

# Journal of Hispanic / Latino Theology

---

Volume 22 | Number 1

Article 6

---


June 2020

## Cultivating a Decolonial Feminist Integral Ecology: Extractive Zones and the Nexus of the Coloniality of Being/Coloniality of Gender

Melissa Pagán

Mount St. Mary's University, Los Angeles, [jlsantana@smu.edu](mailto:jlsantana@smu.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://repository.usfca.edu/jhlt>

 Part of the [Catholic Studies Commons](#), [Christianity Commons](#), [Latina/o Studies Commons](#), [Other Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Pagán, Melissa "Cultivating a Decolonial Feminist Integral Ecology: Extractive Zones and the Nexus of the Coloniality of Being/Coloniality of Gender," *Journal of Hispanic / Latino Theology*. Vol. 22 : No. 1 , Article 6. (2020) :72

Available at: <https://repository.usfca.edu/jhlt/vol22/iss1/6>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by USF Scholarship: a digital repository @ Gleeson Library | Geschke Center. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Hispanic / Latino Theology by an authorized editor of USF Scholarship: a digital repository @ Gleeson Library | Geschke Center. For more information, please contact [repository@usfca.edu](mailto:repository@usfca.edu).

**Cultivating a Decolonial Feminist Integral Ecology:  
Extractive Zones and the Nexus of the Coloniality of Being/Coloniality of Gender**

*Melissa Pagán*  
*Mount St. Mary's University, Los Angeles*

Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical letter *Laudato Si'* ("On Care for Our Common Home") (hereafter *LS*) elicited highly positive responses from Catholics and non-Catholics worldwide. The initial reception of *LS* seemed to mirror the jubilation that came with the election of Francis to the papacy. Progressive Roman Catholics were especially delighted at the direction in which the Catholic Church seemed to be headed with the election of its first pope from Latin America, who had foregrounded his commitments to the preferential option for the poor. Like Francis, the encyclical was considered timely, if not overdue, in drawing attention to what is arguably one of the most urgent social issues of our time, climate change. Heavily informed by liberationist conceptual frameworks and methodologies, Francis provides a comprehensive analysis to this global crisis in *LS*. For many, the content and analytical lenses utilized to explain the crisis, its underlying causes, and suggestions for action in *LS* provided a refreshingly clear and necessary resistance to oppressive structures of power inherent in the logics of late neo-liberal capitalism. This is especially true as the encyclical invites all people of good will to refuse to participate in "every form of self-centeredness and self-absorption ... to care for our brothers and sisters and for the natural environment"<sup>1</sup> and to embrace an integral ecology that is rooted in the proper view of the human person in relation to other humans, the earth, and God.

The concept of an "integral ecology" had been developing in the tradition of Catholic Social Thought (CST) for decades, though some have argued that Francis's exposition of the concept in *LS* evidenced a definitive shift in the tradition. While over its history CST had upheld

---

<sup>1</sup> Francis, *Laudato Si' (On Care for Our Common Home)*, 208.

the principle for the care of all creation, and encyclicals such as *Populorum Progressio*, *Octogesima Adveniens*, and *Caritas in Veritate* highlighted concerns over the care for creation articulated as necessary to understand “authentic human development” in relation to political and social economies, no encyclical had centered care for creation as the primary social concern to be addressed.<sup>2</sup> Thus, we have in *LS* one of the most systematic analyses of the underlying causes of our ecological crisis in the tradition of CST. The most important underlying cause brought to light in the encyclical is what Francis terms a “vile anthropocentrism”<sup>3</sup> rooted in the rational modern subject, which has deemed human technological advancement and “progress” an end in itself with no regard for the domination and destruction of land and lives that such unchecked human activity requires. Francis’s diagnosis of the problem, then, is located at the intersections between an inherently wrong view of the human person in the “modern era” and the ways this view has furthered the oppressive workings of a variety of institutional ecologies—social, cultural, and political—to the detriment of the environment and the most vulnerable. As such, his articulation of an integral ecology aims to destabilize the “tyrannical” modern anthropological subject to center the care for creation within a proper view of the human person and establish a proper “human ecology” that will attend to both the “cries of the earth and the cries of the poor.”<sup>4</sup> Francis claims that “a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach.

---

<sup>2</sup> Christiana Z. Peppard. “Hydrology, Theology, and *Laudato Si’*,” *Theological Studies* 77, no. 2: 417.

<sup>3</sup> While Francis maintains an anthropocentric view, privileging humans as accorded with a special dignity in relation to the rest of the created order, he critiques this form of anthropocentrism associated with the modern subject, which lacks in any sense of responsibility for the care for the planet.

<sup>4</sup> Francis, *Laudato Si’*, 49. In his borrowing of the phrase “the cries of the earth and the cries of the poor” from Leonardo Boff, Francis reveals some of his liberationist commitments. See Boff’s

Therefore, the integral ecology he proposes requires both an “adequate anthropology” and an analysis of how a variety of social, cultural, and political ecologies affect all human persons.<sup>5</sup> The integral ecology espoused in *LS* is now regularly being referenced by both laity and clergy and played a vital role in the development of the final document of the Pan-Amazonian Synod, *The Amazon: New Paths for the Church and for an Integral Ecology*.<sup>6</sup> Like the many individuals extolling Francis’ *LS*, I am in general agreement with his points of emphasis and convinced by his rejection of the modern rational anthropological subject, as the embrace of this subject has led to a greater prevalence and easier endorsement of sustaining an “extractive view” of peoples and lands.

In her text *The Extractive Zone: Social Ecologies and Decolonial Perspectives*, decolonial theorist and scholar of critical indigenous studies Macarena Gómez-Barris analyzes the continuing pernicious effects of the utilization of “extractive capital” on indigenous lands. She highlights practices undertaken by indigenous feminists and artists in various parts of Latin America that reveal how the development of a decolonial aesthetics<sup>7</sup> may inherently undermine

---

systematic analysis on the relationship between the earth and the poor in *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* (Orbis Books, 1997).

<sup>5</sup> Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 49, 118.

<sup>6</sup> Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for the Pan-Amazon Region, *The Amazon: New Paths for the Church and for an Integral Ecology*, <http://www.sinodoamazonico.va/content/sinodoamazonico/en/documents/final-document-of-the-amazon-synod.html>. The Synod took place in October 2019.

<sup>7</sup> Decolonial aesthetics invites us to challenge the centering of Western aesthetic categories of beauty, justice, etc. that imbue current discussions of philosophical and theological aesthetics. We must allow for the expansion and inclusion of queer feminist decolonial epistemologies, geographies, and bodies to inform how we understand art, beauty, and justice. We must decolonize theological aesthetics.

and promote resistance to colonizers' lenses that have created an "extractive view" of persons and lands. According to Gómez-Barris, this extractive lens continues to

render territories and peoples extractible ... through a matrix of symbolic, physical, and representational violence. Therefore, the extractive view sees territories as commodities, rendering land as for the taking, while also devalorizing the hidden worlds that form the nexus of human and nonhuman multiplicity ... this viewpoint facilitates the reorganization of territories, populations, and plant and animal life into extractible data and natural resources for material and immaterial accumulation.<sup>8</sup>

The extractive view continues to be operative in the workings of late globalized capitalism. In fact, the Pan-Amazonian Synod consistently refers to "extractivist" activities as being at the heart of the destruction of the Amazon, the forced migration of persons, and the criminalization and murder of land protectors.<sup>9</sup>

While we can certainly agree to the veracity that the extractive view is predicated, at least in part, on the tyrannical anthropological subject Francis critiques so poignantly in *LS*, we should also consider the fact that the development of the modern rational subject alone did not set the stage for the widespread adoption of a colonial extractive view of lands and the peoples that inhabit them. We ought to be disquieted that the dominant framework in *LS*, which is in continuity with the dominant frameworks of theo-ethical analysis throughout the tradition of CST, analyzes our current crises by highlighting problems assumed to be unique to modernity

---

<sup>8</sup> Macarena Gómez-Barris, *The Extractive Zone: Social Ecologies and Decolonial Perspectives* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 5-6.

<sup>9</sup> Synod of Bishops, *The Amazon*.

and in discontinuity with the broader “ecology of the human” espoused by CST.<sup>10</sup> By this, I mean that Francis’s framing of the anthropological problem and his construction of an integral ecology are achieved through a critique of the logics of modernity rather than through a critique of the logics of coloniality. Privileging modernity as a frame of analysis rather than coloniality, which is its underside, creates a perception that we are analyzing a problem that is new and not one that is, as Gómez-Barris stresses, “ensconced within larger processes of war, colonization, violence, slavery, and capitalism.”<sup>11</sup>

I contend that we ought to analyze the anthropological subject at the root of the climate crisis through the purview of *modernity/coloniality*, not only modernity. Explaining and analyzing the onto-anthropological nexus of the coloniality of being/coloniality of gender, I argue that while the modern anthropological subject certainly does sustain an extractive view of peoples and lands, it is born from a prior conception of the human person, one that is born from coloniality and that continues to be present in our own theological anthropologies (natural law, complementarity) especially. These anthropologies coalesce with and thus intensify the problems associated with the modern subject insofar as they aid in creating and sustaining hierarchized systems of knowledge and being. This further entrenches our complicity in the nexus of the coloniality of being/coloniality of gender rather than empowering us to subvert it, threatening our ability to build an authentic integral ecology and thus call for the creation of a feminist

---

<sup>10</sup> Historically, the tradition of CST has made clear that it does not espouse a “modern” view of the human subject. While the tradition may adopt some of the “rights” language associated with the modern Enlightenment subject, they hold a firm line on the core differences between the human subject as bearing rights and responsibilities, as being relational, and as bearing the *imago Dei*.

<sup>11</sup> Gómez-Barris, *The Extractive Zone*, 144.

decolonial integral ecology to disrupt the nexus of the coloniality of being/coloniality of gender. To demonstrate the creative possibilities contained in a decolonial feminist integral ecology, I will provide and analyze two central concepts crucial to the cultivation of this decolonial integral ecology: *hermeneutics of el grito*, which is a renewed way to hear the cries of the earth and the cries of the poor, and *vincularidad*, which facilitates relationality and ecologies of decolonial rupture that, if incorporated into our integral ecology, would prove more helpful in resisting the extractability of bodies and lands.

### **Coloniality and the Cultivation of Extractable Zones of Being:**

#### **The Nexus of the Coloniality of Being/Coloniality of Gender**

The concept of coloniality is one that cannot be properly explained without reference to the scholarship of Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano.<sup>12</sup> As most decolonial projects engage with his framing of the concept of the coloniality of power, I will, with reference to other decolonial theorists, offer a brief summarization of Quijano's primary claims on the concept and the ways that the nexus of the coloniality of being/coloniality of gender extends from the coloniality of power. It should be made clear at the outset that coloniality is not a concept that is interchangeable with colonialism.<sup>13</sup> As decolonial theorists have noted,<sup>14</sup> while coloniality as a

---

<sup>12</sup> Quijano's development of the concept of coloniality is an engagement with sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein's world systems theory. See, for example, the piece co-authored by Anibal Quijano and Immanuel Wallerstein, "Americanness as a Concept, or the Americas in the Modern World System," *International Social Science Journal*, XLIV (1992): 549-557, and Anibal Quijano, "Questioning Race," *Socialism and Democracy* 21, no. 1 (2007): 45-53.

<sup>13</sup> The term "decolonial" and/or projects that claim to focus on "decoloniality" should also not be understood to be interchangeable with any of the following: a project on historical decolonization (though this may be part of a broader decolonial project), postcolonial projects, or projects in liberation theology.

<sup>14</sup> See especially the work of Nelson Maldonado-Torres and Walter D. Mignolo.

system of power was birthed in the colonial encounters of the fifteenth century, it is not restricted to historical and material colonialisms, as it has survived these manifestations to establish a global system of power relations relative to knowledge and being. Decolonial theorist Nelson Maldonado-Torres puts it simply by saying that “coloniality survives colonialism.”<sup>15</sup>

The notion of coloniality functions as a critique of the privileging of a “Eurocentric Marxist perspective”—one that places the development of capitalist modernity neatly within the confines of the Industrial Revolution and the philosophies of the late eighteenth century.<sup>16</sup> The critique of this framing is centered upon an understanding that the structures of modern and late capitalism actually took formation in 1492 with the conquest of the Americas. As feminist decolonial theorist Marcelle Maese-Cohen argues, the primary claim decolonial theorists put forth on this point is that

both the U.S. and Europe alike arose as much through their reliance on patron-client relations, debt peonage, the subjugation of colonized workers, and outright slavery in their colonies as through the commodification of the labor force that resulted in the system of waged labor thought to be proper to industrial capitalism.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “On the Coloniality of Being,” *Cultural Studies* 21, nos. 2-3 (March/May 2007): 243.

<sup>16</sup> Marcelle Maese-Cohen delineates each of these points in her “Toward Planetary Decolonial Feminisms,” *Qui Parle* 18, no. 2 (Summer 2010). See also Anibal Quijano’s “Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America,” *International Sociology* 15, no. 2 (June 2000) and Walter D. Mignolo’s *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011) and *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012).

<sup>17</sup> Maese-Cohen, “Toward Planetary Decolonial Feminisms.”



Part of the concern, then, is that if one ignores this fact, it can become easy to claim that the workings of colonialism are pre-modern and no longer relevant. Indeed, a central part of the decolonial project is understanding how coloniality is not only linked with historical colonialisms, though there is a linkage, but also with the systemic codifications and categorizations of knowledge and being that were, and continue to be, normalized under global coloniality.

This brings us to our next primary point: shifting the genealogy of modern capitalism from eighteenth century Europe to the fifteenth century colonial encounter enables a privileged view on the persisting consequences of coloniality, which have effects on the ways we perceive and attend to, or do not attend to, lands and bodies. Colonial projects relied upon the creation and sustenance of “subhuman identities, of the Black, of the Indian, of women, and so makes evident the intertwinement of capitalistic labor with racialization and gendering.”<sup>18</sup> Coloniality sustains them and ought to be understood as a capitalist system that enabled a new pattern of power centered around the “axis of capital.”<sup>19</sup> It also introduced a racialized hierarchy of being in an effort to “codify relations between conquering and conquered populations.”<sup>20</sup>

New social historical identities were formed [“Whites,” “Indians,” “Negroes” or “Blacks,” and “Mestizos”] ... so race was placed as one of the basic criteria to classify

---

<sup>18</sup> Maese-Cohen, “Toward Planetary Decolonial Feminisms.”

<sup>19</sup> Anibal Quijano. “Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America,” *International Sociology* 15, no. 2 (June 2000): 216.

<sup>20</sup> Quijano, “Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America,” 216.

the population in the power structure of the new society, associated with the nature and roles in the division of labor and in the control of the resources of production.<sup>21</sup>

Citing Quijano, Nelson Maldonado-Torres argues that this racialized capitalist system of power emerged from the very simple, albeit violent, question as to whether or not Indians had souls, and that the creation of a multitude of hierarchized identities hinged along racial classifications that directly reflected differing degrees of humanity. So the identities created at the colonial encounter were discursively framed as bearing a particular value, with some having superiority over others, “and such superiority is premised on the degree of humanity attributed to the identities in question.”<sup>22</sup> It is important to note a few points at this juncture: first, the processes of racialization that were concurrent with the processes of colonization were intimately intertwined with the domination not only of peoples but also lands and, second, these processes have been theorized as the coloniality of being.

The roots of the coloniality of being can best be understood as a product of the “*ego conquiro*,”<sup>23</sup> that, according to Enrique Dussel, provided the ground upon which Descartes’s “*ego cogito*” could be built.<sup>24</sup> This point is crucial as it decenters the myth of the modern rational anthropological subject as wholly new or unique. Instead, the modern subject was rooted *within the prior impulse to domination, which found its full articulation in the conquering of indigenous*

---

<sup>21</sup> Quijano, “Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America,” 216.

<sup>22</sup> Maldonado-Torres, “On the Coloniality of Being,” 244.

<sup>23</sup> Enrique Dussel. “Europe, Modernity, and Eurocentrism,” *Nepantla: Views from the South* 1, no. 3: 471.

<sup>24</sup> Maldonado-Torres, “On the Coloniality of Being,” 244.

*populations by the Spanish and Portuguese.*<sup>25</sup> The violent question as to whether Indians had souls was answered through a mixture of natural law philosophy and a racially delineated and ontologized anthropology.

In his 1537 bull *Sublimis Deus*, Pope Paul III answered the question by claiming that while Indians do, in fact, have souls, they do not represent the fullness of human being.<sup>26</sup> He claimed as much by “conceiving of the indigenous people’s soul as an empty receptacle, an *anima nullius*, very much like the *terra nullius*.”<sup>27</sup> So, while Pope Paul III and Spanish theologians did not go so far as to claim that Indians did not have souls, with reference to Aristotelian natural law philosophies and their theological interpretations in Aquinas’ *Summa* they articulated and justified a “natural” hierarchy of being. This “natural” hierarchy of being “organized different social positions, different roles and different rights for individuals ... every individual was impressed into a different class/category within the hierarchy ... and [each had] a different human value,”<sup>28</sup> with women, darker raced persons, and those considered “natural slaves” understood as only bearing vestiges of the fullness of being. As Jorge A. Aquino notes, these individuals were so

inferior to the Spaniards—in intellectual aptitude, culture—that they could hardly be regarded as human. Rather, they were *barbarians*, prone to vice, unreason, sexual promiscuity, and indecency. They should therefore be committed—by force if

---

<sup>25</sup> Dussel, “Europe, Modernity, and Eurocentrism,” 471.

<sup>26</sup> Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicide* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 122.

<sup>27</sup> De Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South*, 122.

<sup>28</sup> Joseph Indaimo, *The Self, Ethics, and Human Rights* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 12.

necessary—to servitude as *siervos a la naturaleza*—slaves by nature ... Intellectually and culturally “inferior” peoples should be assigned the grunt-work of society whether they liked it or not. Thus did natural law thinking become one of the ideological foundations underwriting the enslavement of the Indians. Later it was stood up as justification for African slavery.<sup>29</sup>

It was within the context of natural law hierarchies that the conquering of people and lands as extractable resources for profit was justified. As indicated earlier, this sets the stage for the growth of the *ego cogito*. Similar to the *ego conquiro*, the *ego cogito* assumed superiority relative to questions of knowledge and being—what has become theorized as the coloniality of being. Maldonado-Torres makes clear that internal to the logics of the coloniality of being, the Cartesian ego finds “justification as subject relative to the colonized object” as he argues: “From ‘I think, therefore I am’ we are led to the more complex and both philosophically and historically accurate expression: ‘I think’ (others do not think, or do not think properly), ‘therefore I am’ (others are not, lack being, should not exist or are disposable.)”<sup>30</sup> This new formula produces the “sub-ontological colonial difference,”<sup>31</sup> where racialized others are “granted” being only insofar as they approximate the white European, male, normative center of humanity. Maldonado-Torres defines the “subontological colonial difference” as “the difference between Being and what lies

---

<sup>29</sup> Jorge A. Aquino, “Natural Law Philosophy and Today’s Ideologies of Racism and Homophobia,” published by author on academia.edu, [https://www.academia.edu/32719297/Natural\\_Law\\_Philosophy\\_and\\_Todays\\_Ideologies\\_of\\_Racism\\_and\\_Homophobia](https://www.academia.edu/32719297/Natural_Law_Philosophy_and_Todays_Ideologies_of_Racism_and_Homophobia) (2017): 5.

<sup>30</sup> Maldonado-Torres, “On the Coloniality of Being,” 252.

<sup>31</sup> Maldonado-Torres, “On the Coloniality of Being,” 252.

below Being or that which is negatively marked as dispensable as well as a target of rape.”<sup>32</sup> In the ontological hierarchizing of being, those who have been marked as subhuman, perversely human, or only bearing instrumental value (the land, women, and racial minorities), the resident bodies of the colonial difference, find themselves within an *extractive zone*, a zone characterized by capitalistic violences that have been deemed justifiable, even necessary, to maintain the subjugation of the colonized.<sup>33</sup> At the extractive zones of the colonial difference, ecocide and genocide collide: normalized violence against lands, peoples, and peoples protecting their lands is excused for the greater end of racialized capitalistic profit.

By way of example of the extractive zones at the colonial difference, consider the rates of the murders of land defenders, which, according to Global Witness, have “doubled in the past 15 years” and mirror or exceed “levels usually associated with war zones.”<sup>34</sup>

At least 1,558 people in 50 states were killed between 2002 and 2017 while trying to protect their land ... the death toll is almost half that of US troops killed in Iraq and Afghanistan since 2001 ... researchers say the tally is likely to be a conservative estimate because many deaths were unreported ... particularly with regard to the killing of indigenous people, who make up a disproportionately large proportion of victims.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> Maldonado-Torres, *On the Coloniality of Being*,” 252.

<sup>33</sup> On the point of violences being seen as necessary to maintain the subjugation of the colonized, see especially Maldonado-Torres’s “On the Coloniality of Being” and his book *Against War: Views from the Underside of Modernity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).

<sup>34</sup> Jonathan Watts. “Environmental Activist Murders Double in 15 Years,” in *The Guardian*, August 5, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/aug/05/environmental-activist-murders-double>.

<sup>35</sup> Watts, “Environmental Activist Murders.”

Two of the individuals recently murdered were Monarch butterfly defenders from the state of Michoacán, Mexico. After receiving several threats against his life if he did not cease criticizing and attempting to stop illegal logging,<sup>36</sup> Homero Gómez was found murdered, his body discovered covered in bruises and dumped in a well.<sup>37</sup> Raúl Hernández, who also worked as a butterfly defender and illegal logging critic, was discovered just days after Gómez's funeral, also covered in bruises and seemingly having absorbed blunt trauma to the head.<sup>38</sup>

Concerns surrounding the incessant threat of criminalization and/or murder of land defenders have not only been articulated by NGOs and news reporting agencies, but also constitute an ethical imperative in the recent Amazon Synod. Not only does the Synod document consistently refer to the criminalization and murder of indigenous persons, but it also affirms that we ought to envision the future of a church that has a preferential option, not just for the poor, but for the indigenous.<sup>39</sup> One can reframe this important contention as the church needing to have a preferential option for those at the ontological colonial difference, for those trapped in extractive zones.

If the colonial difference, rooted in the *ego conquiro* as well as the *ego cogito*, helps to create persons and lands as extractive zones, it is important to note that the geographies of these extractive zones are not simply drawn along the lines of race and indigeneity, but also along the

---

<sup>36</sup> Illegal logging is an umbrella term covering a variety of illegal practices related to harvesting, trade, and/or sale of timber.

<sup>37</sup> “Second Mexico Monarch Butterfly Activist Found Dead,” in *BBC News*, February 3, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-51356265>.

<sup>38</sup> “Second Mexico Monarch Butterfly Activist Found Dead.”

<sup>39</sup> Synod of Bishops, *The Amazon*, 9-10.

lines of gender. While Maldonado-Torres, among others, has noted the violences meted out against women in his theorizing the coloniality of being, he and others have not, as feminist decolonial theorists have noted, sufficiently engaged with queer women of color feminisms that have theorized for decades the intersections of race and gender.<sup>40</sup> This is precisely what feminist philosopher María Lugones attempts to address in her development of a decolonial feminism, the primary lens of which she calls “the coloniality of gender.” The coloniality of gender functions to critique the concepts of the coloniality of power and being as well as to further illuminate the nexus of the coloniality of being/coloniality of gender along these lines.

Lugones, in her critique, notes that theorizing the coloniality of being without considering the historical imposition of the institution of gender is a misstep since “biological dimorphism, the patriarchal and heterosexual organizations of relations... [are] crucial to an understanding of the differential gender arrangements along ‘racial’ lines.”<sup>41</sup> The concept of the nexus of the coloniality of being/coloniality of gender maintains that race, sexual-dimorphism, *and* heterosexism were, and continue to be, constitutive of the subjugation of being that occurs at the colonial difference. To this point, Lugones claims,

the modern hierarchical dichotomous distinction between men and women became known as characteristically human and a mark of civilization. Indigenous peoples of the Americas and enslaved Africans were understood as not human, as animals, as monstrously and aberrantly sexual, wild. The dichotomous gender distinction became a

---

<sup>40</sup> See especially the work of Marcelle Maese-Cohen and María Lugones.

<sup>41</sup> María Lugones, “Heterosexuality and the Colonial/Modern Gender System,” *Hypatia* 22, no. 1 (Winter 2007): 190.

mark of civilization: Only the civilized are men or women ... the hierarchical dichotomy as a mark of the human becomes also a normative tool to damn the colonized.<sup>42</sup>

The imposition of the Western gendered dichotomy paradoxically places the colonized into the realm of humanity even while simultaneously constructing their subordinate status within the hierarchy of being. Like the lands they inhabited, women's bodies were captured and deployed for the purposes of productive/reproductive<sup>43</sup> capitalist heteropatriarchy. The system ensures that women, like the land, bear an instrumental value only, deployed as the helpmate of extractive capitalism, which "violently reorganizes territories"<sup>44</sup> to suit its own needs. The violent reorganization that occurs under extractive capitalism transforms women's bodies as well as the land into private property to be plundered at will for the potential extraction of "natural resources" then turned to profit. Indeed, the extractive zones of the colonial difference continue to be rich in territory and resources.

While we may assert that we ought to develop an integral ecology in CST, we ought to begin constructing this integral ecology through the critical lens of coloniality/modernity rather than only the lens of modernity. Reading from coloniality rather than from and/or in addition to modernity enables us to better perceive the onto-anthropological underpinnings of globalized late-capitalism. Francis, in *LS*, is concerned about the instrumental value granted to the earth and the most vulnerable of its inhabitants under the modern technocratic paradigm, itself rooted in a

---

<sup>42</sup> Lugones, "Heterosexualism," 190.

<sup>43</sup> On this point, see especially M. Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009). In this work, Copeland analyzes the brutalized black female body under "slavocracy" as constructed as object of both production and reproduction in the service of the plantation economy.

<sup>44</sup> Gómez-Barris, *The Extractive Zone*, xviii.



dysfunctional and violent perception of the human person. A view from coloniality reveals that both the technocratic paradigm and the problem of the nexus of the coloniality of being/coloniality of gender are ultimately problems not only of power and capital, but of the way power and capital have constructed bodies and lands, that is, the way power and capital influenced anthropology.

If Francis wants to construct an integral ecology based within an “adequate anthropology,” we must also mine our own tradition for the continuing workings, even if inadvertent, of this nexus that hierarchizes being/gender and/or attempts to separate how the domination of land is intimately connected to the domination of women, persons of color, and those in the global south. The next section explores the fact that while Francis is partially correct in his general diagnosis of our current ecological crisis, his integral ecology continues to espouse a view of humanity that is in continuity with the nexus of the coloniality of being/coloniality of gender, and thus undermines rather than furthers our struggle for environmental justice.

### **Human Ecology in *Laudato Si'* and the Naturalness of the Coloniality of Gender**

As has already been made clear in this piece, in *LS* Francis is intent upon resisting the wrong view of the human person as central to the construction of an authentic integral ecology. He delineates his concern for the climate as connected to his concern for human persons, their dignity, and their accompanying rights and responsibilities. While I agree with Francis on this point, it is also necessary to highlight the fact that the contours drawn around what is considered an “adequate anthropology” at the root of creating an integral ecology are in themselves problematic. Due to a divide between the “public” (social) and “private” (gender and sexuality)

teachings within Roman Catholicism,<sup>45</sup> most have assumed that the anthropological subject at the root of the teachings of CST is not problematic. There is a kind of anthropological amnesia induced in the cross from the Church's teachings on gender and sexuality to its social teachings. This amnesia allows social ethicists to remain uninterested in excavating the underlying anthropological subject in CST, as it seems not to jeopardize our claims for justice. This is not the case. *LS* is but a recent example of the ways that a problematic, even violent, conception of the human subject lingers and is at the root of our justice claims. It provides us with one example among many in the tradition of CST wherein we have assumed the problematic anthropological subject regularly critiqued in other aspects of the tradition while interestingly ignored in the teachings that we deem our "best kept secret."

Specifically, in *LS* Francis constructs a human ecology predicated upon the dichotomous ordering of humanity. Taking seriously Francis' claim that we will find it "difficult to hear the cry of nature itself" if we fail to hear the cries stemming from the poor and those most vulnerable, as "everything is connected,"<sup>46</sup> I find it necessary to consider the ways our own human ecology contributes to the logics of the coloniality of gender, thus potentially requiring the residence of bodies and lands at the colonial difference.

Francis provides some of the contours of a "human ecology," a right understanding of theological anthropology, as follows:

When human beings fail to find their true place in this world, they misunderstand themselves and end up acting against themselves: "Not only has God given the earth to

---

<sup>45</sup> On the public/private divide in Catholic teachings, see especially the work of Margaret Farley and Lisa Cahill.

<sup>46</sup> Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 117.

man [*sic*] ... but man [*sic*] too is God's gift to man [*sic*]. He [*sic*] must therefore respect the natural and moral structure with which he has been endowed." Human ecology also implies another profound reality: the relationship between human life and the moral law, which is inscribed in our nature and is necessary for the creation of a more dignified environment. Pope Benedict XVI spoke of an "ecology of man," based on the fact that man too has a nature that he must respect and that he cannot manipulate at will ... The acceptance of our bodies as God's gift is vital for welcoming and accepting the entire world as a gift from the Father and our common home, whereas thinking that we enjoy absolute power over our own bodies turns, often subtly, into thinking that we enjoy absolute power over creation. Learning to accept our body, to care for it and to respect its fullest meaning, is an essential element of any genuine human ecology. *Also, valuing one's own body in its femininity or masculinity is necessary if I am going to be able to recognize myself in an encounter with someone who is different. In this way we can joyfully accept the specific gifts of another man or woman ... and find mutual enrichment. It is not a healthy attitude which would seek to cancel out sexual difference because it no longer knows how to confront it.*<sup>47</sup>

While Francis also emphasizes other aspects of authentic human *being* and dignity, such as our inherent relationality and our capacity for genuine love and their importance in considering how to resist technocracy and climate change, he maintains the formidable anthropological structure of a gendered dichotomy that has, throughout the centuries, justified a variety of injustices against women and sexual minorities. This is quite ironic. If we privilege the lens of coloniality

---

<sup>47</sup> Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 115, 155. Emphasis mine.

and understand the centrality of the coloniality of being/coloniality of gender in the creation of extractive zones of inequality for lands and peoples, we cannot uncritically assume that a human ecology such as this is free from problems. In fact, maintaining a view from modernity rather than from modernity/coloniality elides the deeper socio-cultural ecologies necessary for us to understand that our own anthropologies actually perpetuate these problematic logics, rather than subvert them; thus our efforts for environmental justice are proven lacking. This is so because justice as it relates to gender and sexuality *has always been intertwined with environmental justice*.

It is disconcerting that many Catholics and people of good will have missed this intersection. Some feminist theologians<sup>48</sup> have critiqued the encyclical for its usage of gendered language relative to “God the Father” and the earth as a “Sister/Mother” in need of care and protection and its maintenance of a strict gender binary that both perpetuates gender ideologies that have been “dangerous for women” and neglectful of the ways that women “shape culture” as well as the “hierarchy between nature and culture.”<sup>49</sup> While such critiques are necessary, they do not adequately address the linkages between the coloniality of gender and our environmental crisis, since they do not adequately historicize and decolonize gender and sexuality as institutions intimately intertwined with the institution of race; nor do they reference their creation as constitutive of extractive zones of land, knowledge, and being. To have a better understanding of these destructive onto-anthropologies and their role in the environmental crisis will require that

---

<sup>48</sup> See especially Emily Reimer-Barry, “On Naming God: Gendered God-Talk in *Laudato Si*, ” *Catholic Moral Theology* (blog), June 30, 2015, <https://catholicmoraltheology.com/on-naming-god-gendered-god-talk-in-laudato-si/>.

<sup>49</sup> Reimer-Barry, “On Naming God.”

we begin to privilege alternative ways of knowing and the bodies from which these ways of knowing stem. If we want to adequately analyze and re-envision our relationships with one another and the land, we must do so in a mode that privileges the cries stemming from the colonial difference and construct a feminist decolonial integral ecology.<sup>50</sup>

### **A Feminist Decolonial Integral Ecology**

While cultivating a decolonial feminist integral ecology begins from analysis of our current crisis from modernity/coloniality with special attention to the construction of extractive zones of lands, knowledges, and being, it also incorporates certain core methodological commitments that may better assist us in challenging the extractability of bodies and lands. I briefly sketch out the contours of two basic concepts that enable a decolonial feminist method and privilege the experiences and knowledge of those at the colonial difference.

*Re-framing the “Cries of the Earth and the Cries of the Poor”:*

*Privileging a Hermeneutics of El Grito*<sup>51</sup>

Constructing a feminist decolonial integral ecology ought to begin with a *hermeneutics of el grito*. A primary concern for Francis in the cultivation of his own integral ecology was paying attention to the signs of the times and listening to the ways both the earth and the poor cry out as they “groan in travail” at all that has been “laid to waste.”<sup>52</sup> Those situated at the colonial difference, those most vulnerable and impacted at the extractive zones of our world, ought to be

---

<sup>50</sup> Gómez-Barris, *The Extractive Zone*, 9.

<sup>51</sup> The development of my concept of a *hermeneutics of el grito* began at a panel presentation on the impact of Hurricane María on Boricuas that took place at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion in Boston, Massachusetts in November 2017.

<sup>52</sup> Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 2.

heard. The feminist decolonial concept of reframing the “cries of the earth and the cries of the poor” as a *hermeneutics of el grito* is a union of primary concerns of decolonial theorists, feminist theologians, and historians. This concept is rooted both historically and theologically within the Puerto Rican experience.<sup>53</sup> “*El grito*” can be translated as “the cry.” From a Puerto Rican perspective a *hermeneutics of el grito* is rooted in *El Grito de Lares*, a rebellion against colonial rule and oppression that took place in 1868. That it is deeply shaped by the Puerto Rican experience is not to say that it is not applicable to the *gritos* that are expressed the world over by those at the extractive zones of the colonial difference. Indeed, the *hermeneutics of el grito* is just that—a *hermeneutics that privileges the cries of those at the colonial difference who have been placed there through the logics at the nexus of the colonality of being/colonality of gender*.

The hermeneutic is an expansion of two central concepts. The first is Nelson Maldonado-Torres’ interpretation of what he terms Frantz Fanon’s “phenomenology of the cry,” which represent the cries of grief and desire of recognition that stem from the space of the colonial difference.<sup>54</sup> The second, articulated within María Pilar Aquino and María José Rosado Nunes’s co-edited volume, *Feminist Intercultural Theology: Latina Explorations for a Just World* is the concept of a “hermeneutics of lament.”<sup>55</sup> Some may claim that this is precisely part of what

---

<sup>53</sup> My privileging of our Puerto Rican experiences both on the island and in diaspora to construct decolonial theologies is heavily informed by the groundbreaking work of Teresa Delgado, *A Puerto Rican Decolonial Theology: Prophecy Freedom* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

<sup>54</sup> Nelson Maldonado-Torres, *Against War: Views from the Underside of Modernity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 133-150.

<sup>55</sup> Maricel Mena-Lopez and María Pilar Aquino, “Feminist Intercultural Theology: Religion, Culture, Feminism, and Power,” in *Feminist Intercultural Theology: Latina Explorations for a Just World*, ed. María Pilar Aquino and María Jose Rosado-Nunes (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2007), xx-xxiii.

Francis suggests as one course of action to take in beginning the process of ecological conversion and reconciliation. In fact, Francis does claim that in addition to attending to the facts of climate science about the groans of the earth, we must also pay special attention to the cries of the indigenous. He notes:

The disappearance of a culture can be just as serious, or even more serious, than the disappearance of a species of plant or animal ... In this sense, it is essential to show special care for indigenous communities and their cultural traditions. They are not merely one minority among others, but should be the principal dialogue partners ... For them, land is not a commodity but rather a gift from God and from their ancestors who rest there, a sacred space with which they need to interact if they are to maintain their identity and values.<sup>56</sup>

While such a stance certainly evidences an openness and genuine concern for indigenous and other populations located at extractive zones, we must be cautious to ensure that the cries to which we are listening are not simply being placed within the broader frameworks of our own traditions or considered only through the lens of modernity and/or the modern anthropological subject. We must be willing to listen to the *gritos* on their own terms, from their own contexts, and in their own modes of expression. The Amazon Synod document, building upon *Laudato Si'*, emphasizes the preferential option for indigenous persons and explains the importance of the context of historical colonialisms and current “neo-colonialism” as central to acknowledging a “church with an indigenous, peasant, and afro-descendent face.”<sup>57</sup> While the document makes

---

<sup>56</sup> Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 144-146.

<sup>57</sup> Synod of Bishops, *The Amazon*, 27.

important moves in recognizing the importance of colonialism and neo-colonialism, it must also incorporate the concept of *coloniality* as it endeavors to create “new paths of ecological conversion.”<sup>58</sup> We should attend to these cries with a gesture of humility at the limitedness of our own knowledge and traditions. In this way we can begin the process of decentering and undermining the extractive view of persons and lands. Privileging a *hermeneutics of el grito* in its decolonial, historical, and theological strands may facilitate the growth of an integral ecology that authentically allows an “ecological approach [to become] a social approach ... [and allow us] to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.”<sup>59</sup> Further, it gestures towards the consideration of a variety of ecologies of knowledges and bodies in the shaping of an integral ecology and sets the stage for an embrace of the concept of *vincularidad*.

*Vincularidad: Decolonial Relationality as a Path to Re-Existence*

The concept of *vincularidad* contains content representative of the appreciation of the variety of ecologies of knowledges and the persons from whom they stem. If totalitarian forms of knowledge have functioned towards the subjugation of being, as we have seen at the nexus of the coloniality of being/coloniality of gender, we must move towards the humility and appreciation of “radical copresence” of peoples and cultures and understand that those who have historically been constructed as “not knowing” or “not being” ought to be granted an epistemological privilege in our own cultivation of an integral ecology. According to de Sousa Santos, there are two realities that one must consider when enabling the emergence of a variety of ecology of knowledges:

---

<sup>58</sup> Synod of Bishops, *The Amazon*, ch. IV.

<sup>59</sup> Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 49.



The first of these is the strong political presence of peoples and worldviews on the other side of the lines as partners in the global resistance to capitalism, that is, as significant agents of counterhegemonic globalization. The second factor is the unprecedented confrontation between radically different conceptions of alternative society ... Suffice it to mention the struggle of poor peasants against landgrabbing and agroindustrial monocultures around the world, or the struggles of indigenous peoples throughout Latin America against such megaprojects as dams or highways ... Counterhegemonic globalization excels in the absence of a single globally valid alternative. The ecology of knowledges aims to provide epistemological consistency for pluralistic, propositional thinking and acting.<sup>60</sup>

While this pluralistic epistemological consistency will include modern science and traditions such as the tradition of CST, it would be ever open to epistemological diversity so as to resist the re-articulation and re-inscription of epistemic and ontological domination that is intertwined with ecological domination. This is actually in line with the current call for the Church to “unlearn, learn, and relearn, in order to overcome any tendency towards colonizing models that have caused harm in the past.”<sup>61</sup> With a commitment to respond to this call and enable pluralistic epistemologies and ontologies we can better appreciate and abide by the principle of *vincularidad*.

Andean indigenous thinkers define *vincularidad* as follows:

---

<sup>60</sup> De Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South*, 192-3.

<sup>61</sup> Synod of Bishops, *The Amazon*, 81.

[*Vincularidad*] is the awareness of the integral relation and interdependence amongst all living organisms (in which humans are only a part) with territory or land and the cosmos. It is a relation and interdependence in search of balance and harmony of life in the planet.<sup>62</sup>

This is to say that *vincularidad* is another way of expressing relationality and solidarity with the land and the cosmos *outside of the reification of one mode of knowledge and being*. Uplifting *vincularidad* allows for the “different geobody storytellings, his/hers/trans stories, especially from those who have lived—and live—the colonial difference.”<sup>63</sup> This is also to say that while *vincularidad* may have a resonance with the current articulation of an integral ecology, its starting point (coloniality and the colonial difference) is different, as is its inclination remain open to a variety of decolonial paths of “conviviality,” ones that do not assume the “singularity and linearity of the West.”<sup>64</sup> Disrupting a singular narrative by uplifting the cries of those at the colonial difference and privileging their ways of knowing and being allows us to consider the ways that *vincularidad* enables a type of resistance to the extractive view of persons and lands, or their “re-existence.”

The notion of “re-existence,” originally developed by Colombian decolonial theorist Adolfo Albán Achinte, is the “redefining and re-signifying of life in conditions of dignity.”<sup>65</sup> These conditions of dignity require the subversion of the coloniality of being/coloniality of

---

<sup>62</sup> Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh. *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), 1.

<sup>63</sup> Mignolo and Walsh, *On Decoloniality*, 2.

<sup>64</sup> Mignolo and Walsh, *On Decoloniality*, 2.

<sup>65</sup> Mignolo and Walsh, *On Decoloniality*, 3.

gender and the onto-anthropological frameworks that undergird them. It is a way to “re-member” our bodies, lands, and knowledges—to re-exist where we have been previously erased at the colonial difference. The notion of “re-membering” is drawn from the work of Toni Morrison in the novel *Beloved*.<sup>66</sup> Morrison reflects on the ways that our bodies (and the land) “remember” or embody trauma in a particular way such that we are “dismembered” or “disabled” in some way. Thus part of our collective work in solidarity resisting the extractive view of lands and people, in shaping a decolonial feminist integral ecology, is to empower the “re-membering” of lands and the bodies, or their re-existence outside of the purview of the coloniality of power/being/gender.

### Conclusion

The severity of the climate crisis requires that we begin to address not only the individual practices, governing policies, and institutions that further global warming but also the onto-anthropological groundings that tend to further perpetuate rather than challenge the paradigms that maintain the space of the colonial difference and the coloniality of being/coloniality of gender. Pope Francis, in *LS*, provides an excellent critique of the modern anthropological subject. As I have argued in this piece, we must critique the onto-anthropological subject through the lens of modernity/coloniality, not only through the lens of modernity, in order to properly understand and resist the nexus of the coloniality of being/coloniality of gender and the space of the colonial difference where genocide and ecocide intersect. I have proposed the development of a decolonial feminist integral ecology that re-frames the “cries of the earth and the cries of the

---

<sup>66</sup> See Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987). Not only do we see the embodiment of trauma and bodily memory through Morrison’s description of the “chokecherry tree” on Sethe’s back, but also the “re-membering” of the ghost of Beloved as she emerges out of water. This may be a way in which Morrison is gesturing to an intertwinement between bodily memory, the memory of a people, and the memory of land and water, as it could be a reference to all those lives murdered in the Middle Passage.

poor,” in a decolonial vein via the introduction of *a hermeneutics of el grito* and the privileging of a variety of ecologies of knowledges and being as expressed in the concept of *vincularidad*. The incorporation of both of the above could enable a true coalition of ecologies that aim to rupture the dominant and oppressive workings of coloniality, undermining the extractability of bodies and lands and bringing forth the potential for justice.