

Coming of Age. A (Post) Colonial and Queer Contribution Towards the Deconstruction of the Notion of “Minority”

*Mayoría de edad: Una contribución
(post) colonial y queer hacia la
deconstrucción de la noción de minoría*

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5

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Resumen

La noción de “minoría” ha sido históricamente un elemento determinante en el otorgamiento de derechos a distintos grupos en las sociedades modernas, ya sean debido a su condición étno-racial, de género, religiosa, o sexual, entre otras. Sin embargo, el uso de esta noción ha sido utilizado para mantener a estos grupos en la subalternidad. Este artículo explora la noción de minoría y la funcionalidad del “discurso minoritario” como herramienta colonialista. Luego de analizar la historia del término en la filosofía de Immanuel Kant, el artículo se centra en el caso de las minorías étnicas y sexuales para luego relacionarlas con el discurso de la teología de la liberación latinoamericana. Basándose en los estudios étnicos, estudios de Michel Foucault sobre el poder, la lectura de Slavoj Žižek sobre el concepto de *jouissance* en Jacques Lacan y la teología indecente de Marcella Althaus-Reid, este ensayo concluye que tanto la noción de minoría como el “discurso minoritario” son tecnologías retóricas del colonialismo cuya función restringir la alteridad y perpetuar una perspectiva desexualizada y racializada de lo sujetos subalternos.

Palabras clave: noción de minoría, subalternidad, colonialismo, minoría racial, minoría sexual, teología.

Abstract

The notion of “minority” has historically been a determining factor in the granting of rights to different groups in modern societies, whether because of their ethno-racial, gender, religious or sexual orientation status, among others. However, the use of the concept has been used to maintain these groups as subaltern. This article explores the notion of minority and “minority discourse” functionality as a colonial tool. After analyzing the story of the term in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, this article focus in the case of ethnic and sexual minorities in order to related them to the discourse of Latin American Liberation Theology. Drawing from ethnic studies, Michel Foucault’s studies on power, Slavoj Žižek’s reading on Jacques Lacan’s concept of *jouissance*, and Marcella Althaus-Reid’s indecent theology, this essay concludes that both the notion of minority and the “minority discourse” are rhetorical technologies of colonialism whose function is to restrict Otherness and perpetuate a desexualized and racialized perspective on subaltern subjects.

Keywords: notion of minority, subalternity, colonialism, racial minority, sexual minority, theology.



Introduction

In this essay I explore the notion of minority and the functionality of “minority discourse” among racial and sexual minorities. Cognisant of the manifold influences that this notion and derived “minority discourse” has exerted over the Modern-Capitalist World-System, the analysis emphasizes the effects upon Latin American Liberation Theology (hereinafter cited as “TLL” for its acronym in Spanish). The importance of this connection resides in the fact that, as a liberative theology, the attention was placed on the economic by-products of colonialism, thus avoiding other conditionings such as race/ethnicity as well as gender/sexuality. If the “poor” was the “subject” of the liberative process, the analysis made that “subject” to unavoidably appear as “de-racialized” and “de-sexualized.” Subsequently, the construction of a “de-racialized/de-sexualized minor(ity) poor” created and reified lasting consequences, especially for Latin American subaltern groups.

For that reason, the goal of this essay is to deconstruct the notion of “minority” from a postcolonial perspective. The first part of the analysis traces back the notion of minority to the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, highly influenced by the thought of René Descartes. After unearthing the “archeology” in the conformation of the notion of minority within the Modern-Capitalist World-System, the analysis draws for its critique from the theoretical tools of ethnic studies. Concurrently, the essay benefits from the pivotal studies of Michel Foucault on power as well as Slavoj Žižek’s reading on the concept of *jouissance*, as propounded by Jacques Lacan. The final section of the essay returns to liberation theology through the lenses of that critique paired with the work of Marcella Althaus-Reid and her indecent theology. I conclude that the notion of minority and the “minority discourse” together function as rhetorical technologies of colonialism in order to restrict Otherness and perpetuate a desexualized/racialized/disempowered “minor(ity) poor” who in perpetuum remains as subaltern.

The Colonial Construction of the term Minority

In November 1784 the periodical, *Berlinische Monatschrift* of Königsberg, Prussia, published its monthly issue. It could be non-important data except for the fact that in its pages there was a response from Immanuel Kant to the question “Answering the question: *Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?* [Answering the question: What is Enlightenment?]. This article has historically marked one of the few clear responses to that question. In his article Kant defines Enlightenment as a *coming of age*, that is, the passage from immaturity to maturity, and therefore, the end of the need to be mentored or ruled. In other words, coming of age to exercise the use of self-reason without being told what to do by anyone else.

Despite the shortness of Kant’s article, and the impossibility of that text to describe the philosophical, social, politic, economic, historical and cultural processes that took place at the end of the eighteenth century, the description of Enlightenment as *coming of age* is something this paper seeks to highlight. It is obvious that Enlightenment did not begin with Kant, but with the work of many others before him: F. Bacon, René Descartes, Baruch Spinoza, John Locke, Thomas Hobbes, Pierre Bayle, Galileo and Isaac Newton, among others, through the movement known as *Humanism*. However, the article of Kant is an important step towards the understanding of the philosophical and scientific revolution that reached its fulfilment as the *Aufklärung* of the eighteenth century. To the understanding of academicians, the common element of the different stages of this process is their unanimous “anthropocentrism” or “categorical valorization of the human subject.” (Gandhi, 1998: 29).

Minority and the Cartesian cogito

The idea of *coming of age* is related to the possibility of the European subject to be independent, to think by herself/himself, to have self-awareness and to assume self-being in order to *live-in-the-world*. At this point the work of René Descartes could be recalled. He dramatically shifted epistemology to posit the modern notion of the *self as the center-agent of knowledge*. In

his *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641) Descartes is concerned with the problem of knowledge. He basically queries on how human beings know the world. His analysis leads him to positing *doubt* as a departure point, that is, the material world that constitutes the surrounding of human beings is not meant to be trusted. By questioning the validity/existence of that material world, Descartes arrives to the conclusion that only one thing can be trusted: the subjects' own existence shown through her/his single act of *thinking* (Vesey and Folkes, 1990: 79-84, 98-99). This has been traditionally summarized by the phrase: *Cogito ergo sum*.¹

That notion has certainly produced a shift in the epistemology of the modern European Self. Despite the possibility of enquiring in a different way regarding the material world surrounding us, the modern notion of the subject who alone thinks and determines reality —the Cartesian *cogito*— has been often related to the notion of *objectifying*. The notion of *objectifying* is related to the narcissism of the European Self that attempts to grasp/rule the world according to the willingness of the subject who *thinks* that world, making it an *object*, a commodity to be possessed/owned. On the contrary, that would be impossible given the fact that the epistemic shift produced Enlightenment has been the precursor of the actual scientific/theoretical paradigm within which we operate today. However, the connubiality of colonialism, and later capitalism as part of the development of the modern/colonial/capitalist world-system (Wallerstein, 1976), with a co-opted/narrowed notion of the modern European self and of the material world has produced a different ideology that is not necessarily direct component of the Cartesian/Kantian contributions. In other words, if the contributions of Descartes and Kant aim to know the world, it is when the world is reduced to be a mere *object* that could be manipulated/sold/bought and, therefore possessed, where we encounter a colonial turn in those contributions. All this is at the basis of the modern/capitalist world-system.

When this particular (re)presentation of the modern European Self is transmitted onto performances of power and onto certain subjects —

¹ The phrase *cogito ergo sum* cannot be found in R. Descartes' works. The phrase that he uses is *I think, therefore I am*. Although the *cogito* is found in previous thinkers such as St. Augustine in *De Civitate Dei* (books XI, 26) Descartes' *I think, therefore I am* is often summarized as *cogito ergo sum*.

individuals as well as collective— who are racialized/sexualized, we can talk about emerging colonial manifestations. Moreover, this particular understanding of the modern notions of the European Self and the material world as socially constructed bear the power to neutralize any other interpretation of what *reality/truth* are. In other words, it leads to delegitimizing or omitting *the Other/s'* interpretation. The problem is not to have *subjective* understanding of what *reality/truth* are. Rather, the problem resides in the impossibility for this co-optation of the Cartesian *cogito* to acknowledge that there are particular understandings based on different subjects to define what *reality/truth* are, all of them competing in a web of power relationships to establish their voices as *the* primal voice. This has been the basis for the colonial enterprise since 1492.

This particular —narrow— (re)presentation of the Cartesian *cogito* implies that only one perception of the world is *universalized* and imposed onto *the other/s*. In this sense, the Cartesian *cogito* narrowly understood became a co-opted instrument for the colonization of *Otherness*. In Hegelian terms, this constitution [thesis] necessarily requires an anti-thesis. Therefore, Anti-Cartesian thought in Western societies began to co-exist through the work of some thinkers concerned with the colonial consequences of this particular (miss) (re)presentation of the European self. Leela Gandhi (1998: 37) points this out when she suggests:

The anti-Cartesian turn in Foucault, Derrida and Lyotard, [...] develops out of a long line of thinkers from Max Weber to Martin Heidegger, through to Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. Each of these thinkers is concerned with the destructive powers of Western rationality, and all of them invoke the nihilistic figure of Nietzsche to bolster their onslaught on the epistemological narcissism of Western culture —that is to say, the narcissism released into the world through Descartes self— defining, all-knowing and formally empowered subject of consciousness.

This narcissistic (re)presentation of the Cartesian *cogito* pushed forward the belief that European subjects' *coming of age* or *enlightenment* was the way towards which the whole world had to evolve. In the light of Gandhi's critique of the European Self, which is a concept central to *Western Enlightenment*, I propose to re-phrase this concern as the critique

of the binary *enlightenment/childhood* transmitted into the binary *majority/minority* through colonial discourses and practices.

However, this historical and epistemic shift in European philosophy and its more covert colonial politics would not be possible without a previous event: the conquering of the Americas immediately after 1492. Due to this event the European subjects who established contact with the indigenous people in the year 1492 dealt with a new face of *Otherness* that was not expected by them. Their immediate reaction was to conquer and dominate in order to guarantee their superiority. In this sense, Sylvia Wynter (1995) argues that this should be understood as the combination of different elements present both in the Portuguese as well as the Spaniard enterprises outside European lands. She suggests that the introduction of the peoples of Africa as slaves in the trade nets of the continuously expanding new vision of the world legitimized the status of inferiority and the subsequent subjugation of the peoples of the New World based on “juridico-theological” arguments, especially those coming from Christianity (1995: 11, 13). From then on, through covert ideologies, religion, politics and economics of development and progress, the West has understood Third World countries as lesser subjects, almost sub-subjects, especially after the latter contributions of Enlightenment and its understanding of the European Self. The event of the conquest of the Americas by Spaniards reflects this relationality. In his book *The Conquest of America*, Tzvetan Todorov (1992) offers us a useful typology to identify the different levels through which the European self and *the Other/s*, later constructed in contemporary times as *minority* in their own land, interacted. He defines them as follows:

First of all, there is a value judgment (an axiological level): the other is good or bad, I love or do not love him, or, as was more likely to be said at the time, he is my equal or my inferior (for there is usually no question that I am good and that I esteem myself). Secondly, there is the action of rapprochement or distancing in relation to the other (a praxeological level): I embrace the other’s values, I identify myself with him; or else I identify the other with myself, I impose my own image upon him; between submission to the other and the other’s submission, there is also a third term, which is neutrality, or indifference. Thirdly, I know or am ignorant to the other’s identity (this would be the epistemic level) of

course, there is no absolute here, but an endless gradation between the lower or higher states of knowledge. There exist relations and affinities between these three levels, but no rigorous implication; hence, we cannot reduce them to one another, nor anticipate one starting from the other. (1992: 185; emphasis added).

Given this understanding, when we turn to the contemporary notion of *minority*, it is clear that it entitles seeds of colonialism and oppression built historically and philosophically over the centuries in order to understand/(re)construct *the Other/s* as immature and, consequently, as deserving to be ruled. Following Tzvetan Todorov (1992), from 1492 the *Other/s'* [native] self was constructed as the negative of the European Self:

European Self	Native [American] Self
Mature	Immature
Enlightened	Ignorant
Adult	Minor
Ruler	Ruled
Civilized	Barbarian

Source: Author's elaboration from concepts taken from Todorov (1992).

Furthermore, the *essentialization* of the Cartesian's notion of European Self, the *cogito*, read from a particular narrow understanding of superiority is basically the essence of *Eurocentrism*.²

Minority and racialization

This has affected not only the way subjects have been racialized and class-defined but also the way sexuality and gender performances have been constructed in modern Western societies. Because of the colonial past,

² The term refers to a process through which Europe understood itself as *civilization*, and the rest of the world was labeled/constructed as *barbaric* (Shohat and Stam, 1995: 3).

Third World countries have followed this notion even when clashing with local understandings. *Language* is also seen as an important element to construct different grammars to normalize *the Other/s*. These grammatical constructions have not only *written* the lives of *the Other/s* but also their bodies, their environments and their contexts. Everything has been affected and re-shaped according to the colonialist superiority, superiority constructed through a very particular discourse: "[...] colonial discourse typically rationalizes itself through rigid oppositions such as maturity/immaturity, civilization/barbarism, developed/developing, progressive/primitive." (Gandhi, 1998: 32). Walter D. Mignolo (2006) has studied this in relation to the European colonial enterprise after 1492. In his book *The Darker Side of the Renaissance*, he states that from the 1600s, colonization and the construction of *Otherness* were the major enterprises of European subjects; therefore "[...] modernity is the period, in the history of the West, in which contact and domination between human cultures reached their peak." (2006: 217).

If it is the *cogito*, read in this particular way, that has embedded a particular notion of Enlightenment, it is not surprising that could also carry out the enforcement or institutionalization of racism and xenophobia since it prioritizes and privileges one understanding of human beings over others in continuity with the colonial enterprise carried out after 1492 (Gandhi, 1998: 30). Again Mignolo also acknowledges this fact when he affirms that the European subject determines the validity of these multiple levels of knowledge. In other words, or in Mignolo's words, the *locus of enunciation* (European subject) determines the *truthness* of truth, excluding from this non-European knowledge. In both cases, the author denounces a center/periphery power dynamic that privileges European knowledge as such while denying this status to other forms of knowledge. A highlight on Mignolo's contribution in this respect is the implicit statement that the European Self considers *itself* the determining subject of the world, even before the famous Cartesian *cogito* or the Kantian definition of *Aufklärung* would arise. A second highlight on his contribution is that he shows how the European conception of history posits Europe itself as the center of the modern world even before a Hegelian construction of the modern notion of history (in his *Phenomenology of the Spirit*), and even before the arising of historiography

as a discipline.³ What this implies is the erosion and/or co-optation of non-European forms of knowledge that are silenced or exoticized within the dominant matrix (in this case, Amerindian knowledge as *res dominam* of European colonial power.) In other words, the formation of knowledge in the sixteen hundreds already transformed Amerindian subjects into subalterns *o(su)bjects*, universalizing the European particular and erasing Amerindian particularity (Quijano, 2000: 4). Given this context, it is likely to understand the *Other/s* as *minor(ity)* and, therefore deserving to be “educated” and “ruled.”

Covertly, this also implies that an implicit power and will of ruling, from the ones considered privileged to those who are not, is at stake. Fanon describes vividly the consequences of this: “When I search for Man in the technique and the style of Europe, I see only a succession of negations of man, and an avalanche of murders.” (Fanon, 1963: 312). According to Michel Foucault, *Otherness* reduced to an anti-thesis of the European self is dangerous and deviant. (Gandhi, 1998: 39). Consequently, the expected way for the European self of relating to *Otherness*, which s/he sees as a threat, is through violence and conquest, as so clearly Gandhi has stated: “Accordingly, just as modern rationality has often attributed a dangerous Otherness to the figure(s) of the deviant, it has also endeavor violently repress all symptoms of cultural alterity.” (Gandhi, 1998: 40).

Michel Foucault has also noticed this. Exactly two centuries after the publication of Kant’s response in *Berlinische Monatschrift*, Foucault asks the same question in his article “What is Enlightenment?” (1984) Among his questions about the Kantian response, Foucault observes the problem of universalizing the European subject:

A [...] difficulty appears here in Kant’s text in his use of the word “mankind,” *Menschheit*. The importance of this word in the Kantian conception of history is well known. *Are we to understand that the entire human race is caught up in the process of Enlightenment? In that case, we must imagine Enlightenment as a historical change that affects the political and social existence of all people on the face of the earth. Or are we to understand that it involves a change affecting what constitutes the humanity of human beings?* (1984: 35; emphasis added).

³ This is a fact that Mignolo notes in his second *Afterword* (2006: 427).

In Foucault’s words we clearly see the danger of narrowing the Kantian contribution to the understanding of the Self and reducing the notion of humanity to a particular group of subjects: the European subject. Given this dynamic it is not surprising to see the effects of colonialism in the world. Once again I should state that many intellectuals such as Sartre and Fanon, trained in the European school of thought have fought against that colonial ideology. This shows how discourses that attempt to become hegemonic are almost always contested. However, if Fanon is correct in pointing out the presence in colonialism of a relationality based on the dialectic of Master/Slave, and when the slave has assumed the discourse of the master, it is possible that every human being around the world has been exposed to this kind of discourse and participated in it. From here the task to be mindful and aware of this in order to seek our liberation. Decolonization, as Enrique Dussel (2002: 256) would argue, is still a project to be done, which slowly is evolving by the arising of consciousness of those “ignored” and “excluded” by former colonial regimes. However, the work of both Descartes and Kant reified that conquest ideology. Racial ideologies also contributed to the strengthening of the “superior” European Self.

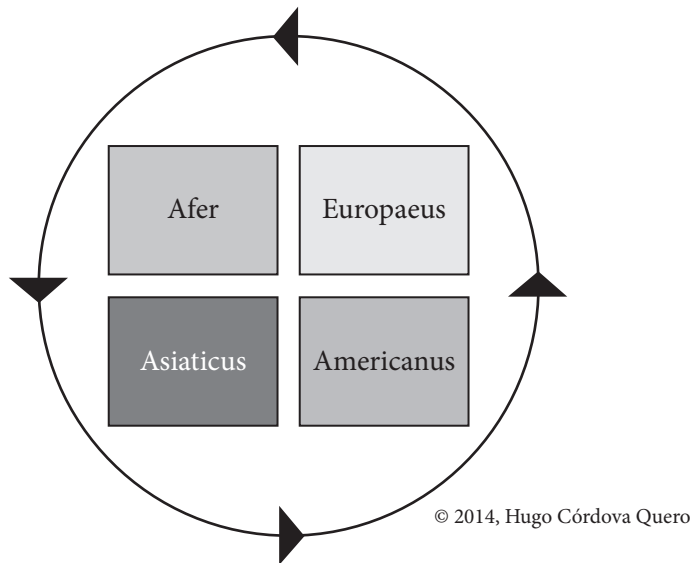
European racial ideologies

In 1758, the Swedish scientist Carl Linnaeus published his *System Nature*, establishing the modern taxonomy of human races, which he characterized as follows:

- *Americanus*: “red, choleric, right size, with dark skin and dark, lank hair and thick, with thick lips, big nose, chin almost beardless, stubborn, happy with his luck, freedom-loving, painted the body with colored lines combined in different ways.” (Bitlloch, 1996).
- *Europaesus*: “white, sanguine, muscular, clear and abundant hair, inconstant, inventive, totally covered with clothes, governed by laws” (idem).
- *Asiaticus*: “yellow, gloomy, narrow, black hair, brown eyes, severe, lavish, wearing long robes, governed by opinion” (idem).

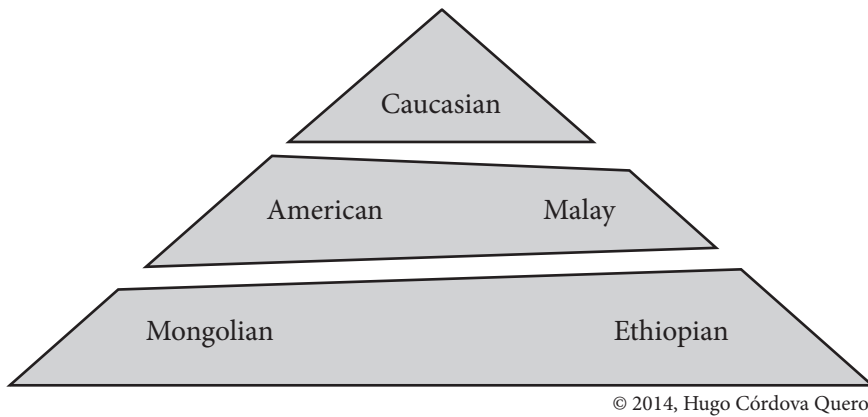
- *Afer*: “black, phlegmatic, with curly hair, wide nose, cunning, lazy, body rubbed with oil or grease, ruled by arbitrary wills” (idem).

Linnaeus’ studies had a more geographically tone, that is, he sought to make sense of the people in relation to their places of residence. When Linnaeus divided humanity into these four categories apparently did not seek to pass judgment about the goodness or badness of the peoples of the world, only to realize its observation on the experience of the place where they live and how humans act in the known continents. This is not to say that Linnaeus did not have any prejudice. However, his intention was possibly to describe the world as he saw it. Its structure was more circular than hierarchical as the following graphic shows:



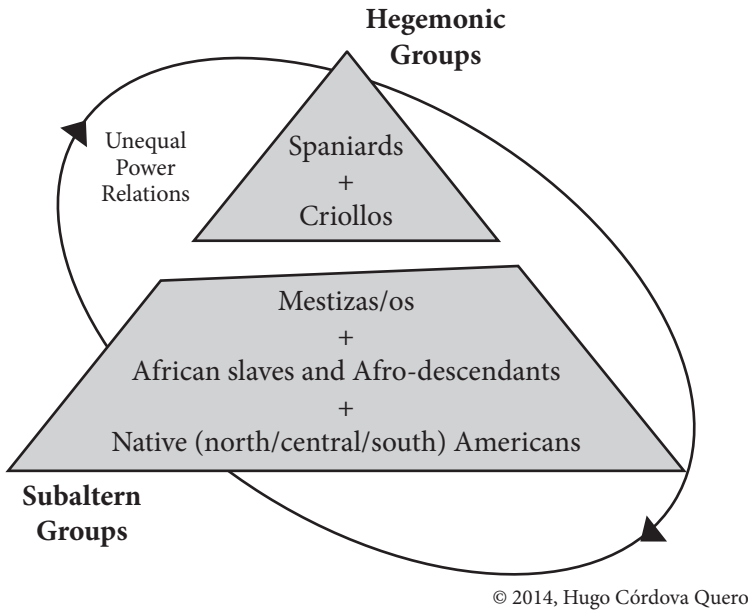
However, Friedrich Blumenbach —one of Linnaeus’ disciples— coined and gave rise to the term “white race” that has largely defined race relations in the Western world along modern and contemporary times. Blumenbach in 1795 introduced a different concept, and not based on geography but on subjective valuations. By doing this “small change”, Gould (1994) tells us, opened the foundation on which modern notions of race and racism were constructed. We believe it is important to know

how the white race became in category and occupy their place in the racial dynamic in the West. Blumenbach defined five racial categories: (a) Mongolian or yellow, (b) American or red (Native American), (c) Caucasian or white, (d) Malay or brown (Southeast Asia), and (e) Ethiopian or black. We can represent this typology in a pyramid based on Mongolian and Ethiopic categories as the base of the pyramid, while the American and Malaysian medium acting categories link to the top of the pyramid is occupied by the Caucasian category. The following graphic illustrates his model:



Notice how from a more circular hierarchical understanding of the different peoples of the world (present in studies of Linnaeus) the transition to a more pyramidal structure gives rise to white privileges as the best of humanity (in the Blumenbach) studies. From there, humanity is “degenerating” in other races —this is the actual term used by Blumenbach in the 1795 edition of his work—.

Gould (1994) have stated that Blumenbach himself was not a racist person, although his work became an important source for modern racism. The reason why Blumenbach created the category “Caucasian” was because — according to his understanding — human beings from there were more beautiful than other inhabitants of the planet. Thus, Blumenbach opened the way for other scientists to entrench racial ideas of European superiority over the rest of the planet, as the following graphic shows for the case of Latin America:



The colonial binary “majority/minority”

Given this context, it is likely to understand *the Other/s* as *minor(ity)* and, therefore deserving to be educated/ruled. Coming back to the particular understanding of the Kantian notion of Enlightenment, which could be read as *adulthood-childhood*, I suggest to apply this notion to the term *minority* as it is displayed in the public sphere/discourse in order to unpack its dynamics. Therefore, whether ethnic, social/class, sexual/gender or political *minority*, the notion of mentoring/ruling them is constantly present, most of the times at *unconscious levels*, in the mind of the subject who constitutes the implicit *majority*. Of course, if the notion of *minority* is a construction, so is the notion of *majority*. Paraphrasing Jean-Paul Sartre (1948: 143), “it is the *majority* who creates the *minority*.” In the same direction, the work of Sylvia Wynter (1990) identifies a similar pattern when she explains:

As such, the category minority is always already a subordinated category within the organizing principle of difference/deference of our present “symbolic contract” and of the mode of particular “nature” to which its

specific secular ontology "ties us down" metaphysically. As a result we are just restricted to our negative signifier function (i.e., functioning to constitute majority discourse as an opiate-inducing signifier so that it can maintain its "narcissistic advantage") [...] (1990: 458).

In other words, the notion of *minority* presupposes the need of a counterpart, the *majority*, which is construed in the very moment that the notion of *minority* arises. That is to say, *the Other/s* force the dominant subject to reveal/assume itself, or as Gandhi defines it, ". . . an ethically unsustainable omission of the Other." (1998: 39). If the notion of *minority* entitles the question about *Otherness*, the former may well function as offering legitimation for the controlling of the latter as well as a safe category for its containment. On the underside, it also posits a new problem for *the Other/s*: the choice between radical alterity and assimilation, binary that can be destroyed- by looking, for example at *mestizaje* (Anzaldúa, 1987), *hybridity* (García Canclini, 1995), or at queer radical movements (Jindal, 2004: 25) as a *third space* for the contestation of this dynamic. In other words, the *minority* has to undergo a process of being assimilated, co-opted to the mainstream; and therefore erased or (re)constructed in order to be accepted and safely controlled. When it fails in doing so, the *minority* becomes a threat to the *majority* and, therefore, subject to its elimination.

The problem with this worldview is a narrow vision of the dynamics behind the construction, because in some cases, the *minority* is the *majority* numerically while the *majority* is the *minority* that holds the wholeness of power and can oppress those whom they construct as *minority*. In other words, the term *ethnic minority* is usually seen as a way to define those who are oppressed by groups that hold power as an *ethnic majority*. In his book *Rethinking Ethnicity*; Eric Kaufmann (2004: 1-2) also proposes to look at the issue of *dominant minorities*. The importance of the concept brought by Kaufmann resides on the possibility of expanding the notion of *minority* to uncover two different aspects that frequently are not mentioned in its common understanding.

On the one hand, if we only concentrate in analyzing those sectors who are labeled as *minority* as non-holders of power, we miss the possibility to identify those sectors, which can be labeled as *dominant*

minority by holding the main power. This is evident in regimes, such as the former Apartheid rulers in South Africa, where a *white minority* became the *dominant minority* by ruling the vast *black majority*.

On the other hand, by homogenizing all ethnic/sexual groups under a unique category of *minority*, it is impossible to uncover the multiple dynamics of hierarchies among those groups that are brought together. This is evident when we look at some Jewish or Italian communities in the United States that find their way to obtain some rights/privileges. They are co-opted and seen as part of the white sector within the system while other *minorities* keep fighting/reclaiming the same benefit. Similarly, this can be said about the different/multiple communities of gays and lesbians competing for certain rights and privileges within society, as in the case of the recognition of domestic partnerships, especially in relation to health insurance, while bisexual, transsexual, intersex, and/or que(e)ring communities clearly do not get the same benefits.

These two issues are better identified when we look at the intersection of different dynamics: race/ethnicity, class, citizenship/legal status, sexual orientation, gender performances, marital status, religious affiliation and political ideology, among others. For example: a gay white male in San Francisco who is middle-class and US citizen under-employing a Mexican straight male who is from a lower class and illegal immigrant. Who is the oppressor and who is the oppressed in this relationality? Which is the category we use to define it? The issue becomes really complex when we bring all the categories to their intersection. However, humanity resides in those intersections constantly that is the way we are constructed as such. Nevertheless, given this vast confluence of issues, we should wonder if there would ever exist such a thing as an implicit *majority*. In other words, in opening up the analysis to concentrate not only in those sectors who fight for power/rights but also those who hold power and grant rights, we start to see not only the construction of a *minority* but also the construction of an implicit *majority* that lack the realm of reality. Furthermore, its colonial basement is then revealed. Even so, where that *majority* could be located in hierarchical society is still in question. Furthermore, given the fact that a *majority* could be identified, that would still not solve the lack of recognizing *Otherness* as *alter idem*, in other words, the identification in sameness/equality of *the*

Other/s instead of difference/inequality as it is traditionally understood, i.e. Fanon's analysis of *the Manichean divide* (1967: 189-190). Basically, Fanon understands colonialism as a binary symbiotic system that divides the world into positive/negative terms, being those terms white/black, assigning opposite characteristics to every term of the binary, that are transformed into expression such as "white = good" / "black = bad" or "white = beauty" / "black = ugliness." Given this structure, if the white term is at the top of the pyramid, the Negro is at the very bottom. In Fanon's words: "The archetype of the lowest values is represented by the Negro... in the remotest depth of the European unconscious an inordinately black hollow has been made in which the most immoral impulses, the most shameful desires lie dormant." In other words, the status of equality of *the Other/s* considered as *minority* is a construction yet to come, unless it is performed through a process of cooptation that erases vestiges of alterity in *the Other/s*. Given this latter situation, we could only think in extreme cases where the result is the elimination of *the Other/s*, i.e.: Nazism in Germany; ethnic cleansing in Serbia-Croatia and Rwanda, to mention a few examples. The lesser and more common process of cooptation of *the Other/s* is assimilation, which basically erases the identity of those assimilated. Assimilation is a colonial device to erase *otherness*, whose extreme deployment is carried out through total annihilation and/or genocide.

In relation to this last point, a word about the psychic conflicts of *the Other/s* who are catalogued as *minority* should be said. Fanon argues that, during the process of *decolonization*, human beings themselves need to change. Colonization, through a process of unconscious internalization, operates from inside, although we might note that Fanon takes this from Hegel's dialectic of the Master/Slave. Nonetheless, and as I have said before, he categorizes the colonial world as *Manichean/binary*. This *Manicheism/binarism* dehumanizes *the other/s* and, through a process of labeling, categorizing them as incomplete humans, or as *second-class* humans. What this binaries produce is the lack of human dignity to the point of conceiving *the other/s* as animals that deserve to be ruled, mistreated (Fanon, 1963: 41-42), or even destroyed. The conquest of the Americas, the colonial regimes after Enlightenment and the contemporary notion of *minority* in the modern/capitalist world-

system, all of them share the same goal, which is to (re)shape/(re)define Otherness in order to colonize it.

Fanon (1963) does not believe in the myth of the *noble savage*. He acknowledges that the oppressed unconsciously wants to be like the oppressor. He states, "The colonized man is an envious man. [...] It is true, for there is no native who does not dream at least once a day of setting himself up in the settler's place." (1963: 39). Fanon is aware that colonization has gotten deep into the minds of the oppressed to the point of operating from inside. The *logic of desire* operates from within and enslaves human beings to the point of keeping them in this oppressive relationship with the oppressor. The difference between the Hegelian and the Fanonian dialectic of the master and the slave is that the latter denounces the identification of the slave with the life of the master (Gandhi, 1998: 19). In Fanon's words: "The native is an oppressed person whose permanent dream is to become the persecutor." (1963: 53). This is not to say that the oppressed is guilty of a conscious engagement with the oppressor. Instead, we should look at this relation as colonialism operating unconsciously from inside/within the oppressed, making him or her into a slave. This is the deeper root of colonialism.

140

When we move towards an understanding of sexuality, the contribution of Fanon is that this *Manicheism/binarism* is not only the oppression of one ethnic group over others, but this has been reproduced in human beings all over the world in different aspects. Bodies as well as sexualities have been colonized. The *compulsory* characteristic of heterosexualism that requires everything in society (culture, fashion, art, film, theology, sexualities, gender, for example) to be *straight/heterosexual* is also an operation of colonialism. Given this situation, the cooptation or assimilation of the sexual *minority* carries the notion of non-acceptance of *the Other/s* and their *conversion/transformation* in order not to be excluded/exterminated. Nonetheless, assimilation has as a consequence the *erasure* of the identity of *the Other/s*, genocide being one of the most extreme forms of erasure of *Otherness*. However, there is still one more layer to analyze and it is the fact that there is a deep connection with the psychology of race.

Slavoj Žižek (1998: 155) in his essay "Love thy Neighbor? No, Thanks!" analyses the relation between racism and psychoanalysis,

especially in relation to the *enigma* of the Other. In redefining the Hegelian dialectic of Master and Slave using the notion of *jouissance* and the images of fool/knave, Žižek unpacked this *enigma* of the Other. In Lacan's conception, *jouissance* is the pleasure/sexual pleasure that substitutes the relationship “child-mother,” and precedes the child's knowledge of separation. The important point here is that *jouissance* points to a certain connection beyond the principle of pleasure, but that is not separated from it. Žižek points out:

One can see, now, how each of the two positions —that of the fool and the knave— is sustained by its own type of *jouissance*: the enjoyment of snatching back from the Master part of the *jouissance* he stole from us, and the enjoyment that directly pertains to the subject's pain. Psychoanalysis can help the critique of ideology clarify precisely the status of this paradoxical *jouissance* as the payment the exploited, the servant, gets for his serving the Master. This *jouissance*, of course, always emerges within a certain fantasmatic field; the crucial precondition of breaking the chains of servitude is thus to “traverse the fantasy” that structures our *jouissance* in a way that keeps us attached to the Master, that makes us accept the framework of the social relationship of domination (1998: 156).

In this quotation, Žižek points to the relationship of domination of the Other. But the interesting element that he brings to the analysis is the one of pleasure that exist in this relationship Master/Slave. The dangerous element in Žižek analysis is the boundary where this *jouissance* arises in the slave. It is true that any regime cannot sustain its power without a certain level of collaboration, whether through fear or brain-washing ideological techniques exercise over the Other. But when death or torture is present in the life of the Other, this analysis fall short.

The analysis of Žižek using psychoanalytic elements is enlightening when applied to political and economic processes. It is in this context that racism comes on board. In his example about the cornering of an African American man from a white gang, he points to some extent how *jouissance* could be present in the slave. Although, the extension or universality of this example to other situations is still not clear. Žižek relates that the white gang shouts to the African American man: “Spit on me! Tell me I'm scum!” as a way to then legitimize the brutal beating or

lynching. He points out that certainly for the African American man's true desire, he wants to call the white men scum, but at the same time, he shows how this situation reverses the terms of the dialectic Master/Slave. Through making the African American man shout to them "scum," the white men finds legitimate to respond violently to this "aggression" from the African American man. At the end, the victimizer becomes victim while the victim becomes perpetrator.

This is clear in the politics of war when a country bombs and attacks other country and then claims to be a victim of the aggressions of the defense of the country under attack. International politics have long shown this reversal of the dialectic. This is not disconnected from the intersections of sexuality and racism, when the lynched one is a queer folk or an immigrant, generally undocumented. The straight man is the one in control of the gaze, but when the queer man gazes back, the straight man feels threatened and responds with violence, whether verbal or physical. This is the main argument of every hate crime plea for innocence: The perpetrator conceives of himself as victim. The same occurred to immigrants who are seen as a threat to the identity of a nation. This fantasy over the Other, which posits the slave as a perpetrator, not only objectifies the Other but also function even in the absent of the Other. This is how fantasy works; it takes elements of reality but recreate an object that is not outside but inside the Master. When the fantasy becomes true is because of a mechanism of projection of the fantasy-object to an objectified outsider that fits with the characteristics of the fantasy-object. In other words, only when the immigrant is dirty, uneducated and conservative in the mind of the educated national, and in turn the immigrant is seen as this object, it is then when he/she becomes a threaten, a process that ignores the multiple identities under the immigrant umbrella. For this process, Žižek uses the Kantian phrase "synthesis of imagination" (1998: 162).

For Žižek, *jouissance* is present in this process of corroboration between the real and the imaginary/fantasized object. He states: "All this is crucial for the functioning of ideology in 'everyday' sexism or racism: Ideology's ultimate problem is how to 'contain' the threatening inside from 'spilling out' and overwhelming us" (1998: 167). During the military dictatorship in Argentina, the fear of the communist threat

endangered the life of people whose ideas or social commitment did not fulfill the categorization of the idealized/fantasized *nationalistic* Other but were closer to the idealized/fantasized *guerrilla* Other. Those were the ones who suffered abduction, torture and death. Žižek explains that this is possible because the “real” Other is denounced as a threat, “since the kernel of Otherness resides in the regulation of its *jouissance*” (1998: 169). The result of this is the de-essentialization of the Other and her/his “occupation.” Žižek is able to show in his analysis the pathology/perversion/sadism present in the situations he describes, especially in relation to the “public” and secret/fantasmatic dynamic to justify them. But he fails in the ethical parameters through which the *jouissance* of the Master becomes legitimized in itself. In other words, it fails to point to the ways and mechanisms through which this secret/fantasmatic dynamic obscures the repercussion of the Master in the Slaves. That is, the story of the survivors of the tortures should also be interrogated/listened in relation to their reaction to the *jouissance* of the Master in their actions. At the same time, it blinds the displays of daily life where the *jouissance* of the Master becomes legitimized and publicly accepted.

Liberating the oppressed? “minority” dilemmas among theologians

Latin American Liberation Theology has encountered these situations quite often. For example, Juan Luis Segundo in his book *Liberación de la Teología* deals directly with the issues of popular culture and popular religiosity. It is here that we see some limitations of Segundo by his closeness to a Marxist socio-economical analysis. Although in chapter 7 he enters in dialogue with —and sometimes argues against of— other authors such as Renato Poblete, Aldo Büntig and Segundo Galilea, we leave the chapter with the sensation that the terms “minority”, “mass” and “popular” do not reveal the concrete people behind them. When we arrive to the following chapter, the situation does not change. We are not denying the incredible ability of Segundo to analyze socio-cultural and historical situations of Latin America reality, but the spirit of his analysis is so broad that the “real” individuals behind his analysis get occluded:

it seems that Segundo is thinking about Christianity as a small minority that functions as “organic intellectuals”, to be put in Gramscian terms. However, this does not bring the different realities of “the poor” to a place of visible agency (Hennelly, 1977: 132).⁴ In the introduction prepared for the 15th anniversary edition of *A Theology of Liberation*, Gutierrez (1993: xxi) has a word about this issue when he states:

The world of the poor is a universe in which the socio-economic aspect is basic but not all-inclusive. [...] At the same time, it is important to realize that being poor is a way of living, thinking, loving, praying, believing, and hoping; spending leisure time, and struggling for a livelihood.

I believe that Gutierrez in this quotation is pointing to the same direction than Indecent Theology and other Liberation Theologies. However, in the past production of TLL there is an intrinsic absent of some “poor” because the category “poor” is only related to economy. The same occurred in the main writings of Gustavo Gutierrez, Leonardo Boff, Jon Sobrino, and Ignacio Ellacurria, among others. This is clear in the words of Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff (1986: 12) when they state:

Liberation theology has found its source by confronting faith against the injustice done to the poor. It is not only the individual poor who knocks on our door asking for alms. The poor to whom we are referring here is a collective, the popular class that includes more than the proletariat studied by Marx (it is a mistake to identify the poor of Liberation Theology with the proletariat, as many critiques do): they are the workers exploited within the capitalist system; they are the underemployed, the marginalized from the productive system — a reserved army, eternal labor force to substitute the employed—; they are the laborers in the fields; they are the temporary workers. All this block of oppressed socially and historically constitutes the poor as a partial phenomenon.

There was certain paternalism attached to that notion of “the poor” as deserving to be “made aware” of “their class consciousness” and to “be taught” about “their liberation.” If for *hegemonic* groups, the *subaltern*

⁴ For a better understanding of Segundo’s ideas on these issues, see his work *Masas y Minorías en la Dialéctica Divina de la Liberación* (1973).

groups were the "ethnic" and "class" minor(ity), for *liberation theologians*, the *poor* were the "economic" and "spiritual" minor(ity). In other words, in Liberation Theology, "the poor" became the sanitized minority, the gender-neutral and asexual object of liberationist's actions. Thus, I am referring to the impossibility to genderize, sexualize, and/or culturalize the poor, taking off from a strictly economic notion. It seems that gender in relation to the constructions of "female" and "male" identities, sexual orientation and "deviant" performances of sexuality are absent. In the attempt to recover "the poor," it itself became an abstraction that was not all the time recognized in its differences, which are highly important both for a process of liberation and for the hermeneutic circle. The "poor" gay, the "poor" prostitute among many other examples, are as important as the "poor" *poor* in the strict economic sense. Althaus-Reid (2000: 30) calls this the "asexual poor": "[In Liberation Theology,] [t]he poor, as in any old-fashioned moralizing Victorian tale, were portrayed as the deserving and asexual poor". This would be another distinction as well as contribution that the present generation of liberation theologians is bringing to light. Therefore, the "poor" gay, the "poor" prostitute, the "poor" transvestite, the usual "sexual minorities", were excluded from the "sanitized" *poor*. This reveals how the category "poor" is as illusory as the construction of the categories "majority/minority."

One could think that after almost forty years in the path of Liberation Theology, the unheard different "poor" would take upfront participation in its main-stream writings. Sadly, even with the incorporation of women, the people represented in TLL are so mainly because of their economic and socio-political status. The issues of everyday life, as sexuality, gender, domestic violence, and the like are most of the time mentioned as a "by the way" but never taking seriously as a *locus* of praxis and reflection (the famous "first stage" and "second stage" of the Boff brothers (1986: 17), even when theology itself is constantly referring to sexuality in many covert ways.

Regardless the growing production of queer scholars and ministers such as Marcella Althaus-Reid, Thomas Hanks, Roberto Gonzalez, André Muskoff, and Mario Ribas, among a few others, those issues remain insular in mainstream TLL production. Most of the time, the "important" issues such as economic deprivation, social outcast, and the

like take the focus of TLL. Without denying the incredible importance and devastating daily consequences of these issues for millions of human beings in Latin America, their solving will be a continuous unstable and threatened project if issues of everyday life remain unnoticed —especially at the level of the intra/extra social relationality based on sexuality.

Nonetheless, this absence, that could be understood in those years of political turmoil and systematic impoverishment of Latin America, was carried out further even in the years of globalization and democracy. In consequence, in 1989 another book was published. We are talking about *The Future of Liberation Theology*, which is a *Festschrift* in honor of Gustavo Gutierrez. Although Carter Hayward mentions these issues in her article, when we reach the last section of the book we find out that even when “women” are included; queer folks still remain excluded. We could say that they *are* included when we talk about the poor and –now– about women, but it is an argument hard to believe. It seems the *future* of liberation theology from this hetero-patriarchal perspective is embedded in what Hayward (1989: 409) describes as being “so tightly fastened in the texture of patriarchy that it may well be the last-noticed impediment to a fully just society, indeed the stuff of the ‘final revolution.’” I hope that more liberation theologians will see this as a challenge and not as another deviance to be normalized.

146

In his book *Liberación de la Teología*, Segundo questions the validity of any theology labeled as “Christian” if their basic task is not related to the biblical text (1975: 37-38). If we cannot disagree with Segundo, at the least we should question his dogmatic position of denying the label of “Christian” to theologies that do not proceed in the “correct” order of his hermeneutic circle and do not take the biblical text in the same way. It seems that there is no space for deviancy in Segundo’s position and in this sense, he does not differ from Colonial theologies such as Classical theology, the same one he is critiquing throughout the entire book. From Indecent theology I would like to remember the reader that it is important to open-up theology to all the situations that produce oppressed and outcast people, not only for queer people but for all humanity. Even from our own good-intentioned liberationist closets!

It may be fair to say that the discourse of TLL from the generation of theologians in the ‘70s and ‘80s have a strong economic horizon.

Consequently, the poor was reduced to an economic unit within the intricate net of dominance. Althaus-Reid (2000: 32-33) in talking about the TLL production from the past states:

It was a moral construction of the poor as native. They never thought about the poor as, for instance, a sweet transvestite who needs to prostitute himself in a night club to survive in a life of extreme marginality and oppression. The poor native Christian was restricted heterosexual model. [...] [But h]eterosexual people in Latin America also live in asphyxiating closets.

We should add that theology, even Liberation Theology “live in asphyxiating closets”. How to liberate Liberation Theology from its own closets? How to let its liberating message reach the everyday life of all the poor and not the “fantasy-land” minority poor? I remember my early years of theological formation, listening to some liberation theologians teaching me; how much they would proclaim “the option for the poor” while at the same time condemning queer people as if “poor” and “queer” were two categories that never could intersect with each other. It occurred to me very early in my formation that maybe we need to take the label “poor” to more concrete examples in real life. Otto Maduro (2006) in examining of the issue of liberating theology points out to this very fact. He explains that oppressed people, because of categories of “indecency” used to degrade them, tend to be harsher against queer people than the elites in power. He states:

Maybe that is why those who resist economic, political and cultural oppression are often more scrupulous than their own oppressors precisely in that dimension of sexual and gender relations. In order to show the falsity of the stereotypes used against them and in order to claim a higher moral ground than the elites, the oppressed often adopt, exacerbating them, the dominant criteria of morality and decency, thus reducing morality to the strict observance of certain traditional, dominant patterns regarding sexual relationships, sexual identity, and gender construction. (2006: 27)

This quotation of Maduro helps to understand why in some revolutions in Latin America (the implicit majority), queer people (the minority) also suffered the heavy hand of the new powers. An emblematic case is the one of Cuba and Fidel's revolution, which imprisoned Queer folks as criminals (Quiroga, 2000: 124-144). It may also explain why today in first world countries, queer movements are becoming more distant from gay and lesbian groups who, for example, have made gay marriage their only banner. I believe that the latter are attempting to disrupt the stereotypes over queer people by assuming heterosexual marriage as "the norm" to rule queer relationalities. This, of course, is done at expense of diminishing their political force by distancing from queer movements that do not consider gay marriage as the main criteria to challenge homophobic stereotypes. Even within Christian churches and movements we have strong episodes of homophobic acts throughout the history of Christianity. On this Maduro (2006: 27) continues his line of thought by stating:

148

This tendency is noticeable in many labour, socialist, nationalist and/or revolutionary movements across human history and geography. A similar propensity is observable in liberation movements arising from religious traditions which, during centuries, have condensed sacred duties into purity codes regarding ethnic, bodily and sexual relationships.

In following Maduro we can affirm that TLL was not free from the "Christian" duty of monitoring and censoring the morality of the Christian "poor". In fact, the absence of a critical analysis on this matter due to a heavy leaning towards economic and socio-political aspects of society has created a vacuum that can no longer stand its emptiness. Around the world, many Christians have begun to question the authority of Christianity over sexuality. Following Otto Maduro (2006: 27) "The poor", thus, became the moralizing *dominant minority* of Christianity.

In other words, what has been pointed out in this research is the fact that *minority discourse* functions a rhetorical technology of colonialism in order to both contain *Otherness* as well as occlude *dominant minorities* and their concentration of power with the subsequent display of oppressive politics over *the other/s*. The notion of *minority* as a rhetorical

technology is related to the subject that has produced/still reproduces such a discourse: the European Self. Through this connection, the historical link and continuity between former colonial regimes and current *coloniality* through *globalization*, (Neo) liberalism and politic-economic re-alignments in relation to immigrations and force displacements of millions of people is undeniable. Further research would benefit from exploring the impact of this continuity in different areas of the modern/colonial/capitalist world-system, especially through the experience and issues of forced migrants, cooptation of new *minorities* and deployment of colonial politic-economic actions over large sectors of the world population. In order to do this, the notion of *minority* should also be decolonized.

To decolonize the notion of minority implies to denounce the mechanism of privilege self-ascribed by the majority. Within the theological realm, to de-sanitize “the poor” implies to allow their humanity to come back to them, to open the door of the closet to hear their “sexual stories as revelation” (Althaus-Reid, 2000: 148) in order to de-center the moralizing expectation resting on its shoulder as dominant minority. One way to do this is by bringing sexual stories up front again, whether by reading the Bible sexually or by listening to lovers’ stories as a revelation (Althaus-Reid, 2000: 148). Althaus-Reid (2000: 131-132) affirms:

Sexual and gender issues are not addenda in the minutes of a meeting, but key epistemological and organizational elements which, if ignored, never allow us to think further and differently.

That would help to highlight individuals as receivers of the love of God, that is, all people with their (sexual) stories, their hopes and their dreams. These experiences would allow its discourses to pass through our bodies and our senses, our daily experiences, and go with us from bed to the temple. At the same time, Queer theologies take into account that daily-lived experiences are important to be remembered and that all individuals are shaped by their culture, their ethnicity and their various experiences of the divine and that at those intersections lies the richness and complexity of being human.

Conclusion

Coming of age is indeed not needing to be mentored neither by ideologies of moral decency nor economic power nor racial/ethnic demarcations, but to queerly be/come part of communities of friends that display the love of the queer divinity amidst us. This challenges TLL as well as queer theologies to not sanitize/desexualize those in subaltern positions of power. On the contrary, it requires for theologians to exercise reflexiveness and critique as to where and when oppressive ideologies become ingrain in our theo(ideo)logical constructions. To allow the sexualized/racialized/disempowered “poor” to “come of age” confronts the positions of privilege of those usually speaking “on behalf of” them. This has long contributed to minoritize the “poor,” the “fantasy-land” minority poor! This cannot continue if we are to seek further liberation. Dismantling the notion of “minority” as a colonial device would definitely contribute to liberation. It is our task to walk this decolonial path.

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