view the axis of knowledge and power as central to their analysis. Decolonial theory offers scholars of religion and colonialism a broader framework for thinking about the formation of secular modernity as a Western imaginary whereas the latter helps the former to think more critically (and constructively) about the place of religion (and the secular) in the making of not only colonial modernity but also alternative modernities.

Decolonial theory helps to locate the place of religion in the constitution of modernity/coloniality. It helps clarify the historical continuity that cuts through the various events constituting the making of the Western imaginary: the continuity of the theological ethos that has continuously shaped its making since the early Roman Christendom to the present secular order of neoliberal globalization.

In his article "Secularism," Gil Anidjar joins the much-contested debate about Edward Said's secularism by adding that Said must have forgotten the important lesson his book *Orientalism* has taught us: "that Orientalism *is* secularism."[36] Considering that, for Said, orientalism operates across boundaries and disciplines, keeping a distance or indifference to religion is "effectively abandoning religion to scholars of religion . . . leaving them perhaps in the pre- or ahistorical, indeed 'sacred' sphere."[37] Consequently, what is overlooked is not only the role of religion, but also the complex intellectual genealogies that inform and inspire diverse forms of anticolonial ideas and movements. In this sense, engaging with secular texts and thinkers deserves as much attention as the study of religious texts and practices of religious communities in the Americas. The fact that the study of Latin American and Caribbean Black and Indigenous religions is primarily dominated by the study of local communities' "practices" while there is scarce interest in their intellectual production (theory) raises questions about the problem of knowl-

edge and knowledge production, as well as the dominant category of religion largely informing the field—even when many are already highly critical of such categories. Religion and secularism have already been widely scrutinized by contemporary scholarship. Such critiques have yet to extend to other adjacent theoretical-methodological frameworks that determine the process of identifying artifacts, texts, theories, thinkers, and sites for the study of religion. When considering the mutual imbrication of religious/aesthetic/cultural sensibilities and political visions in the Americas, it is highly imperative that we reconsider these secular texts as critical sources for theorizing religion. Failure to do so results in the continuous loss of nuanced critiques and readings of religion in those texts as well as the full implication of their political vision. The secular, as the twin mirror of religion, is a key fabric constitutive of modernity/coloniality. Throughout the book, I interrogate the problematic disciplinary practices and theoretical assumptions that reinforce colonial-secularist forms of knowing (and knowledge production), which reproduce the narrow category and concept of religion. Rethinking the dominant theoretical tendency and secularist frameworks in the field is a crucial element of the decolonial theory of religion that I propose.

While I take a comprehensive approach and make certain categorical generalizations, *The Coloniality of the Secular* does not pretend to be all-comprehensive. The analyses that follow engage thinkers and texts rather than movements. Following Walter Mignolo's dictum "I am where I think," I acknowledge my own site of enunciation and therefore recognize the particularity and limitations of my own approach.[38] My reading and intervention focus particularly on the possible connections between the radical intellectual movements and Christian traditions in the Americas, while my interlocutors are mostly theorists with literary and philosophical inclinations who have rarely made direct interventions in the study of religion and religious thoughts. In this sense, the connections and implications I explore here offer a mere glance at the diverse emerging conversations that are yet to take form.

The central questions that drive my inquiry go beyond the critique of religion and its formative role in the constitution of colonial modernity in the Americas. Equally important to me is the task of locating and theorizing various sites of the enunciation of a decolonial otherwise. World-making struggles that emerged against the tyranny of colonial modernity offer crucial resources for rethinking the conversations about modern religion, race,

and coloniality. The chapters that follow show my attempt to elaborate on the link between these generative visions of decoloniality and the possible reconception of the sacred that they signal.

Overall, part 1 presents theoretical analyses that locate and amplify the problem of the religious/secular underpinnings of colonial modernity. The introduction and chapter 1 provide preliminary theoretical backgrounds in which I situate my argument. Chapter 1 builds on the primary points I elaborate in the introduction. I further discuss key themes, topics, and questions by locating the various decolonial interventions in religion that often go underrecognized and underexplored due to their presumably secular orientation. I map out both the different sites of enunciation of colonial secularity and the sites of anticolonial resistance by reviewing a broad range of literature that extends across the twentieth-century Americas. These diverse voices point to different locations (North America, South America, Caribbean) and interrogate different issues (gender, class, indigeneity, Blackness). The brief review of an ever-expanding cartography of struggle reveals the complex topography of power in which religion is entangled. It also hints at various points of possibility for exploring and further theorizing the nexus of modernity/coloniality/secularity.

Chapter 2 captures the intellectual history of twentieth-century Latin America with a focus on two important adjacent movements: philosophy of liberation, and liberation theology. Despite their partly shared root and trajectory, these movements occupy contrasting positions in contemporary decolonial scholarship. The former (philosophy of liberation) serves as a crucial resource for contemporary decolonial thought whereas the latter (liberation theology) is largely left out of the conversation on decoloniality. While acknowledging the historical significance of LALT (Latin American liberation theology) as an authentic Latin American intellectual intervention, decolonial theorists have seldom engaged with LALT. I argue that the omission of LALT is likely due to the dominant secularist framework operative in decolonial theory. I locate the important common historical trajectories that were shared by both LALT and decolonial theory as seen in the works of key Latin American philosophers such as José Carlos Mariátegui and Enrique Dussel, both of whom viewed religion as a powerful tool for decolonial critique and resistance. The first part of the chapter illustrates the intellectual landscape in which philosophy of liberation emerged in mid- to late twentieth-century Latin American intellectual circles. It traces the advancement of philosophy of liberation as an important form of decolonial

thinking. It also re-illuminates the ways in which religion informed some of its key figures. I pay particular attention to their critique of secularism as a project of colonial modernity. The second half of the chapter reads liberation theology through the lens of (de)coloniality by examining its limits and possibilities. Liberation theology breaks away from the traditional Western theological method by situating knowledge in geopolitics and by breaking down the binary of knowledge and praxis. Liberation theology also presents a strong critique of imperialist capitalism and the problem of class, an area that remains rather underattended in decolonial scholarship. Taken together, the chapter sheds light on the seeds of decolonial thinking and its inseparable connection to religion that existed all along in modern Latin American intellectual traditions.

Part 2 consists of three chapters that explore constructive possibilities for rethinking the existing terms and theoretical frameworks used for theorizing religion in conversation with Caribbean decolonial poetics. Chapter 3 probes the complex place of the secular in colonial epistemology in conversation with Frantz Fanon. It brings to light Fanon's complicated relation with religion. Against the prevailing narrative that emphasizes Fanon's antagonism toward religion, I argue that Fanon does not simply dismiss or turn away from religion in search of a secular decolonial future. I demonstrate that Fanon's phenomenology of the political hints at the significant place of religion in Fanon's critique of colonial modernity. I read his critique of colonial modernity as a critique of the political theology of coloniality (whiteness). Chapter 4 extends my close reading of Fanon's phenomenology to racial embodiment. In addition to offering an acute observation of the way Black bodies are registered in space (and time), his phenomenological reflection also allows us to think about the possibility of life, revolt, and world-making in the face of immeasurable violence. I explore how Fanon's struggle to reconfigure his body (Blackness) winds up resignifying religion. Fanon employs the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty's work on phenomenology as he reflects on the ways his own body is co-constituted by the world and others who inhabit it. I argue that his phenomenological reflection on race (Blackness) offers the possibility of rethinking the sacred. The secular humanist's staunch rejection of Western religion and metaphysics unfolds, paradoxically, alongside the unnamed figure or moment that evokes a certain sense of the sacred, a sacred presented as antithesis to the sacred. I suggest that Fanon's struggle to decolonize and restore his humanity can be read as an attempt to recode, that is, decolonize, the sacred.

The stream of decolonial thought that chapter 5 explores is informed by philosophical and poetic reflections on the transatlantic experience of displacement, namely, the Middle Passage and (post)plantation life. The chapter deepens discussions about the problem of secularist methods and disciplinary practices that often segregate religion in decolonial thinking and poetics. The chapter focuses on Édouard Glissant, one of the key thinkers who shaped the Caribbean poeticist tradition. With his constructive philosophical vision, Glissant seeks to rethink being in relation to place(lessness). Decolonizing being and place requires rethinking them completely anew, as creative movements of encounter, exchange, and becoming. While Glissant rarely evokes religion explicitly, the notion of the sacred occupies a significant place in his philosophical vision. The poetics of creolization, central to Glissant's thoughts, indicates a constant morphing, becoming, and re-creating of the sacred. In conversation with his Caribbean interlocutors such as Aimé Césaire, Derek Walcott, and Sylvia Wynter, I seek to identify the central place of the sacred in Glissant's generative visions.

Theory's allusive secularity entices us into embracing certain epistemic norms that dislocate various intellectual genealogies that have for a long time sought to articulate complex and heterogeneous worldviews. Reflecting on the confining effects the secularist presumption has on feminist epistemic capacity, M. Jacqui Alexander writes, "Experience is a category of grand epistemic importance in feminism but we have understood it primarily as secularized as if it were absent spirit and thus antithetical to the sacred."[39] The modern notion of religion (and the subsequent bias that pits religion against decoloniality) reifies binary categories that make us lose sight of the equally ideological nature of the secular while precluding a deeper understanding of the possibilities (of a different world) that these murky (quasi)religious figures may signal. Meanwhile, a related yet slightly different figure, namely, the sacred, surfaces in the writings of different anticolonial intellectual traditions of the Americas. The notion of the sacred figures prominently in the Caribbean intellectual tradition. Where religion signifies an imposed category perhaps inadequate to capture the complex ambiguity of religion in the archipelago, the sacred is often employed as a vessel that holds the space for articulating the creative capacity and imagination for creating new worlds.

The figure of the sacred is one that is not without its own complicated history and problems in the study of religion and colonialism. Whereas

nineteenth- and early twentieth-century anthropologists viewed the sacred as an archaic code that holds together various "exotic behaviors" of "primitive" communities, phenomenologists of religion uplifted it as a postmetaphysical signifier that attests to the universality of religion (as an inner phenomenon that is belief), thus reinforcing the Christian-centric definition of religion. Despite these complicated histories, I want to pay attention to the murky figure of the sacred that surfaces in various works of Caribbean thinkers. In my observation, this is not a figure that signals an overtly mystic (spiritual) dimension transcending history. The sacred here functions as an alternative figure to religion where the notion of religion engraves strong boundaries that miscategorize the complex modalities of thinking and being in the archipelago. I must clarify, however, that I am not suggesting the sacred as an alternative or a competing figure in relation to the concept of religion. Rather, the murky figure of the sacred allows us to glimpse myriad unrealized possibilities that the conventional notion of religion would have otherwise signified. That many of these thinkers have buried the figure of religion does not mean that the dreams, visions, practices, and affective registers associated with it have been interred as well. The absence of (the figure of) religion is still haunted by religious imaginations of the sort. In this sense, the sacred functions as a kind of boundary object that complicates and unhinges the link between decolonial poetics and decolonial politics, as well as the link between decolonial politics and religion. These various tropes of the sacred form, this way, a certain vernacular resource for the study of religion.

Working with vernacular sources signals a form of thinking and theorizing from the vernacular space in which the object (religion/sacred) and its theorization are profoundly woven into the vast mundane texture of social life.[40] It is at the burial site of religion that we catch sight of the overlooked figure of the sacred that continuously evokes the ghosts that never cease to make demands: the unrealized dreams, the unfulfilled visions, the unthinkable and the unimaginable, and ultimately, unknowable forms of world-making.[41] Where lives and dreams are buried alive, the ocean as an "open water grave" represents not only the symbol of a painful memory, but also the horizon from which unimaginable and unknowable forms of worlds are yet to emerge. Poetics and the figure of the sacred at its center might be an activating force that mobilizes these unspoken words, unrealized dreams, and unfulfilled hopes and despairs that have been muted by the secular modern. In this sense, Caribbean decolonial poetics might hint at a "counter-ritual" that disarticulates the colonial "unritual." As Valérie

Loichot has recently articulated in the context of Caribbean arts and literature, the colonial unritual deprives the sacred. It deprives mourning the open water grave.[42] Poetics grapples with the question of how to attend to the drowned and muted voices that do not cease to make claims on the present. But it also seeks to reckon with the equally difficult question of new beginnings and how to begin again after trauma. Life and future are not determined by endless narratives of pain and grief. Caribbean decolonial poetics is born in this middle, the middle of the ocean: between the abyssal depth of the ocean in which dreams are drowned and the shoreline on which life begins again. Where foundation has been evacuated, the thin and murky figure of the sacred that emerges in Caribbean decolonial poetics gestures at a new ground, a groundless ground on which unthinkable and unknowable forms of worlds are to be made.

Notes

Introduction

Earlier versions of the introduction and chapter 1 appeared as "A Decolonial Theory of Religion: Race, Coloniality, and Secularity in the Americas," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 88, no. 4 (2020): 947–80.

1 Walcott, *What the Twilight Says*, 52.

2 Walcott, *What the Twilight Says*, 52.

3 The colonial sublation turns the colonized into a Eucharistic offering, a cannibalistic transubstantiation that feeds the modern colonial West. As I will unpack further in chapters 3 and 4, I follow J. Kameron Carter's recent reading of Césaire's passages in *Discourse on Colonialism* in which Césaire employs the metaphor of the Christian Eucharist to analyze the dialectical relationship between the cannibalistic killing of colonial insurrectionists and the modern Christian bourgeoise Europe. See Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, 48.

4 Césaire, *Notebook*, 19.

5 Maldonado-Torres, "Religion, Modernity, and Coloniality," 547.

6 Asad, Brown, Butler, and Mahmood, *Is Critique Secular?*, vii, xix.

7 Wynter, "Beyond the Word of Man," 641.

8 Wynter, "Beyond the Word of Man," 641.

9 Wynter, "Beyond the Word of Man," 641.

10 Mbembe, *Out of the Dark Night*, 14.

11 Mbembe, *Out of the Dark Night*, 14.

12 Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 29.

13 If, as many contemporary social scientists have contended, secularism regulates religion in social-political domains, then similarly, "the secular" as a conceptual category, rhetoric, and imaginary effectively regulates religion in discursive domains, including conceptual and epistemic frameworks. See Mahmood, "Secularism, Hermeneutics, and Empire"; Agrama, "Secularism, Sovereignty, Indeterminacy"; Brown, "Civilizational Delusions"; and Van der Veer, *The Modern Spirit of Asia*.

14 Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*; Mastnak, *Crusading Peace*; Anidjar, *The Jew, the Arab*; Maldonado-Torres, "Race, Religion, and Ethics"; Heng, *The Invention of Race*; Keel, *Divine Variations*.

15 Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*, 27–29; Maldonado-Torres, "AAR Centennial Roundtable," 637.

16 Long, *Significations*; J. Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious"; Chidester, *Empire of Religion*; Nongbri, *Before Religion*; Maldonado-Torres, "AAR Centennial Roundtable"; Topolski, "The Race-Religion Constellation."

17 Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*; Maldonado-Torres, "Race, Religion, and Ethics"; Maldonado-Torres, "AAR Centennial Roundtable."

18 Some of the key figures who laid down the foundation of contemporary decolonial theory are Aníbal Quijano, Enrique Dussel, Walter Mignolo, Maria Lugones, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, Catherine Walsh, Ramon Grosfoguel, and Santiago Castro Gomez. Some recent literature that addresses decoloniality and the study of religion are Rivera, *The Touch of Transcendence*; Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*; Isasi-Diaz and Mendieta, *Decolonizing Epistemologies*; Maldonado-Torres, "Race, Religion, and Ethics"; Slabodsky, *Decolonial Judaism*; Tayob, "Decolonizing the Study of Religions."; An and Craig, *Beyond Man*.

19 See Moraña, Dussel, and Jáuregui, "Colonialism and Its Replicants," 6; and An, *The Decolonial Abyss*, chap. 1.

20 Johnson, *African American Religions, 1500–2000*, chap. 3; Mendoza, "Decolonial Theories in Comparison."

21 Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*; Chidester, *Savage Systems*; King, *Religion and Orientalism*; Van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters*; Fitzgerald, *Religion and the Secular*.

22 The institutional religion's presence in the process of colonialization was all-pervading, including in military, judicial, cultural, and political spheres. More important, as Willie Jennings notes, the religion-based

encomienda system forced a radical reconfiguration of Andean peoples' relationship to land and space—a central element to their worldview. See Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 75–81.

23 While Wilfred Cantwell Smith has already problematized the notion of religion over half a century ago it was not until decades later that the category of religion was probed through the lens of colonialism. See W. Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*; Long, *Significations*; and Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*. More recently, Nelson Maldonado-Torres has produced important works that explore the connection between the category of religion, race, and colonialism. See Maldonado-Torres, "Race, Religion, and Ethics"; and Maldonado-Torres, "Religion, Modernity, and Coloniality."

24 Long, *Significations*.

25 Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*.

26 Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies*; Fitzgerald, *Religion and the Secular*.

27 Chidester, *Savage Systems*; Chidester, *Empire of Religion*.

28 Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*; Connolly, *Why I Am Not a Secularist*; Asad, *Formations of the Secular*; Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere"; Taylor, *A Secular Age*; Jakobson and Pellegrini, *Secularisms*; Calhoun, Juergensmeyer, and Van Antwerpen, *Rethinking Secularism*; Calhoun, Van Antwerpen, and Warner, *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age*; Bilgrami, *Secularism, Identity, and Enchantment*; Josephson Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment*; Balibar, *Secularism and Cosmopolitanism*.

29 Connolly, "Europe," 75.

30 Dressler and Mandair, *Secularism and Religion-Making*; De Roover, *Europe, India, and the Limits of Secularism*; Mahmood, *Religious Difference in a Secular Age*; Gole, *Islam and Secularity*.

31 King, *Religion and Orientalism*; Van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters*; Van der Veer, *The Modern Spirit of Asia*; Asad, *Formations of the Secular*; Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*.

32 The broad significance of political theology's contribution—particularly as it was advanced by Schmitt and his interlocutors—for analyzing the complex organizing mechanism of the political is far-reaching. See De Vries and Sullivan, *Political Theologies*; Žižek, Santner, and Reinhard, *The Neighbor*; Kahn, *Political Theology*; Robbins, *Radical Democracy and Political Theology*; Crockett, *Radical Political Theology*.

33 Dressler and Mandair, *Secularism and Religion-Making*, 4–5.

34 Dressler and Mandair, *Secularism and Religion-Making*, 10–11.

35 Long, *Significations*; Chidester, *Savage Systems*; Van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters*; King, *Religion and Orientalism*; Asad, *Formations of the Secular*;

Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*; Nongbri, *Before Religion*; Mahmood, *Religious Difference in a Secular Age*.

36 Anidjar, "Secularism," 56.

37 Anidjar, "Secularism," 54.

38 Mignolo, "I Am Where I Think."

39 Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, 295.

40 Farred, *What's My Name?*, 11–12; Drabinski, *Glissant and the Middle Passage*, 205–12.

41 I want to thank Beatrice Marovich for inspiring this phrase.

42 Loichot, *Water Graves*.

Chapter 1: Modernity/Coloniality/Secularity

Earlier versions of the introduction and chapter 1 appeared as "A Decolonial Theory of Religion: Race, Coloniality, and Secularity in the Americas," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 88, no. 4 (2020): 947–80.

1 Kahn and Lloyd, *Race and Secularism in America*, 5.

2 Kahn and Lloyd, *Race and Secularism in America*, 5.

3 Kamugisha, "The Promise of Caribbean Intellectual History," 52.

4 Kahn and Lloyd, *Race and Secularism in America*, 15.

5 Quijano, "Colonialidad y modernidad/racionalidad"; Quijano, "Colonialidad, poder, cultura y conocimiento en American Latina."

6 Quijano, "Coloniality of Power," 534–40.

7 Mignolo and Walsh, *On Decoloniality*, 144.

8 Dussel, "Europe, Modernity, and Eurocentrism."

9 Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System*, vol. 1; Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System*, vol. 2.

10 Dussel, "World-System and 'Trans'-Modernity," 224.

11 Mignolo and Walsh, *On Decoloniality*, 24. It is also important to note the Jewish aspect of Levinas's notion of exteriority that Dussel wrestled with. As Santiago Slabodsky observes, it was precisely the Jewishness of Levinas's thought that inspired Dussel's refinement of his geopolitics of knowledge. Slabodsky traces the exchange between Levinas and Dussel and argues that this encounter shaped not only Dussel's thought, as it is well known, but also Levinas's thought. For more, see Slabodsky, *Decolonial Judaism*, chap. 6.

12 Dussel, "Europe, Modernity, and Eurocentrism," 223–24; Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*, 30.

13 Wallerestein, "The Insurmountable Contradictions of Liberalism," 1163; Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*, 56–57.