POLITICAL THEOLOGY REIMAGINED

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Introduction

POLITICAL THEOLOGY IN RIOTOUS TIMES

Alex Dubilet and Vincent W. Lloyd

"Love always means non-sovereignty," asserts Lauren Berlant. "I think sovereignty badly conceptualizes almost anything to which it is attached. It's an aspirational concept and, as often happens, aspirational concepts get treated as normative concepts, and then get traded and circulated as realism."[1] These lines condense a knot of challenges for political theology. There is the challenge of genealogy: critically undoing what appears as natural and necessary by tracing the hidden normative investments that make it function. There is the challenge of sovereignty and its others: theorizing politics that acknowledge the materialized dreams and realities of statist modernity no less than the ways they are never as exhaustive as they claim. There is the challenge of conceptual distinction and scale: The problem of sovereignty is not circumscribed to the arena of the state but can arise on the level of an individual or a citizen, a comportment or a disposition. And there is the challenge of the persistent lives and afterlives of the sacred: to eschew sovereignty, a turn to love, but this turn takes place in the ineradicable shadow of theology, since what is God if not love, at least in the Christian tradition that shapes the Western imagination (and its detractors)?

Tracing subterranean interactions and conceptual links between sovereignty and its others, reflecting on the impact of theological and other violent legacies on the psyches and bodies of the living and the dead, and doing so via surprising sites (whether they are textual, historical, or material): This is some of what political theology has to offer.

The Cree poet Billy-Ray Belcourt concludes his collection *This Wound Is a World* (2017) with Berlant's definition of love and adds, "Love is a process of becoming unbodied; at its wildest, it works up a poetics of the unbodied."[2] There are no clean divides: On the obverse side of political sovereignty and the body politic, one does not find love purified of politics. To be bodied or unbodied does not just happen. Settler colonialism, white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, capitalism: These are the interlocking

forces that body and unbody. The rigor of poetry does not merely name these abstractions; nor does it allow them to remain abstract. Instead, it renders them visceral, somatic. A poetics of the unbodied explores what happens when the distinctions between corporeal and incorporeal, the living and the dead, cease being obvious conditions of intelligibility. The claim to *have* a body remains within an analytic of possession and sovereignty, but intimacy with unbodying renders bodies inseparable from historical violence and from text: "sometimes bodies don't always feel like bodies but like wounds" (23). At other times, the body remains in the conditional, "if i have a body, let it be a book of sad poems" (18).

In addition to Berlant's, Belcourt takes up another motto, this one from the Nishnaabeg writer Leanne Betasamosake Simpson: "i think we fucked, and maybe i should say make love, but maybe not because we didn't actually make love. it was sadder than that. we were sadder than that. but it wasn't bad and it wasn't wrong. it wasn't desperate. i think it was salvation" (55). Hesitation is layered, and ambiguity disturbs conceptual certainty. One might see here a love sadder than love. But it matters what we call things, and there is precision even amid ambiguity. To call experience love carries a normative force that would cover over the raw encounter. We fucked; we didn't make love. Avoiding the language of love does not condemn: "it wasn't bad and it wasn't wrong." What is being described is a libidinal encounter without disavowal, and to it is ascribed the power of salvation. Yet not unambiguously. The culminating transfiguration falls short of asserting objectivity ("*i think* it was salvation"), and this is confirmed in Belcourt's subsequent redoubling through personal meditation of being "sadder than that" and yet making "love anyway and it felt like salvation." Thinking and feeling are real, but their addition here invites doubts about salvation's standing. It is as though these invocations of salvation carry with them the political-theological insight that salvation has not been an innocent concept, entangled as it is with dreams and aspirations, sometimes positioned in opposition to sovereignty but frequently as sovereignty's very promise.[3]

Salvation, like sovereignty, is an aspirational concept treated as normative, circulated as realism, mediated politically. As is love. Yet this does not permit one to simply abandon them. That would be not only to ignore their tremendous historical effectivity but also, for example, to discount the powers of encounters that feel like salvation. Such diagnoses—without a concomitant all-too-easy dismissal of concepts such as salvation, sovereignty, and love—is at the heart of the political-theological enterprise. This

entails determining hermeneutic frames and fields of intelligibility no less than tracing out conceptual narratives and discursive histories that have given meaning to such terms.

It may also entail finding sovereignty's alterity not in love or salvation but, for example, in dwelling with and giving language to the ghosts on which sovereignty's kingdom has been built. *This Wound Is a World* conjures ghosts out of the archives, inhabits states of ghostly apparition, meditates on the two-way porosity of the living and the dead. As Belcourt announces, "the poem: an ontology of ghosts" (52). Yet as his poetics suggest, there are no easy demarcations. The living are spectral, and ghosts can have bodies and fuck. Libidinal encounters without disavowal that may feel like salvation have effects that greatly exceed the subjective realm. There is a repeated, unsettling imbrication of libidinal economies and settler colonial ones, which sometimes meld into one and at other times break each other apart: "i wanted to taste / a history of violence / caught in the roof of his mouth" (22). Remaining suspended between love and fucking, violence and ecstasy, corporeality and the incorporeal, the living and the dead is perhaps too subtle a maneuver for theological and political grand narratives. The task remains how, amid the ongoing inheritances and disinheritances of history and its abstractions, to form a conceptuality and a language that do not simply reproduce or disavow that ongoing history of violence—an urgent task for political-theological reflection understood from the perspective of the colonized and racialized, the violated and the poor.

This is a task that Belcourt undertakes in verse. Woundedness is world making, so the title seemingly announces. But Belcourt resists converting unbearable and inescapable loss into possibility and salvation by inviting the reader into the ambivalent attachments and desires that make *this* wound not a lack but a source for a poetics where attention is trained to structure ecstasy and where ecstasy shatters structure. The world remains in the wound, and the wound attests to the world's violent undoings and to the violating promises—whether of sovereignty, love, or salvation—it carries. There is a persistent liminality at the heart of the psycho-geography of Belcourt's poems that undoes the kind of heroic centering that words such as *possibility* and *world* might suggest. The lyrical voice unapologetically locates itself—"i am from the back alley of the world" (21)—or declares, "we need not to pretend that love was to be found in wastelands like these" (23). In back alleys and wastelands, the dead are not left to bury the dead; there, a communion takes place between the dead who have afterlives and the living who live in intimate proximity to death. The past is not past but

persists in violent fragmentation, never easily sublated or superseded, despite the claims of theologico-political narratives of salvation and progress.

The vision of the poet constructs a conceptuality that binds and unbinds, that diagnoses the violence of the past but does not stop there. Rather, it intensely weaves the past with the present, the ghosts of the dead with the living. It links the holy and the material, the mythical and the natural, violence and ecstasy. Untethered from sovereignty, from a vertical chain between God and the sky and the king on the throne and the soul as individuated and self-possessed, the political and theological link and unlink, igniting thought and the imagination. Less assured than either sovereignty or salvation, the poet confronts "history's barb-wire door" (49) by starting to look for other "doors, not enclosures. Doors without locks. Doors that swing open" (43). This is hardly a vision of personal escape since, to follow Belcourt's elliptical formulation, "a theoretics of the doorway is a revolutionary undertaking" (52), an undertaking of the unbodied that includes the ghosts of (settler colonial, heteropatriarchal, capitalist) modernity.

The essays that follow denaturalize the vertical chain of sovereignty and experiment with the resulting political-theological productivity. They diagnose narratives of secularization, their displacements and disavowals, their violent promises and realities. They attend to the ways narration and genealogy can confront modern colonial visions of universal history and disturb its ontological presumptions about who and what is dead and living, past and present. They explore the complex affiliations of the material, the bodily, the economic, and the mythical, and they listen to the theoretics and poetics fostered in the struggles of liberation.

No longer is political theology a branch of Christian thought. No longer does it name the contested legacy of fascist legal theory. Today, political theology is a field engaged across a variety of disciplines, from cultural studies to anthropology, from comparative literature to Black studies. As we become increasingly aware of the dangerous and liberatory entanglements of religion, secularity, and power, political theology names a crucial site for research and teaching, discussion and collaboration. Yet misconceptions (*it's Christian, it's Nazi*) about this burgeoning field remain prevalent. This book brings together a constellation of essays that, collectively, offer an account of what political theology means today, and where it is headed tomorrow.

Each of the essays models what it means to do critical scholarship in political theology. The essays stake out the field's emerging new identity

by engaging critical theory from diverse and global perspectives. No longer are Carl Schmitt, Jacques Derrida, and Giorgio Agamben the only cornerstones of political theology. Now Black, decolonial, queer, and feminist theory, and new movements in continental thought, are front and center. This volume opens new itineraries in political theology by expanding its conceptual references, theoretical topoi, and conversation partners. The essays experiment with what political theology might become while at the same time offering a guide to the field's ongoing scholarly dynamism. This experimental mode means that the voices that follow do not offer a unified program, and sometimes their inclinations diverge and even conflict. We welcome such moments of discord, as they invite readers to take a position, to participate in the dialogical development of the field.

What holds together the field of political theology and the essays collected? Scholarly fascination by and critical suspicion of the secular and its ontology. Creative exploration of the imbrications and intertwinements of the theological and the political. Rigorous investigations of legitimation and delegitimation and how religious operations haunt these processes. Commitment to insurgent struggles for liberation, to impossible justice, to assertions of freedom antagonistic to the reign of law and order. Nuanced attention to the effects of conceptual narratives on our understanding of what constitutes religion and the secular, the theological and the political. The imperative to attend to religious ideas, practices, and imaginaries and the way they are inflected by anti-Blackness, patriarchy, caste prejudice, and colonial legacies. The power of genealogy to constellate history anew and make visible ambivalent attachments in our critical practice. In short, political theology grapples with religion in all its complexity and with critical thought in all its complexity, combining them in ways that trouble regnant sureties and commonplaces.

Within this common horizon, the volume's essays pursue a variety of paths to probe the nature, shape, and orientation of political theology. Reflecting the rich diversity and interdisciplinarity of the field, contributors range from early-career scholars to senior faculty members and include scholars of literature and philosophy, political theory and anthropology, religious studies and theology. The essays, however, are not intended as a survey of the ways various disciplines approach political theology; nor do they seek to discipline the field of political theology. Instead, the essays put discipline and method to use in ways that are intended to inform and transform what political theology might mean. In doing so, they share certain scholarly virtues: They pursue novel theoretical lines of investigation; they

read texts (literary, philosophical, and cultural) carefully; they construct creative conceptual constellations; and they marshal often unexpected resources to address aporias in the scholarship and in the world. Each essay resists, in some way, the two most common starting places of political theology: the classics of Christian theology and the classics of modern political theory.

To what standards ought we hold scholarship in political theology? Standards follow from disciplinary contexts—not just the syllabi of theories and methods courses but the soft norms inculcated in conferences, workshops, and peer reviews. One of the awkward features of conversations happening under the label "political theology" is that their disciplinary context remains ambiguous. Or because scholars formed in multiple disciplines are participating in these conversations, in these multiple clusters of conversations, it is not clear whether political theology itself has standards or a characteristic methodology. There are Christian theologians (of various stripes), Continental philosophers (often situated in an uncertain disciplinary positions), political theorists, and, in recent years, anthropologists, literary scholars, and scholars of cultural studies. The result has been that the label "political theology" is attached more to those who claim it for themselves than to those who approach their work in a certain way, and those who claim it often do so in reference to someone who claimed it before them: Schmitt, Agamben, Jürgen Moltmann, or Jacob Taubes, to take a few popular examples.

Indeed, colleagues relate to the phrase "political theology" in quite different ways. Christian theologians are often comfortable saying, "I am a political theologian"—by which they mean, "I am situated in the discipline of theology, and my particular interests are in politics." Christian theologians will also say, "I work in political theology," signaling that political theology is a field (of Christian theology) that can serve as a primary research interest, if not an identity. In contrast, scholars formed in any other discipline would shrink from saying, "I am a political theologian," though they may say, "I work in political theology." The latter locution, sometimes resulting in "political theology" listed among other research interests—next to, say, African American literature, phenomenology, or affect theory—suggests not only a set of questions but also a set of theoretical resources with which to engage those questions. But rarely is there any overlap between the theoretical resources that secular scholars associate with political theology and those Christian theologians have in mind when they say, "I work in political theology." Staging conversations to overcome this divide,

as much dispositional as disciplinary, is difficult. Even if, somehow, colleagues who sit in these two corners of the academy find themselves in the same room, it is not only different points of reference that inhibit dialogue. If some colleagues identify so strongly with the field that they claim it as an identity and others take it as one tool among many, there is necessarily some awkwardness, even incommensurability.

As a scholarly approach, political theology is not essentially bound to any particular religious, intellectual, or discursive tradition.[4] In recent years, scholars have debated the significance of political theology for Judaism and Islam (with both cases necessitating further reflection on the relationship among law, ethics, and politics) as well as in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Indigenous religious traditions—in addition to explorations of various forms of Christianity, from the Eastern Orthodox to Mennonite and Mormon. Scholarly gatherings and forums have sought to "provincialize" European political theology and to probe the shapes that decolonial political theology might take, with contributions from scholars of religion and politics in Chile, China, Colombia, Korea, Nigeria, Poland, South Africa, and beyond.[5] In dealing with the histories of colonialism, capitalism, and the modern state that constitute global modernity, such investigations confront head on the reality that there is no easy abandonment of the analytics deemed "European," even for those struggling against its legacies.

In addition to expanding outward, the theoretical apparatus of political theology has become increasingly sophisticated. Not only are critical tools from decolonial, feminist, and Marxist theory part of the conversation, but the theoretical practices of genealogy and speculation have also become creatively imbricated. This has entailed reconceptualizing classic moments of European thought through novel theoretical lenses, resulting in conceptual experimentation—with the world and the Earth, theodicy and legitimation, and much else. For example, when examined with the conceptual tools elaborated by Denise Ferreira da Silva, Fred Moten, or François Laruelle, German Idealism becomes an expansive and unfamiliar terrain for reassessing the complex interconnections of theology and the political and philosophical aspects of secular modernity.[6] Approaching fundamental categories of modernity with an entwined genealogical and speculative attunement to theological materials presents a particular task for political theology: to refuse the triumphalist visions of secular modernity and to do so without recourse to the authority, order, and continuity of tradition.[7]

One of the goals of this volume is to showcase the rapidly expanding breadth of conversations in political theology while, at the same time,

offering resources to orient them. The tools employed by scholars working in political theology in different traditions, in different discursive sites, need not be the same, but it is important to self-consciously reflect on those tools: why they are chosen, when they are effective, and when new tools are needed. Colleagues and students whose intellectual homes are at a distance from core discussions of political theology often encounter political theology for the first time through a small set of canonical theorists, which can lead to the paradoxical result that those whose scholarly interests are most outside of modern Europe lean most heavily on modern European theoretical resources. It is, of course, hardly an accident that the home of capitalist and colonial modernity would be the home of theoretical abstraction and universality, while other sites are relegated to the realm of particularity and become objects of ethnography or the mere application of theory.[8] Yet this does not need to be accepted as fate, as anticolonial, postcolonial, and decolonial theoretical developments demonstrate. Whether out of specific traditions or their catastrophe and ruination, such contemporary theoretical dislocations have forced us to rethink the presuppositions of Eurocentric theory, and this volume aims to continue this innovative line of research.[9]

It is important to acknowledge that the sites of insurgent thought and activity to which contemporary political theology turns were already, in a sense, practicing political theology. If we attend to the words, images, and actions of movements struggling against domination the world over—say, Zapatistas in Mexico, Dalit organizers in India, Aboriginal organizers in Australia, land reformers in South Africa—we will surely find religion and politics mixing in ways that are complex and generative and that shift what we think counts as religion and what we think counts as politics. And the organic intellectuals formed by these movements, whether Houria Bouteldja in France or Essex Hemphill in Black America, must certainly be *doing* political theology. What does a volume such as *Political Theology Reimagined*, which pushes outward from a Eurocentric, poststructuralist frame in feminist, queer, Black, and decolonial directions, add when political theology is already happening, in sophisticated ways, outside of that narrow frame? And would additional scholarship—more attuned to the lives and afterlives of religion and theology—in cultural studies, anthropology, literature, and other fields, where the turn beyond poststructuralism happened a generation ago, not suffice?

Our contention is that political theology, whatever its limitations, has become an important site of inquiry that has generated novel theoretical

tools and perspectives on the complex interrelations of religion and politics that remain frequently unavailable in established disciplinary spaces. It has developed critical approaches to rigorously conceptualize the historical junctures and disjunctures of the theological and the political, which have continued to structure the colonial, racialized, capitalist modernity we inhabit. This interdisciplinary conversation has produced inventive ways to interrogate the status of religion: its historical formation as a concept out of Protestantism and liberal modernity, its continuities and discontinuities with Christianity and its visions of particularism and universalism, its status as the default object of critique for secular philosophy or of management for the secular state. Political theology has provided a critical vantage on the ways that religion is shaped by power but also on the ways that forms of power are shaped by disavowed religious genealogies, and it has taught us to attend to assemblages—material and ideal, historical and contemporary—that weave together the theological and political across the long histories of modern religion and the state. Our hope is that critical perspectives developed within political theology can help attend to texts and archives of those struggling against domination by rendering theoretically visible how forms of insurgency *and* counterinsurgency can enact political and religious dimensions in intricate ways. And its inventive modes of reading can unsettle common assumptions about the discourse of religion, which limit our approach to those texts and archives and their power to insurgently challenge regnant terms of order. Showcasing these expanding conversations can attune scholars across the humanities and critical social sciences to political theology in ways that deepen and problematize their own scholarly and political itineraries.

Whether in Christian theology or political theory, Continental philosophy or the anthropology, political theology often brings with it a radical edge. Those who think that the powers that be get things right most of the time, or need only the occasional gentle nudge, rarely gravitate toward political theology. The field grows out of crises, times when fundamental assumptions come into play, times when the order of the world loses its solidity. You will find a crisis at the center of whichever origin story for political theology you choose. There was a crisis for Augustine in the late Roman empire. There was a crisis for Schmitt in Weimar Germany. There was the post-1989 crisis of the left that generated novel political-theological theorizing by the likes of Agamben and Slavoj Žižek; after September 11, this line of investigation only intensified, now becoming dominant in the

US academic context, as well. In each case, the unsettling of the order of the world necessitated a rethinking of the foundations, and this could not avoid a reengagement with the theological dimension.[10] In each case, the wealthy and powerful sought to exploit crises for their own ends, at times using the lexicon of political theology. Fending off these attempts, whether Hindutva or Christian nationalist or Zionist, requires developing the tools to cleave insurgent political theology from the political theology of order, purity, and domination—a key task of this volume.

This narrative of crisis is worth interrogating: Crisis for whom? Is an intellectual crisis equivalent to a political crisis? It does, however, suggest an important truth: that struggles born of vulnerability engender creativity. The experimental itineraries in political theology that occupy the pages that follow could also be said to grow out of the 2008 financial crisis and the decade of social movements that followed: Occupy Wall Street, the Arab Spring, Black Lives Matter, Idle No More, Standing Rock, #MeToo, the fights for public education and prison abolition. These movements captured the imagination of young scholars who, with increasing frequency, have one foot in the academy and another in activism. Social movements challenged scholarly fields to ask new questions, to create new tools, and to orient themselves in a clearer way to calls for justice that exceed the order of the world. They have also opened new theoretical vistas, ranging from riotous insurgency to the commune form. Scholars of color, first-generation scholars, and queer and trans scholars entered conversations in political theology motivated not only by theoretical concerns but also, frequently, by existential concerns—concerns about life and death, faith and hope, violence and oppression. A shift of perspective occurred: From an exclusive focus on the state, political theology came to investigate insurgent theories, affects, and vernaculars that oppose domination.

With their intellectual and political formations entangled, scholars attracted to political theology have often brought an organizing spirit to their intellectual labor. The result has been an explosion, over the past decade, of collaborative projects and infrastructure, from the growth and transformation of the journal *Political Theology* to the proliferation of online forums, reading groups, seminars, and workshops. It has also led to regular conferences, some hosted by a new professional organization, the Political Theology Network, and the development of streams focused on political theology within established professional organizations, including the American Philosophical Association, the American Studies Association, and the American Academy of Religion.[11] This is the context that

gave birth to the chapters that follow, and many of the contributors have participated in or led organizing projects in the field.

Like many academic projects, this volume grows out of a mix of excitement and frustration. We see political theology moving in multiple promising directions, enlivened by adjacent fields in the humanities and critical social sciences and by a cohort of colleagues coming to their work with deep political commitments. But we also see risks. Political theology is easily misunderstood and dismissed. A focus on first-order political commitments can shrink interest in the sort of theoretical reflection that requires intellectual patience and rigor—tracing networks of concepts, making distinctions, considering counterarguments, and reading and writing with care. There is the risk of insularity for discussions of political theology within particular contexts—for example, Jewish political theology, political theory and political theology, ethnography and political theology—and we hope readers can find inspiration in the essays that follow to bring new energy and creativity to their work. We are concerned, as well, that work in political theology can remain unserious when it comes to understanding the complexity of religion, reducing dense networks of practice, thought, and imagination to a few key concepts that are easily legible to secular (or Protestant) interlocutors. Or it can remain narrowly Christian, without working through the paradigms of critical theory that have transformed understandings of power and the political, the material and the economic, in ways that implicate Christianity itself.[12] In compiling this volume, the two of us—one located in an English Department, the other in a Theology and Religious Studies Department—showcase promising developments that might serve as antidotes to these concerns.

The four groups of essays that follow map out distinct trajectories within the field of political theology. The first group expands the canon of European critical theory relevant for political theology. These contributions retrieve novel conceptual perspectives, topoi, and problematics from leftist political theory, speculative philosophy, and contemporary critical theory for use in political theology. They investigate what purchase these approaches have for political theology and what becomes visible when they are interrogated from a political-theological perspective. The second section collects essays that ask what happens to political theology when it is examined through novel sets of coordinates, from the colonial to the cosmic. Moving across diverse sites and events, from the decolonial to Islam and from India to the scale of the planetary and beyond, they explore how the thought and

structure of political theology is transformed, deformed, refused, and expanded by such encounters. The third set of essays traces what attunements to racialization and Blackness do to political-theological contours and how such perspectives transform the concepts and narratives that ground political theology. They make the case that political theology necessarily goes wrong when it does not grapple with anti-Blackness. The interventions of the final section are framed by questions of feminism and gender. They ask what happens to political theology when gender difference and subversion of identity, no less than sentimentality and gendered violence, are situated at the heart of political-theological investigations.

These frames are hardly the exclusive way to organize the contributions. The essays that take up Sylvia Wynter's thought as a theoretical node (David Kline, James Ford, Beatrice Marovich) are as much about Blackness as they are about colonial modernity, with questions of gender never far from view. Feminist thinkers such as Silvia Federici (explored by Adam Kotsko) must also be understood as part of an expanded canon of European leftist critical theory. Other contributions make productive use of European concepts and genealogies within an expanded frame—for example, in Aseel Najib's exploration of Claude Lefort's conceptualization of the political in relation to Islam or Alex Dubilet's reconsideration of the status of Christianity and secularism through the prism of general antagonism and the undercommons.

The essays in this volume respond to a number of open questions in the field. By making these questions explicit, we hope to encourage readers to enter the conversation and articulate new answers themselves. We also hope to make visible some of the conceptual sites with the greatest intellectual energy in political theology today, which have shifted from where they were even a decade ago. For example, the edited volume *Race and Political Theology* (2012) shared with this volume a desire to move beyond both sectarian and dogmatically secular approaches to the field, but that volume focused on Jewish and Black American inflections on paradigms set by Schmitt, with only gestures toward coloniality, patriarchy, and capitalism as essential questions.[13] Indeed, even the reflections in that volume largely approached Jewish and Black thought from a multicultural paradigm that has now been challenged by new currents in Black feminism, Afropessimism, and critical explorations of "Judeopessimism."[14]

One open question in political theology today, in a sense a prerequisite for all others, concerns the significance of storytelling and narration. In 2008, the literary theorist Regina Schwartz suggested that poetics ought

to be read as a modality of secularization, and in 2014, the early modern literary scholar Victoria Kahn centered the Greek concept of *poiesis* in a critique of political theology.[15] In subsequent years, not only literature scholars but political theorists and philosophers have increasingly attended to these questions in ways distinct from, but not unrelated to, the call in 1991 by the Christian theologian John Milbank for political theology to be the project of "out-narrating" secular modernity.[16] What does it mean for political theology to attend to genre, to tarry with the tragic or comic, to understand the tropological power of discourse, or to explore how narrative structures determine the distribution of the possible and impossible?

George Shulman's essay in this volume argues for the centrality of the creative imagination and mythopoetic techniques for political theology understood as a study of what he terms "organizing faiths." Drawing on an archive of voices that includes the Hebrew prophets, William Blake, Friedrich Nietzsche, and James Baldwin, Shulman argues for a political theology grounded not in logos but in poesis, in collective imaginative inventions that "engender creative capacities for enlarged affiliations, self-organizing nomos, and resonant meaning making." Situating political theology less in relation to secularization than to the global color line, Shulman proposes Fred Moten's explorations of fugitive sociality and a sociopoetic insurgency of dispossession in common as a countertheological voice to the grammar of an anti-Black world. Marovich reevaluates the significance of narrative differently through her exploration of the biomythological mode of storytelling. Taking political theology as a discourse that deals with the persistence under erasure of the theological—as a discourse that takes seriously, that is, the shadow cast when the divine is absented—Marovich turns to Wynter's theorization of humans as beings that are at once biological and mythological, living beings with capacity to tell stories about themselves, to unpack the theoretical and political-theological underpinnings of breath in Luce Irigaray's oeuvre, in both its emancipatory and constricting modalities. Kline, meanwhile, explores the necessity, already latent in Wynter's work, of political-theological storytelling for the "new science of the word," which Wynter elaborates in opposition to colonial modernity's dominant paradigms.

One particular mode of storytelling, secularization, has long been closely associated with political theology. Twentieth-century debates among figures such as Schmitt, Taubes, Karl Löwith, and Hans Blumenberg probed which concepts count as secularized, what mechanisms were involved in secularization, and whether secularization might give rise to cri-

tique itself. The debate around secularization remains a critical touchstone in the present, its parameters expanding to include the critical study of the formation of secularism and the ontology of the secular.[17] An important conceptual frame for analyzing the reordering of relations between the religious-theological and secular-political realms, secularization has been complemented by the insight that religion and the political are themselves not ahistorical constants but emerge through complex processes of differentiation in modernity. What does it look like to revisit debates about secularization, but with Europe now understood through the lens of colonialism and empire or altogether displaced by forms of theorizing and politics of the Global South? Our contributor Rafael Vizcaíno offers one answer to this question by turning to the works of Enrique Dussel to argue that traditional secularization narratives are "a colonialist and imperialist myth of modernity" that have obscured the violence of colonialism. As a result, Vizcaíno argues that epistemic decolonization in political theology is necessary, and decolonial struggle is essentially political-theological in nature.

What might it mean to do political theology by juxtaposition? Unlike comparison—a mode of inquiry long suspect in the study of religion—this would entail a joint exploration of the conceptuality and practice of political theology in two quite different sites. Rather than enumerate similarities and differences, such a project would inquire into what we can understand more clearly about political theology through decentering, destabilizing encounters. In a certain way, Agamben introduced this question to the field with the provocative juxtapositions that form the core of his *Homo Sacer*, yet his work leaves lingering questions about the determining role of the European tradition for all political theology.[18]

In this volume, Ford shows that Agamben's theoretical framework is essentially, and not accidentally, incompatible with the forms of exception developed in colonialism and chattel slavery. Agamben's approach, Ford's analysis shows, suffers from "a phobic avoidance of the racialized sites, discourses, movements, and events"—even more so, paradoxically, than Schmitt's own. Resisting the equation of Black life and bare life, Ford turns to W. E. B. Du Bois's account of the general strike to trace the generativity that irrupts and interrupts the discourse of sovereign political theology. Meanwhile, Dana Lloyd stages an encounter between Adriana Cavarero and voices of Indigenous feminism to approach one of the concepts most associated with political theology—sovereignty—with "bad intentions" or irony. Taking her lead from Cavarero's feminist challenge to regnant philo-

sophical concepts, Lloyd constellates Indigenous voices not only to think a decolonial philosophy of nonviolence but also to rethink a sovereignty that may be about sharing and nurturing. She offers a path for political theology "liberated from its commitment to settler colonialism and to violence."

Recent years have seen other methodological innovations expand what it means to do political theology. Anthropologists, in particular, have explored the power of ethnography to put pressure on familiar concepts of political theology—all the while being guided by similiar concerns.[19] European intellectual historians interested in political theology have moved beyond their initial focus on early modernity to track connections between the political and the theological from late antiquity all the way to the twentieth century.[20] Comparativists have asked, for example, what connections exist between theological visions and political accounts of monarchy across traditions.[21] Given this explosion of approaches, what methodological tools are best equipped for political-theological inquiry?

Kotsko finds methodological inspiration in the work of Federici, whose genealogies reject the religious-secular dyad and remain intersectional all the way through. Guided by a strategic presentism, Kotsko proposes that political theology's genealogical perspective could seek "to transform our vision of the past to make it usable for the transformation of the present." The volume also features indirect methodological interventions arising out of encounters staged between political theology and its disciplinary outsides. Drawing on Judith Butler's work, Siobhan Kelly, for example, refuses the reduction of gender to identity to explore "how an analysis of gender subject formation can instead serve as a crucial backbone of political theology moving forward." Ada Jaarsma's contribution explores the role of affects and institutions in political theology. Challenging the presuppositions of secularity and the secular-religious binary, Jaarsma elaborates Isabelle Stengers's conceptualization of passionate thinking as a way to probe what Deleuzian and process-based approaches might do for political theology. Lucia Hulsether, meanwhile, centers affect and feeling in examining Christian nationalism as a category of public discourse in the aftermath of the January 6, 2021, attack on the US Capitol. What structures of feeling, she asks, are involved not only in Christian nationalism but also in packaging "Christian nationalism" as a discursive object?

The conjuncture of Marxism and political theology is a charged but highly productive site of exchange. In his early writings, Karl Marx was poignantly attuned to the essential analogies and transmutations occurring between the theological and the political, formulating a proleptic re-

buttal to Schmitt's vision of political theology.[22] While Marx-influenced thinkers have worked on issues proximate to political theology (think of not only Dussel and Federici but also Alain Badiou, Walter Benjamin, and Ernst Bloch), recent discourse on political theology tends to range from anarchist to liberal (as well as, of course, to conservative).[23] What would it look like to construct generative engagements between Marxist thought and ongoing conversations in political theology?

Inese Radzins responds to this question by excavating the critical force of Michel Henry's phenomenology of life. Influenced by Marxism and Catholicism, Henry diagnoses the violence of objectification at the heart of modernity, driven by scientific reason and capital accumulation. The antidote Radzins proposes is opening up political theology to poesis—in a move that can be put in conversation with Shulman and Marovich—to affirm the irreducible activity and creativity of life. Martin Shuster, meanwhile, turns to the contemporary Japanese Marxist Kōjin Karatani to rethink the status and underpinnings of secularism. He shows the political-theological importance of Karatani's displacement of modes of production in classical historical materialism with modes of exchange. Shuster proposes that it is essential for political theology to appreciate what Karatani calls the "Borromean knot" of nation, state, and capital.

As it enters the commerce of theory, political theology seems to harbor ambitions to the universal. It may appear to tell us what politics, as such, and theology, as such, are really about—but it has usually done this with reference to Western Christianity and the modern state. How constitutive are claims of universality to political theology? Are there ways to think rigorously and abstractly from a political-theological perspective that would not reproduce colonial pretensions of European thought?

Basit Iqbal and Milad Odabaei's provocation puts into question the all-too-easy translatability and convertibility enacted by "theory," of which political theology serves as one instantiation. Problematizing the operations of abstraction necessary for political theology to function as a concept, Iqbal and Odabaei turn to Talal Asad's anthropology of the secular and explore its attunement to the grammars of concepts as they emerge from and remain embedded in collective forms of life. Using examples of Asad's analysis of *laïcité* and political fear, they show the necessity of remaining aware of how knowledge and critique are embedded and transmitted through concrete forms of life. Convergently, Prathama Banerjee explores how B. R. Ambedkar's avowal of the irreducible copresence of different religious traditions—and thus also of dissensus as to the very definition

of religion—helps him develop a "religious criticism as a legitimate form of public ethics, constitutive of the condition of living with multiple religions." Wandering and itineracy—both spiritual and epistemological—across multiple religions becomes the basis for this religious criticism as an essentially anti-statist perspective. For Banerjee, "While operating in the neighborhood of political theology," such religious criticism "cannot quite be reduced to it." But if political theology is understood broadly as a space that itself may unsettle statist visions, as other contributions in this volume suggest, then Banerjee's contribution may be read as showing an example of the way non-European sites of critical encounter can productively unsettle key aspects of the political-theological terrain.

A related question to that of universality is: What can political theology offer the study of religious traditions other than Christianity, and how do such encounters transform political theology? For Najib, postcolonial political theology must attend as much to geographical difference as to historical difference, its "attention to colony and metropole [must be] mirrored by its consideration of the past and the present." Her essay rethinks Lefort's theorization of the political as a tool and a method for studying precolonial Islamic tradition, which she enacts by turning to the Abbasid Caliph al-Ma'mun. For Agata Bielik-Robson, meanwhile, political theology must begin with the theological origin of critique, which she locates in the Jewish messianic tradition's account of transcendence: "In Jewish messianism the divine transcendence is most of all a standpoint from which the metaphysical totality can be seen and judged." In opposition to what she diagnosis as the Jewish Gnostic perspective on negation embodied by Taubes and Benjamin, Bielik-Robson turns to Theodor Adorno's *Negative Dialectics*, which successfully elaborates "a critique executed from within the world and out of *compassion* for its imperfect beings." Meanwhile, Vincent Lloyd explores the spiritual (and usually not religious) Black feminist discourse on healing. He queries whether it fulfills its critical promise and suggests that Hortense Spillers's writings on Black Christianity offer an immanent critique of the secularized Christianity found in Black feminist theory.

Sovereignty has been one touchstone of traditional accounts of political theology, and where there is sovereignty, there is also legitimacy. What happens to legitimacy with the demystification of the sacred aura on which it relies? Are there theological forms, in the realm of concepts, practices, or ways of life that offer alternatives modes of legitimation? Or, by contrast, is demystification an insufficient substitute for more radical drives to delegitimation? What concepts, what terms of order, are

troubled when legitimacy is unsettled: authority, tradition, or, perhaps, modernity itself?

In his chapter, Kirill Chepurin theorizes what he terms "cosmic delegitimation." Chepurin decenters secularization debates by returning to a foundational event of modernity: the Galilean-Copernican revolution that inaugurates the transition from the hierarchized cosmos to the decentered infinite universe (an event also at the heart of essays that engage Wynter). His contribution asks, with the contemporary French speculative philosopher Quentin Meillassoux: What does a political-theological thinking proceeding from the Copernican revolution look like? Meanwhile, if state legitimacy is grounded in overcoming civil war does Christianity, as its theological precursor, perform a more originary form of pacification? To answer this question, Dubilet's essay revisits Augustine's retort to Gnostic dualism and theorizes the Gnostic "a-cosmic revolt" as a rebellion against interpellation and the political. Igniting a cosmic general antagonism and refusing individuation, gnosis delegitimates political theology by showing it to be fundamentally a counterinsurgent project. Rather than reject political theology for a secular politics, Dubilet argues for the necessity of critiquing their essential co-imbrication, but this, paradoxically, requires inhabiting a political-theological attunement.

Behind the variety of questions explored in these essays, one detects a more basic one: What is to be done with political theology? Careful readers of this volume will detect different answers, both explicit and implicit, to this question. For some authors, it is simply to be used, a tool to struggle against oppressive alternative visions of political theology or against self-assured secularisms. For others, it is an accepted intellectual terrain within which certain kinds of conceptual or genealogical work can be pursued. And for still others, it is an ambivalent structure or object to be critiqued—to be clarified, transformed, or entirely abandoned. Even as the meaning and direction of political theology across the essays varies, they demonstrate distinct ways of working with political-theological materials.

The questions that we have separated analytically are deeply overlapping, and each essay responds to multiple pressing questions in the field. Yet the essays do more than this: They create new concepts and open new trajectories of investigation. Taken together, these essays do not produce political theology as a homogeneous terrain but trace multiple throughlines within its contemporary formation. Which direction seems most productive to creatively or critically pick up will depend on the reader's theoretical tastes. It may be the articulation of a fundamental critique of

modernity's theory and practice with recourse to countertheology (Shulman), to cosmic immanence or upscaling (Chepurin), or to auto-religion (Kline). It may be theorizing against the primacy not only of the state but even of the political, whether through Ambedkar's religious criticism and epistemological and spiritual itinerancy (in Banerjee) or through cosmic general antagonism and undercommon gnosis (in Dubilet). Or linking the precolonial and the postcolonial (in the Islamic context, as in Najib) or the colonial and decolonial (in Latin America, as in Vizcaíno) in novel ways that trouble both modernity and tradition. Or intervening into contemporary political debates and their presuppositions and imaginaries, whether on the national level (Hulsether) or on the grassroots one (V. Lloyd). We hope readers will diagnose other conceptual clusters across the volume, which they will take as invitations for their own creative reimagining of political theology.

These essays grow out of a set of ongoing, iterative projects that take political theology as an occasion for conversation, for gathering—simply gathering, with the belief that those who gather will fruitfully push one another and inspire one another, yielding not a shared program but an increasingly sophisticated web of inquiry. While critics worry that political theology names a very specific theoretical move or is necessarily rooted in a given religious tradition, and so yields distorted results, the essays that follow demonstrate that the rich diversity of intellectual work in political theology today is better understood in terms of resonance than origin, in terms of disposition and orientation than dogma.

This collection came together at a time when conversation, gathering, was made difficult by the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic's uneven effects across populations, and across the academy, shaped which colleagues could participate in this volume and partially determined the burden of participation on each. The pandemic is among the many factors that give this project its contingent shape and its silences. This is nothing new: Pandemics and plagues have often been intimately interwoven with political theology in modernity. Below the famous figure of the sovereign as a composite body on the frontispiece of Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan*, two tiny figures observe the well-ordered city landscape devoid of living beings. Identifiable by their clothing and beaked masks, the two are plague doctors, and they look down at a city that appears to be in lockdown.[24] Modern sovereignty and its dreams of perfect order, it turns out, were never far from the plague, a site where obedience is exchanged for security.[25]

The effects of pandemic on political theology may seem distinct from, or even at odds with, the effects of radical social movements. The former isolates and stills; the latter collectivizes and impassions. Yet both contexts, both sets of crises, put similar sorts of pressure on the way that political theology has previously been understood. As Butler points out, *pandemic* etymologically calls forth a vision of collectivity, all the people, and while the powers that be naturalize a world of division and domination, social insurgency of recent years has rethought social reproduction and reactivated radicalism as collective force from below.[26]

While Butler takes the pandemic as an opportunity for reexamining the relationship between world and worlds, the contemporary English poet Sean Bonney explores pandemic's more unsettling associations. Meditating on the Moscow plague of 1771, in which the masses rose up against quarantine restrictions, Bonney recounts that the populace attacked a monastery and murdered the archbishop. Today, according to Bonney, instead of the theological authorities as symbols of uncontrolled disease, we have the police: "every cop, living or dead, is a walking plague-pit."[27] Bonney is not taking sides in partisan debates about pandemic response (he died in 2019); rather, he attempts to map out the paradoxical proximities of plague and riot for a contemporary moment that is marked equally by both.

We conclude as we started, with poetry, to explore another way that a political-theological attunement—which is something less programmatic but no less efficacious than a method—might help delineate and intervene in the contemporary. Bonney's experimental poetics explore "riot, plague, any number of un-used potentialities" to create "a chart of the spatio-temporal rhythm of the riot-form . . . A map that could show the paths *not* taken. And where to find them, those paths, those antidotes, those counter-plagues" (117). As a result, even the plague itself does not remain the same: "Plague. The opposite of solidarity. Or rather, solidarity itself: the solidarity of isolation and quarantine, of the bomb-zone or the ghetto. The great silence is full of noises" (117). Time is also transformed, by riot no less than pandemic. "Antagonistic time, revolutionary time, the time of the dead . . . packed with unfinished events: the Paris Commune, Orgreave, the Mau Mau rebellion" disrupts, tears asunder "normative time, a chain of completed triumphs, a net of monuments, dead labour, capital. The TV schedules, basically" (116). Antagonistic, revolutionary time irrupts into the unfolding catastrophe of history, "the unmarked grave [of] ALL history," to name the specters of those who struggled against or succumbed

to the violent imposition of order at the hands of theological and political authorities.[28] Like Belcourt, Bonney invents a language to commune with the dead, freeing the dead to haunt the present, disjointing and dislocating its time, to join the ongoing riot: "A riot is a haunt."[29] It calls forth an antagonistic poetics for an antagonistic reality, one that sides with "all the beggars of history" against "the inheritors of the law" (17).[30]

The riot "is formative by virtue of what it makes visible."[31] Its insurrectionary force against the world discloses multiple experiences of time and illuminates other political imaginaries that reweave the histories of victory and defeat. Disrupting providence and justification, antagonistic time calls forth, in material and poetic ways, counter-Earths, counter-plagues, and counter-rhythmic interruptions.[32] Riotous times break apart the policing counterinsurgent epoch and connect with past insurgents and victims in a general antagonism as "a riotous production of difference."[33] They elaborate an abolitionist chorus with anarchic and communist dreams that exceed what is commonly contained by those proper names, a chorus Saidiya Hartman speculatively reimagines: "All of them might well have shouted, No slave time now. Abolition now. In the surreal, utopian nonsense of it all, and at the heart of riot, was the anarchy of colored girls: treason en masse, tumult, gathering together, the mutual collaboration required to confront the prison authorities and the police, the willingness to lose one-self and become something greater—a chorus, a swarm, an ensemble, a mutual aid society."[34]

We turn to Bonney to show that one can find elements of political theology in unlikely places if one only knows how to look. In the poem "What Teargas Is For," Bonney describes the omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence of the police: "Cops, being neither human nor animal, do not dream. . . . [They] got access to the content of all of our dreams." Bonney reflects that police need not dream because "they've got teargas"—supplied globally by a company connected to the British crown. In a way, this is a reminder to scholars of political theology that the abstractions of sovereignty are never more than a few mediations away from its material manifestation in police violence. Bonney sardonically speculates that the monarch's relative "probably thinks of teargas as being somehow related to the Cloud of Unknowing, and, in a sense, he's kind of right."[35] The poet is dismissive, though not wholly. But how exactly do we understand the relation between teargas and the anonymous fourteenth-century work of Christian mysticism and to the contemplative apex that gives it its name?

We are certainly far from the legitimating comforts of the king's mystical two bodies or the mystical foundations of authority. This political mysticism is of a different, radically material sort, which we might name a mysticism of teargas. "You come to have a very real understanding of the nature of things, both visible and invisible, by having your sensory system hijacked and turned against you by a meaningful dose of teargas." The poem covertly restages aspects dear to mystical theology: the path of contemplation, the visible and the invisible, the sensual and supersensual, and knowledge and unknowing, as well as the undoing of spatiotemporal organization ("loss of geographical certainty"). There is even a perverse permutation of the imperative mode of spiritual direction so dear to medieval manuals: "Next time things are starting to kick off a little bit just go out on the street and run straight into the middle of the biggest cloud of teargas you can find."[36]

The dialectical dance of the poem shifts from an abrasive dismissal of the theological as a mystifying discourse of sovereign power to tracing its unexpected material transformations in relation to teargas and the police. But you can detect this shift only with a political-theological attunement. The "small and silent point of absolute Unknowing," the spiritual peak of apophasis, occurs not in unity with God but in a cloud of teargas. The spiritual power of teargas displaces the theater of the soul into the theater of police power—or, rather, it is still very much the theater of the soul, now caught in a cloud of teargas, which forcefully corporealizes it by imposing an "absolute regulation and administration of all the senses." The Cloud of Unknowing is a Cloud of Teargas. Thinking this statement in its speculative and material complexity requires a political theology that has severed its ties with sovereign power and its modes of legitimation to side with its victims. It requires a political theology proximate to "an anti-police mystical theology," a disordering insurgency harboring visions and weapons that remain unrecognizable to those political theologies that are, wittingly or not, actually police theologies of order.[37]

This is not the only reference to the Cloud of Unknowing in *Our Death*. Ruminating in "Letter Against the Language" on the status of the inexpressible located in the culminating scream of the father character in Pier Paolo Pasolini's film *Teorema* (a scream containing "all that is meaningful in the word 'communism'") and on "hearing inexpressible things" in the Letter to the Corinthians (which Pasolini cites in his unfinished screenplay on Paul), Bonney catches himself. He declares, "Don't get me wrong. I'm not about to disappear into some kind of cutrate Cloud of Unknowing."

He goes on to explain that Pasolini, whose rage and heterodox commitment to communism Bonney inherits, made clear, in a 1974 article, that by "inexpressible things" he meant "the names of power," names responsible for massacres that are "impossible to pronounce . . . and continue simply to live."[38] Bonney's oblique reference is to Pasolini's "What is this coup d'état? I know," which is structured by an almost incantatory repetition of "I know the names," declaimed as parrhesiastic accusations to political and theological authorities responsible for coups, massacres, and repression in Italy. Pasolini published the essay a year before his murder in Ostia, which, in a political-theologically significant contingency of history, was the site of the foundational mystical vision of Christianity: Augustine's so-called vision at Ostia.[39]

The names of power, however, have a complex relation to unknowing. Are not the first and ultimate names of power, the names of God, those divine names that legitimate theological-political hierarchies? Apophatic unsaying has always been the other side of the kataphatic saying of the divine names, for the entire Christian mystical tradition from Dionysius the Areopagite to *The Cloud of Unknowing* and beyond. Perhaps, then, the cut-rate Cloud of Unknowing remains in the delimited domain of the theological, but at full price, it forces us to traverse the inexpressible names of power up to the massacres and murders carried out in its name.[40] Here, what we see are theological imaginaries traversing the material world of violence and the police, insurgency and counterinsurgency. Political theology allows us to abandon the purely theological domain and transversally defamiliarize interrelated elements such as apophasis, power, knowledge, and the senses. Fragments of a theological imaginary are mutated within the political reality of the present in ways that, as theologians no less than historicists would undoubtedly remind us, betray the original orientation of *The Cloud of Unknowing*. But neither is the secular left undisturbed by political-theological ways of reading that suspend self-legitimating secular presuppositions about history and liberation and that free past insurgencies, relying on millenarianism, the Gods, and other theological weapons, from the condemnation of being premodern: Peasant revolts from sixteenth-century Germany to nineteenth-century India become contemporary in their struggle against hierarchy, established authority, and modern property relations.[41] A political theology that sides with riotous social insurgency against the police will not itself remain unchanged when it confronts the linguistic chain of implication that binds the political to policy and the police.[42] It may become something more and less than political

and more and less than theological, seeing both terrains as imbricated in insurgency and counterinsurgency, in riot and order, in denouncing and legitimating the names of power.

Mapping normative rhythms and their interruptions, recovering voices and lines of antagonism, conjuring counter-plagues: These are the decisive imperatives for the riotous times of the present, and they animate the essays that follow. The goal is less to subsume all this under the proper name of political theology than to explore the lives and afterlives of theological shards in the present and thereby undermine all facile claims to secularity and all easy demarcations of religion. This entails creating new constellations of concepts and texts, reconsidering our basic narratives and genealogies, remaining attentive to the ruses of justification and rationalization, and experimenting with the many folds of transcendence and immanence. Critically engaging with the archives of insurgency across the catastrophes of counterinsurgent modernity means discerning when riotous and insurrectionary direct action opens onto forms of leveling and communizing assembly, insurgent universalities, and destituent freedoms, and when, by contrast, they enact xenophobic reimpositions of identity, counterrevolutions of property, or racist scapegoating in response to neoliberal precarity and, through this discernment, refuse the neutral perspective of the state for which all riotous insurgencies are equal, merely a temporary disorder to be overcome by declaring a state of emergency.[43] As Bonney concludes an epistolary poem, commending the joy of the critical task in political-theological terms, "The deep truth is imageless. When you know that, you know there's everything to play for. All else is madness and suffering at the hands of the pigs" (44). And if the entanglements of sovereignty and sense, of the normative and the imaginary, prevent the formulation of a unified vision of justice, this does not prevent the poets from voicing different senses of this impossibility. Let us end with their words. Belcourt: "i mouthed the word *justice* / and then forgot how to speak" (12). Bonney: "say no justice no peace and then say fuck the police" (29).

Notes

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1 Davis and Sarlin, "On the Risk of a New Relationality."

2 Belcourt, *This Wound Is a World*, 55. Hereafter, page numbers are cited in parentheses in the text.

3 Assmann, *Herrschaft und Heil*.

4 The status of tradition has been a key theoretical site of inquiry influential for political theology: see Asad, "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam"; Asad, "Thinking about Tradition, Religion, and Politics in Egypt Today"; MacIntyre, *After Virtue*; Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 113–17; Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*.

5 See, e.g., the Routledge Transforming Political Theologies book series; "Deprovincializing Political Theology," the 2022 special issue of *Political Theology* (23, nos. 1–2); and An, *The Coloniality of the Secular*.

6 For an instantiation of this approach, see Chepurin and Dubilet, *Nothing Absolute*.

7 See Dubilet, "An Immanence Without the World." For a perceptive critique of the scholarly opposition between colonial modernity as source of abstraction and tradition as source of embodiment and concretion, see Ahmed, *Archaeology of Babel*. There is also an important dissenting tradition of critical scholarship that follows Edward Said in embracing the aspiration to the secular and the worldly. For a collection exemplifying this line of scholarship that articulates a critique of postsecularism, see the "Why I Am Not a Postsecularist" special issue of *boundary 2* (40, no. 1). See also Said, *The World. the Text, and the Critic*. For one critical assessment of secularism and the secular and its essential relation to Christianity, see Anidjar, "Secularism."

8 For one example of the persistence of European universalism, see Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*.

9 For two quite different examples of rethinking of European abstraction, see Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*; Pandolfo, *Knot of the Soul*. For catastrophe, see also *Critical Times*'s special issue "The Destruction of Loss" (6, no. 2).

10 In one classic political-theologically inflected account, modernity itself arises out of crisis; see Koselleck, *Critique and Crisis*.

11 Four book series now address political theology: Transforming Political Theologies (Routledge), Political Theologies (Bloomsbury), Political and Public Theologies (Brill), and Transdisciplinary Theological Colloquia (Fordham), the last of these growing out of regular conferences convened at Drew Theological School.

12 For theoretical accounts of Christianity's multifaceted relation to the secular, see Anidjar, *Blood*; Anidjar, *The Jew, The Arab*; Barber, *On Diaspora*; Stimilli, *The Debt of the Living*; Sullivan, *Church, State, Corporation*.

13 Lloyd, *Race and Political Theology*.

14 See Armstrong, "Losing Salvation"; Kaplan, "Notes Toward (Inhabiting) the Black Messianic in Afro-Pessimism's Apocalyptic Thought"; Magid, *Meir Kahane*, 75–106.

15 Kahn, *The Future of Illusion*; Schwartz, *Sacramental Poetics at the Dawn of Secularism*.

16 Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 331.

17 For a contemporary critique of the earlier debates, see Davis, *Periodization and Sovereignty*. For critical study of the secular, see, e.g., Asad et al., *Is Critique Secular?*; Fernando, *The Republic Unsettled*.

18 Agamben, *Homo Sacer*. For his reflections on method, see Agamben, *The Signature of All Things*.

19 See, e.g., Agrama, *Questioning Secularism*; McAllister and Napolitano, "Political Theology/Theopolitics."

20 See, e.g., Shortall and Jenkins, *Christianity and Human Rights Reconsidered*; Stroumsa, "God's Rule in Late Antiquity."

21 Moin and Strathern, *Sacred Kingship in World History*.

22 Dubilet, "On the General Secular Contradiction."

23 For a recent anarchist articulation of political theology, see Martel, *Anarchist Prophets*.

24 See Agamben, *Stasis*; Falk, "Hobbes' Leviathan und die aus dem Blick gefallenen Schnabelmasken."

25 On plague and dreams of order, see Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 195–209. See also Agamben's controversial meditations on the COVID-19 pandemic in *Where Are We Now?*

26 Butler, *What World Is This?*

27 Bonney, *Letters Against the Firmament*, 115. Hereafter, page numbers are cited in parentheses in the text.

28 Bonney, *Our Death*, 46.

29 Bonney, *Our Death*, 11.

30 Bonney, *Our Death*, 29.

31 Invisible Committee, *Now*, 15. For a Marxist reading of riot as a contemporary form, see Clover, *Riot, Strike, Riot*.

32 For an innovative theorization of insurgency, multiple temporalities, and paths violently repressed, see Tomba, *Insurgent Universality*.

33 Harney and Moten, *The Undercommons*, 109.

34 Hartman, "The Anarchy of Colored Girls Assembled in a Riotous Manner," 485.

35 Bonney, *Our Death*, 73.

36 Bonney, *Our Death*, 73.

37 Dubilet, "The Just without Justification," 18.

38 Bonney, *Our Death*, 18.

39 See Hollywood, "Introduction."

40 For a recent theorization of negative theology in relation to political theology in an insurrectionary key, see Dubilet, "The Just without Justification." For alternative readings, see Newheiser, *Hope in a Secular Age*, and the "Negative Political Theology" special issue of *Modern Theology* (36, no. 1).

41 See Banerjee, "In Memoriam Ranajit Guha"; Guha, "Prose of Counter-Insurgency."

42 On politics, policy, and the police, see Harney and Moten, *The Undercommons*.

43 We completed this introduction as the far-right "anti-immigrant" (i.e., racist) riots began to spread across the United Kingdom. One of the first to receive a criminal sentence was a counter-protestor, Ashkan Kareem, who was jailed for twelve months for "violent disorder" while protecting a mosque from attack in Darlington. This offers another illustration of what the neutrality of the state amounts to in practice.