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Cartographies in the Wilderness: A Decolonial Reflection on Intersectionality

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> The issue is whether the symbol civilization is simply the context for a necessary lie (the appearance of crude and debased cultures and the demonstration of the superior power of the Europeans) or a new sacred power in the world (the bringing of all cultures into communication with each other and the beginnings of the possibility for a new meaning of human freedom in the world). Both interpretations are equally as true as they are false. … Both are products of false consciousness as much as each makes a claim for truth.
> —Charles Long, "Primitive/Civilized: The Locus of the Problem"[1]

> I'm not fighting to be equal to you, but I am fighting for human dignity.
> —Fannie Lou Hamer, "We Have not Arrived Yet"[2]

On MAY 30, 2020, KEISHA LANCE BOTTOMS, the mayor of Atlanta, Georgia, held a press conference to address what she described as "violent protests" not "in the spirit of Martin Luther King, Jr." These "violent protests" erupted in the wake of the killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery. I begin this reflection on intersectionality and theology with Lance Bottoms's press conference as a way of signaling the task of this paper, which is to engage in a critical theological reflection on the relationship between decolonial praxis, intersectionality, transnational feminism, and constructive liberationist theology. I will say more about this task towards the end of this introduction, but for now, I want to sit in an inductive moment of reflection on Lance Bottoms's press conference.

In addition to naming the uprising in the city of Atlanta's "violent protest," Lance Bottoms prefaced her remarks with this statement:

> Above everything else, I am a mother to four black children in America, one of whom is 18 years old. And when I saw the murder of

[1] Charles H. Long, "Primitive/Civilized: The Locus of a Problem," *History of Religions* 20, nos. 1/2, Twentieth Anniversary Issue (Aug.–Nov., 1980): 50.

[2] Fannie Lou Hamer, "We Have not Arrived Yet," in Maegan Parker Brooks and Davis W. Houck, eds., *Speeches of Fannie Lou Hamer*: *To Tell It Like It Is* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 186.

> George Floyd, I hurt like a mother would hurt. And on yesterday, when I heard there were rumors about violent protests in Atlanta I did what any mother would do, I called my son and said, "Where are you?" I said, "I cannot protect you," and black boys should not be out today.[3]

Mayor Lance Bottoms went on to say that what was happening in Atlanta, particularly the looting and defacement of local businesses, was "chaos." She then went on to describe the legacy of Atlanta as a city that had a history of Black mayors, Black police chiefs, and Black business owners. In addition to her appeal to the legacy of Black leadership in the city, she pointed to four public figures, Reverend Joseph Henry Beasley, an international civil and human rights activist; Erika Shields, the former chief of the Atlanta Police Department; and two hip-hop artists, Killer Mike and T. I. With regards to Beasley, she appealed to his long record of experience in "purposeful" protesting. With regards to Police Chief Shields, she appealed to a public statement made by Shields in which she indicated that she was "appalled" by the actions of police officers responsible for the killing of George Floyd. Lastly, she appealed to Killer Mike and T. I., two publicly known hip-hop artists who (as Lance Bottoms made clear) were major property owners in the west side of Atlanta. The most poignant part of her address was her counter-insurgent demand for the protestors/rioters/looters, to go home. She said, "If you care about the city of Atlanta, go home!" In contrast to the chaos evoked by the uprising, she indicated that if the participants in the uprising wanted to see change then they should do it in local and federal elections and not in the streets.

I want to call attention to the symbols Lance Bottoms evokes as she urged the participants in the uprising to "Go home!": motherhood, Blackness, love for the city of Atlanta, Martin Luther King, Jr., looters breaking into stores to steal brown liquor, rioters overturning police cars, property owners, and successful Black entrepreneurs. Lance Bottoms's words appeal to a symbolic universe in which Blackness, womanhood, the civil rights movement, state power, and economic power have a given meaning. The *givenness* of these symbols is integral to the reflection taken up in this paper. Lance Bottoms deploys a given vulnerability in the symbol of Black motherhood that brings attention to the fundamental elements of her self-proclaimed identity as a Black woman. As she states, she is a mother of Black children

[3] Ken Sugiura, "FULL TEXT: Read Atlanta Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms's Plea for Her City," *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, May 30, 2020, www.ajc.com/news/full-text-read-atlanta-mayor-keisha-lance-bottoms-plea-for-her-city/puDJ3iEafspuLZcbuq9rvO/.

"first and foremost." This vulnerability is placed in tension with her authoritative role as mayor.

The listener is asked to hold together the vulnerability of a Black mother and the authority of a person wielding state power. By evoking her inability to protect her son, she signals that Black female vulnerability in the role of mothering is always present, even for the mayor of a predominantly Black city. Listeners are also asked to hold together the political strategy of the 1960's civil rights movement with the economic and state power of the city of Atlanta in 2020. In her appeal to Killer Mike and T. I., she looks to appeal to the commercial and entrepreneurial success of southern hip-hop artists as the achievements of the civil rights movement. The successes of Black businesses are used to characterize what is at stake, the legacy of the civil rights movement and how it is represented via state power and private property. What does it mean that a Black female mayor of a city cannot protect her son? What does it mean that she has authority over the police but tells citizens, rather than the police, to go home? Why is her positive association of the civil rights movement with the economic achievements of two Black hip-hop artists expected to be seen as authoritative and canonical?

I am not appealing to the rightness or wrongness of her words, but rather the ways in which her words reveal a spatial vision of Atlanta. In this spatial vision, we can see a successful Black metropolis born from the coalition of Black entrepreneurial enterprise and civil rights. I want to think about how her spatial imagination of Atlanta as the home to both the success of the civil rights movement and Black entrepreneurial success frames her sense of moral authority over and against the participants in the uprising. I am also interested in how Lance Bottoms leverages her subjectivity—at the intersection of race, gender, and governance—in ways that allow her to disassociate her vulnerability as a Black woman from the political and economic power of the mayoral office. I want to consider how this disassociation signals the utility of intersectionality theory that opens it up for multiple types of uses that exceed the goal of Black liberation and radical politics. Further, I want to consider the fact that it is an achievement of intersectionality that a Black woman can hold the office of mayor while also deploying intersectional identity to disassociate herself from the responsibility to deploy (or not deploy) violent state power.[4] As Black feminist scholar Jennifer Nash has shown, the symbolic universe leveraged by intersectionality is no longer situated in the political struggles of ordinary people (ordinary Black women in particular) fighting against the onslaught of state

[4] The fact that she defines her mayoral authority as ineffectual with regard to protecting her son from the police is telling of this point.

power and the myriad ways in which the state inflicts suffering at the intersection of race, gender, sexuality, ability, ethnicity, nationality, or class.[5]

Nash contends that intersectionality is now used for diversity and inclusion projects and for saving women's studies from a white supremacist notion of gender.[6] This hijacking or cooptation of intersectionality discourse, according to Nash, has precipitated a perpetual "defensiveness" amongst Black feminists and Black women who lay claim to the discursive and political power of intersectionality.[7] This dynamic plays out in Lance Bottoms's mayoral address. Lance Bottoms is defensive concerning the legacy of the civil rights movement and how it is represented by the City of Atlanta in the political and economic achievements of Black Americans. Rather than engaging the potentiality of the uprising, she defended a civil rights legacy. With Nash, I want to inductively underscore Lance Bottoms's words and how they anticipate a public that reads Blackness as vulnerability seeking equivalency to human dignity. As such, Lance Bottoms anticipates that her identity will be read against the power of her office in ways that absolve her from certain interrogations or critiques of her role as a "Black" mayor.

This paper reflects on the moral imagination, with respect to space, allowing Lance Bottoms to leverage the symbol of Black motherhood to blunt the fact that she had to deploy an anti-Black police state in a counter insurgent offensive to *reclaim* the city. I aim to reflect upon the symbolic reality allowing Lance Bottoms to appeal to the potential loss of the legacy of a "Black" civil rights movement, a "Black" city, and her "Black" son, in order to deflect attention away from the fact that the people had already won the streets. I want to offer a theology laying claim to and celebrating the fact that the people, if only for a moment, had reclaimed Atlanta, rather than their private property, as their home. I make way for a theological perspective that engages with intersectionality in a way that confronts its utility for statecraft. I see this utility in the way Lance Bottoms deployed "Black motherhood" to conceal the fact that, as mayor, she had to risk killing her son to "save" a city. I want to think with respect to a framework providing an alternative to Lance Bottoms's notion of governance which leverages Black identity and Black experience to garner support for the deployment of a police state—a police state gravely similar to the one that attacked civil rights protestors in the 1960's. I want to tarry in a contestation with a materiality in which a Black mayor can deploy Blackness and the potential killing, incarcerating, or injuring of her

[5] Jennifer C. Nash, *Black Feminism Reimagined: After Intersectionality* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), 24–32.
[6] Nash, *Black Feminism Reimagined*, 30–32.
[7] Nash, *Black Feminism Reimagined*, 42.

own son as rhetorically effective towards the end of restoring law and order. What does it mean that her office and her Blackness demanded a rhetoric that dances with death? To protect an office and a city brought to her by hard fought diversity and inclusion politics she had to pit one idol against another, Black identity and state power. In what follows, I provide a critical theological analysis that interrogates this scene and rethinks it as a site of deadly ambiguity, emboldened by the utility of intersectionality. I argue that decolonial theological reflection can lend itself to reframing the alternativist spirit of intersectionality such that it might continually delink itself from the idols of racial identity and state power.

The aim of this argument is to show how theology can engage critical theory fruitfully without sacrificing its commitment to mediating the revelation of God in history. From the vantage point of a decolonial theological perspective, I am looking to rethink how theology can lend itself to a framework for thinking about suffering. In general, decolonial theology is methodologically committed to reframing theological discourse by critically engaging and offering an alternative to the entanglement of theology with the legacy of colonial domination.[8] This paper contributes to decolonial theology by attending to Delores Williams's theological intervention of "wilderness experience" and how it interfaces with decolonial notions of space in the work of Sylvia Wynter and Kathrine McKittrick. After reviewing some of the debates over contemporary uses of intersectionality, I will think through how the insights of Wynter and McKittrick help to illumine the decolonial insights in Williams's work and how Williams helps to illumine the theological implications of decolonial struggle.

INTERSECTIONALITY, LEGAL REDRESS, AND THE NATION STATE

Intersectionality, most notably associated with Kimberlé Crenshaw and her work done in the late 80's, is a term first developed to analyze anti-discrimination doctrine.[9] Similar to other forms of critical theory,

[8] Michel Andraos, Lee Cormie, Néstor Medina, and Becca Whitla, "Decolonial Theological Encounters: An Introduction," *Toronto Journal of Theology* 32, no. 3 (Fall 2017): 259–260. See also Joseph Drexler-Dreis, *Decolonial Theology in the North Atlantic World* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 32–57. What these works show is that liberation theologies are now considering a decolonial turn and ways they can remain substantively theological without lauding the discursive power of the Christian theological tradition over and against the epistemic perspectives of the oppressed.

[9] Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1, art. 8 (1989): 139–167. It is important to underscore that it is not my intention to see Crenshaw as singularly responsible for the intellectual production of intersectionality. As many black feminist scholars have

Crenshaw's intersectionality challenged status quo interpretations of reality to reveal how certain human beings are underrepresented as subjects. She was particularly interested in achieving redress for Black women being excluded from anti-discrimination privileges because they were racialized as Black and gendered as women. Within the field of legal studies, Crenshaw's work illumined lacunae in anti-discrimination law that made it impossible to address the unique circumstances of Black women discriminated against on account of both their race and gender. Black women living in the US, Crenshaw argued, were systemically locked out of opportunities for legal redress with respect to the ways their oppression hinged upon the "intersection" of race and gender. As indicated in her article entitled "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine," the compound way in which race and sex is experienced by Black women is excluded from the discursive and juridical assumptions of anti-discrimination law. Key in this assertion is that Black women living in the late 80's were unable to file class action suits because they were read as members of two classes, Black and woman.[10]

In her findings, Crenshaw chronicled several ways in which Black women were excluded from legal redress on account of their status as both Black and female.[11] What is key to note in her analysis of anti-discrimination cases is how the doctrine of anti-discrimination—that is, the way discrimination is foreclosed in legal discourse—was exclusive of Black women's experience of discrimination. When Black women brought suit against their employers for discriminating against them with respect to their gender *and* race, the courts excluded their claims on several counts. First, there was not enough statistical evidence to convince judges that Black women were a class or a group of people that could be protected in accordance with the anti-racial discrimination doctrines in Title VII laws.[12] Secondly, they were either forced to make a case with respect to either their race or their gender but rarely both.[13] Thirdly, Black women could not have their experiences be read as representative of a gendered or racialized class. In cases where Black women filed suit on the basis of racial

argued, intersectionality theory is a collective of ideas traced to the sociopolitical activity of black women's struggle with domination. The so-called "intersection" of race and gender has long been used as a tool for political struggle. Since I am more interested in the species of intersectionality that develops out of critical law theory, I am limiting my reflections to Crenshaw's work as such, my analysis and decolonial theological option does not speak to the entirety of approaches to intersectionality. I am limiting my comments to those that appeal to legal redress and legislative reform.

[10] Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex," 139–167.

[11] Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex," 140.

[12] Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex," 141–143.

[13] Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex," 140.

discrimination, they were not granted redress for their discrimination if Black men had been included where they had been excluded.[14] In cases where Black women appealed to gender discrimination, they were denied by virtue of the fact that white women or other women of color were not discriminated against.

The promise in the juridical applicability of intersectionality rests in its ability to illustrate pockets of vulnerability that exist at the "intersection" of multiple oppressions experienced by an individual as well as unseen classes of people.[15] Crenshaw's "intersectionality" offers a critical examination of class representation with respect to biologically and socially determined differences as well as the relative ways in which these differences confer or deny access to rights and privileges. In the practice of anti-discrimination law, intersectionality recalibrates how class differences are understood and represented. Crenshaw's work implies a host of policy and legal reforms that would expand or rethink how discrimination is adjudicated. Further, Crenshaw's work, at least in its first iteration, confirms that the state apparatus which ensures legislative authority can be reformed to redress and prevent interlocking oppressions and deliver the constitutional ideal of fair treatment under the law. As such, intersectionality and anti-discrimination law is, in large part, situated within a reality of jurisprudence conferred by the power of a state. In what follows, I want to interrogate the framework of the nation state and point to some of the ways this framework troubles the discourse on intersectionality.

Rethinking the Margins and the Marginality of the Nation State

I begin this discussion on the nation state with a decolonial critique of the modern democratic nation state offered by Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano. Quijano is noted as a principal contributor to the Latin American school of decolonial theory. Quijano analyzes and critiques the rise of modern democratic nation states and how they continue the legacy of colonial power. He terms this legacy the coloniality of power. According to him, the coloniality of power is constructed via three simultaneous forms of domination: the domination of non-European ethnicities via the category of race, the domination of labor via capitalism, and the domination of knowledge via Eurocentric ethnocentrism.[16] In short, the colony gives race its facticity in that it relegates humans via skin color to certain functions within the colony.

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[14] Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex," 151.
[15] Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex," 140.
[16] Aníbal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," *Nepantla: Views from South* 1, no. 3 (September 2000): 533.

The original peoples of the Americas, the enslaved African, the European conquistador, and the mixed "race" peoples of the colonies are forcibly rendered transparent within the colonial economy. In particular, they are rendered transparent with respect to their difference from the European.[17] These power dynamics remain intact as post-colonial nation states emerge from independence movements. As independent post-colonial nation states emerge, their need to establish democracy is, according to Quijano, radically dependent on their need to establish homogeneity amid the reality of differences existing in former colonies.[18] By homogeneity, Quijano means to signify the singularity of national identity achieved through "domination/exploitation/conflict between whites and non-whites."[19] Following the insights of Alexis de Tocqueville, Quijano's critique underscores that the modern democratic nation state is built on the exclusion of the "Indian and the Black" from political life. Pushing past Tocqueville, Quijano traces the intricacies of the power differentials created by this general political exclusion. Race, Eurocentrism, and capitalism worked to secure and naturalize the

[17] In essence, the coloniality of power (or coloniality) signifies the Eurocentric naturalization of difference with respect to labor, knowledge, and ethnicity. Race, capital, and Eurocentrism thus proceed as fact-based ways of organizing society. As such, coloniality is a way of talking about how "difference" is dominated. Different ways of organizing labor are dominated by capital. Different ways of thinking are dominated by European thinking. Different ways of understanding human differences at biological, cultural, and ethnic levels are dominated by white supremacist racial hierarchy. See Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," 534–549.

[18] Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," 559–564.

[19] Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," 561. Quijano's point is that homogenization does not occur through a rigorous process of decolonization. Instead, it works by establishing a Eurocentric notion of optimal national identity and enforcing that identity in exclusivist ways. One way of thinking about this is to consider that the identity of Afro-Latino/a/x and black Americans is not seen as integral to the nation state. To this point Quijano states, "At the beginning of independence, principally in those countries that were demographically and territorially extensive at the beginning of the nineteenth century, approximately 90 percent of the total population was composed of American Indians, blacks, and mestizos. However, in all those countries, those races were denied all possible participation in decisions about social and political organization during the process of organizing the new state. The small white minority that assumed control of colonies sought the advantage of being free from the legislation of the Spanish crown, which formally ordered the protection of colonized peoples or races. From then on, the white minority included the imposition of new colonial tribute on the Indians, even while maintaining the slavery of blacks for many decades. Of course, this dominant minority was now at liberty to expand its ownership of the land at the expense of the territories reserved for Indians by the Spanish crown's regulations. In the case of Brazil, blacks were slaves and Indians from the Amazon were foreigners to the new state." (Aníbal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," *Nepantla: Views from South* 1, no. 3 [September 2000]: 564.)

differences between European and non-European. As such, one could argue that white supremacy is a prototype for identity politics in the west. Eurocentrism and hierarchical racialization are thus integral to the task of achieving the homogenization necessary to maintain the order of the modern democratic nation state. Because of these circumstances, Quijano contends that the "democratic" nation state is established by fundamentally undemocratic means.[20] Of course the impossibility of a "democratic" nation state begs an important question: What is a democratic way of organizing difference at a societal level? My earlier reference to Lance Bottoms provides an example of the homogenization process in that Lance Bottoms is attempting to enforce a homogenous notion of Black citizenship. I will say more about this later, but for now, I want to think about how the spatial framework of the nation state troubles intersectionality with respect to international feminisms.

With Quijano's critique in mind, I now turn to the thought of Chandra Talpade Mohanty who, unlike Quijano, critiques the framework of the nation state with respect to how it over-determines gender dynamics in the Global South.[21] I mention her here because of how she analyzes Western feminism and Black feminist expressions of intersectionality. In her work "Under Western Eyes," written in 1986 and reconsidered in 2003, she clarifies that Western feminism and, in part, certain notions of intersectionality, engage in a colonizing notion of feminism when viewed from a transnational perspective. She contends that a transnational, anti-globalization, and anti-capitalist notion of feminism should be approached by considering vulnerability at a planetary scale. In doing so, Mohanty's notion of transnational feminism looks to consider the impact of globalization and how it discursively and materially colonizes local experiences of gender in the Global South. Such a move seeks to recognize the epistemic difference(s) that situate women and girls beyond Western nation states. Mohanty clarifies that she is not looking to engage in a combative contestation of Western feminism. Nor is her intent to

[20] Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," 564.

[21] Quijano's work has been critiqued by feminist perspectives looking to clarify the experiences and struggles of women beyond Western nation states. According to Maria Lugones, Quijano's "coloniality of power" overlooked colonial gender dynamics and thus undertheorizes the coloniality of gender. While the importance of Lugones's critique cannot be underestimated, I will not be taking it up directly. Instead, I will be engaging the work of Chandra Talpade Mohanty, who is mentioned by black feminist intersectionality scholars as an important critic of US feminisms and their relationship to the US nation state. For more on Chandra Talpade Mohanty and intersectionality see Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall, "Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies: Theory, Applications, and Praxis," *Signs* 38, no. 4 (June 1, 2013): 800–801.

foreclose possibilities for solidarity and coalition across the borders that distinguish the Global North from the Global South.[22] Rather, Mohanty's anti-capitalist transnational feminist option is meant to see difference as a way of engaging universal ideas that could inform efforts for solidarity amongst the women of the planet.[23] In her more recent thought, she is self-critical of how her previous anti-colonial critiques of the West were not fully engaging the unique analysis and struggles of women of color living in the One-Third world or the particular ways indigenous women struggle with the globalization of the modern democratic nation state and the discursive hegemony of Western feminism.[24] In addition, she is increasingly critical of global market capitalism and how it exacerbates race, gender, and class oppressions. To this end Mohanty argues:

> The strategy discussed here is an example of how capitalism and its various relations of rule can be analyzed through a transnational, anti-capitalist feminist critique, one that draws on historical materialism and centralizes racialized gender. This analysis begins from and is anchored in the place of the most marginalized communities of women—poor women of all colors in affluent and neocolonial nations; women of the Third World/South or the Two-Thirds World.[25]

Key in Mohanty's model of feminism is a radical delinking from the idea that the particular has nothing to offer the universal. Mohanty's anti-capitalist transnational feminist option raises challenges to intersectionality with respect to how it reads the material evidence of disadvantage and vulnerability. When Western feminists read the rights and privileges of the nation state as the baseline by which the consequences of race, class, and gender are understood, they overlook how the nation state—particularly the US and European nation states—globalizes its experiences of race, class, and gender. In Mohanty's reading, the nation state affirms the power of jurisprudence such that legal and legislative reforms can deliver redress but not freedom from the discursive and capitalistic domination of human differences. By Mohanty's standard, intersectional approaches to discrimination in the US, which aim to diversify access to the rights and privileges of the nation state, are not yet critical enough of how the rights and privileges of the nation state are guaranteed by US and European foreign policies, the World Trade Organization, and

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[22] Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "'Under Western Eyes' Revisited: Feminist Solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggles," *Signs* 28, no. 2 (2003): 502.
[23] Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," 502.
[24] Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," 506–507.
[25] Mohanty, "'Under Western Eyes' Revisited," 510.

international for profit institutions.[26] In other words, the redress guaranteed by the political and economic power of the nation state does not necessarily speak to the legacy of settler colonialism and capital extraction at home or abroad. In the same way that Quijano suggests that democracy requires a thorough process of decolonization such that the identity of the nation state is not blindly Eurocentric, feminism also requires a decolonial praxis for the relationship between the universal and the particular, and thus the foundation for solidarity, not to be dominated by nationalisms or ethnocentrism. Mohanty's work raises an important question that places intersectional oppressions and the borders of Western nation states in profound tension with one another. How does intersectionality delink itself from the coloniality of power/gender that funds legal redress and legislative reforms? In answering this question, one has to consider that the desire for redress is not inherently wrong nor inculcated by particularity. What is problematic is the way in which redress in intersectionality theory demands, at least in part, capitulation to the political economy of the nation state and thus a false universal notion of human identity created via exclusivist notions of power.

With Mohanty and Quijano I want to suggest that another vision for political economy and thus another way to address the injury of racialization, sexism, and poverty is possible. With respect to the opening narrative on Mayor Lance Bottoms's address to protestors, I want to push towards a spatial theological option that rethinks what it means to politically differentiate and delink oneself from the spatial logics of the nation state. To do this, I want to think with the decolonial insights of Sylvia Wynter and Katherine McKittrick and place them alongside the theological insights of Delores Williams. In doing so, I am not attempting a discursive corrective to the discourses of intersectionality, decolonial theory, or anticapitalist transnational feminism. Rather, I am suggesting that religious and theological

[26] Mohanty, "'Under Western Eyes' Revisited," 511–512. With respect to the World Trade Organization Mohanty specifically references the work of Vandana Shiva, which revealed that under the guise of protecting the vulnerability of indigenous knowledges the WTO provided a process by which indigenous peoples could patent their intellectual property. Patenting, as Shiva's analysis of Neem Tree in India suggests, makes the product even more exploitable than before. The problem exists with respect to the ways in which the patents issued by the WTO are credentialed through Western science and private property. These standards of reading "intellectual property" are not universal and radically different from how agricultural knowledge is gained and shared in indigenous communities. As such, corporations often engage in piracy or the theft of indigenous knowledge but are able to legally file for patents through the WTO. Indigenous knowledge, however, is often illegible to the credentialing systems of the WTO patent system and thus easily exploitable and vulnerable to Western epistemological domination. These kinds of practices greatly affect the lives of indigenous women in ways often overlooked by Western feminism.

experiences are vastly under-engaged, both analytically and theoretically, in the aforementioned critical theories. The aim is to carve out a theological perspective and option that delinks hope and divine presence from the idolatrous political economy of the nation state. In effect, my suggestion with respect to Lance Bottoms is that another way of governance is possible. I begin first with the theological insights of womanist theologian Delores Williams.

WILDERNESS EXPERIENCE AS DECOLONIAL CARTOGRAPHY

The womanist theological analysis of Delores Williams offers an example of how the religious experience of Black American women can perform the dual task of holding in tension particular experiences while resisting the foreclosure of universal theological claims. In this regard, it speaks directly to Mohanty's way of envisioning the particular and the universal without universalizing the particular, as is too often the case in Euro-American centered theological discourses. In addition, Williams manages to think the universal and the particular with respect to an intersectional understanding of human experience. This much is reflected in how her theological outlook is grounded in the experiences of Black women while remaining open to how this perspective offers a different vantage point for thinking about the human encounter with God. In her text, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*, Williams correlates the religious history of Black Americans with the biblical figure of Hagar and her experience of God in the desert of Beersheba.[27]

In her systematic theological engagement with Hagar's wilderness experience, Williams constructs what she identifies as a more appropriate way to theologically consider African American experience in North America. Her argument is based upon six points.[28] First, she contends that wilderness experience was a male, female, and family inclusive trope that resisted the "androcentric bias" and narrow racial frame of liberation deployed in Black male theologies. Secondly, she argued that wilderness experience did more to highlight human initiative and responsibility in struggles for liberation, survival, and well-being. Third, wilderness experience signaled both sacred and secular notions of experience. As such, it was more in line with how Black American religious experience "unifies the sacred and the secular." Fourth, it signals the intelligence and ingenuity of Black women and men in their creative struggles of resistance. Fifth, it signals the symbolic leadership of Black women and mothers. Sixth, wilderness is a biblical trope focusing on how God aids Israel and Hagar with the difficulties of securing survival and quality of life.

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[27] Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013), 39, 120.
[28] Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 168–169.

Williams concluded that the biblical trope of wilderness had a history within the religious experiences of Black Americans and thus provided a meeting ground between biblical revelation and Black experience.

As a symbol of struggle and biblical trope, "wilderness" brings the material analysis of Black women's vulnerability—as seen in Crenshaw's intersectionality—together with the Biblical account of Hagar. With Hagar, Williams illumines the implications of God's self-disclosure to an Egyptian slave woman who is an involuntary surrogate mother. Williams argued that black women also experienced the compounding conditions of involuntary surrogacy and enslavement and therefore had more in common with the experience of Hagar than they did with Sarah and Abraham.[29] Moreover, Williams contended that Hagar's story—her wilderness experience—signaled the particular way in which God revealed Godself to women made vulnerable by the compounding oppressions of enslavement and sexual domination.[30] Williams points out that Divine intervention in the text is not characterized by liberation from surrogacy and enslavement, but rather by survival and quality of life.[31] God intervenes not to free Hagar, but to ensure that her wellness and efforts for survival are secure. In Williams's exegesis, God is with Hagar and Ishmael even as they endure being banished from the "house" of Abraham to the desert of Beersheba.[32] In the banishment to the wilderness Hagar and Ishmael enact their agency beyond the confines of enslavement. The wilderness is also where Hagar develops her own experience of God. Williams contends that the context of Hagar's encounter with God is significant because of God's free choice to intervene on behalf of Hagar and Ishmael. Despite her status as a slave woman and her precarious situation, Hagar proceeds to survive and God is supportive of the survival and well-being of a banished family.

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[29] Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 48–49.

[30] While I do not take it up in full here, it is important to note that Williams's reading of Hagar's experience of God with respect to survival and well-being figures prominently in her claim that the Christian notion of redemption should be disconnected from the reality of suffering. This is made most clear in her contention that Jesus, like black women, is too often painted as surrogate for human suffering. For Williams, there is nothing redemptive about Jesus's suffering and she is critical of theological models of redemption that see Jesus's suffering as a ransom or satisfaction for the original sin of humanity. This places her at odds with the reception history of atonement and how it is deployed in black theology. According to Williams, atonement theories of redemption are overly focused on Jesus's experience of suffering. Alternatively, Williams's systematic theological intervention re-envisioned Jesus's redemptive qualities in light of his ministerial vision rather than through a sacralization of Jesus's suffering. See Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 169–178.

[31] Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 205–206.

[32] Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 205.

On the surface it might appear that the events marking Hagar's experience of divinity entail that God is still culpable for allowing the enslavement and cruel treatment of Hagar. However, Williams's point is to suggest that Black American women's experience of divinity is parallel to Hagar's in so far as they also primarily experience the presence of God in their struggle to survive and maintain a quality of life within systems of domination.

Like Crenshaw, Williams recognizes the ways in which race and gender uniquely situate Black women but she does so with respect to religious experience. What I want to underscore here is how Williams emboldens a particular experience of oppression but attempts to respond to it by an appeal to the universal openness of wilderness experience. Wilderness allows the history of Black women's experience to intersect with the biblical history of God's self-disclosure in a way that is inclusive to the particularity of Black women's lives while remaining open to the particularity of other Black lives. Wilderness is an open framing that also makes room for a multitude of religious and secular experiences. While Williams is particularly interested in the experiences of enslaved Black women, mothers, families, and communities, she is ultimately interested in how God's self-disclosure is affirmed in the human struggle with suffering.[33] Similar to Crenshaw, she is critical of how the theological source of Black experience is read in ways that exclude Black women's religious experiences. However, in contradistinction to Crenshaw's premise of intersectionality, Williams appeals to a spatial framework beyond the confinement of identity-bound notions of racial, gendered, and sexual differences. As such, we see Williams leaning towards the insights of Nash and Mohanty albeit in a theological register.

Wilderness experience allowed Williams to rethink the Divine/human encounter inclusively and extensively rather than partially and intensively. Williams's recovery of Hagar is not solely attentive to the compound ways in which Hagar is oppressed, but also the unique way Hagar names Yahweh through her own religious and cultural perspective. In other words, it is through Hagar and her wilderness experience that we learn something else about God. In Williams's review of biblical scholarship on Hagar, we find that Hagar names God as El Roi (the god who sees me). Following the insights

[33] In Williams's assessment, black experience is understood by Cecil Cone, James Deotis Roberts, and James Cone in such ways that the many relationships that make up black experience are ignored. In speaking about black experience primarily with respect to the black male encounter with white America they ignored relationships between black men and women, black women to other black women, black adults to black children and black women to white men and women. This further communicates Williams's synergy with the intersectionality and thought of Kimberlé Crenshaw. For more on this see Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 167.

of Phyllis Trible, Williams argues that Hagar is unique in that no other person in the Hebrew Bible refers to Yahweh as El Roi.[34] Williams contends that this fact could flow from Hagar's memory of the Egyptian God Ra. Ra is associated with, and often visually represented by, the seeing eye. With these references Williams shows that Hagar is an important figure not only for womanist theologians but for all those who find themselves in unseen spaces. In all, Williams's theological imagination is informed by her assessment that Hagar, like enslaved Black women, had a unique experience of God radically distinct from that of their captors.

Echoing the reflections on Jennifer Nash and Chandra Talpade Mohanty above, Williams offers an option for thinking about experience that engages the universal from substantive material engagement with the particular. In other words, Williams was able to look at a long history of Black women's experiences in order to rethink how human experience at large is understood as a source for theological reflection. This overarching problem was not situated in the dynamics of the nation state but within the longstanding tradition of Black religious experience and how this experience was thought through engagement with the Hebrew Bible. Williams's critical engagement with Black male theologians clarifies further how Black women's experiences open up an alternative way of understanding Black religious experience at large. In her critique of James Cone, she offered that Cone saw Black experience primarily through the injury of racial oppression and did not focus enough on the "resistance activity" of Black Americans, particularly Black American women. Rather than using the experience of racial oppression as the sole component in framing her theology, Williams looked to rethink Christian categories in reference to the complexity of black struggle. This complexity opens up a window on the human in ways that exceed the categorical grip of Blackness, woman, mother, and suffering.

Williams's theology is significant and almost prefigures what I am trying to explicate here as a decolonial option for theological reflection on space. While Williams does not explicitly treat decolonial theory, her use of the spatial imagery of wilderness is almost suggestive of a decolonial theological option. Wilderness signals spatial proximity to God rather than an exclusive predetermined experience of that proximity. By rereading the spatial dimensionality of the biblical trope of wilderness, I want to underscore how the spatial openness of wilderness provides a meeting ground between theological reflection and decolonial theory. Such a meeting ground is obfuscated in the spatial imagination that Lance Bottoms deployed during the uprising.

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[34] Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 38.

Lance Bottoms tried to clarify the city of Atlanta as a space governed by the occupying logics of the nation state somehow overcome by the presence of Black leadership (in her case Black female leadership). In her spatial imagination, Black experience is articulated as promised land rather than in a wilderness mode. This image of a black metropolis as a promised land for Black civil rights struggle is symbolized in the presence of Black leadership and success in public office, real estate, and the market economy. Such an imagination is not remaking or rethinking spatial possibilities for governing or the ways in which the political goals of Black leadership and enterprise are out of step with the political imagination of ordinary Black Americans. As Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor has argued, "Black elected officials obscure their actions under a cloak of imagined racial solidarity while ignoring their roles as the arbiters of political power."[35] In line with Taylor's argument, Lance Bottoms's notion of governance—at least in a moment of uprising—is based upon a desire to inhabit the sovereign authority of the mayoral office without representing the implicit "anti-Blackness" of that office. Reading Lance Bottoms from a decolonial spatial perspective, I want to suggest that the problem with the city of Atlanta and other cities like it is not who is governing, but rather how the modern nation state over-determines what it means to govern. Rethinking and unthinking Black governance from a decolonial perspective requires a different framework for considering the spatial implications of political struggle. Dislodging domination at the level of the spatial imagination requires a different imagination of the political rooted in a notion of space delinked or delinking from the settler and extractive logics of the modern nation state. I now turn to this notion of space.

A Spatial Decolonial Reading of Wilderness Experience

In what follows, I consider the spatial dimensions of Williams's wilderness experience in light of decolonial theory and analysis. Helpful in this reading is the work of Sylvia Wynter[36] and the

[35] Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2016), 79. For a similar argument with respect to Keisha Lance Bottoms's address to protestors on May 29, 2020, see K. Scott, "Ooh La La: Atlanta's Mayor Keisha and Civil Rights Myths in the Black 'Mecca,'" *Black Agenda Report*, June 10, 2020, www.blackagendareport.com/ooh-la-la-atlantas-mayor-keisha-and-civil-rights-myths-black-mecca, accessed on October 9, 2020.

[36] The articles being taken up here are as follows: Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument," *The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (2003): 257–337; "On How We Mistook the Map for the Territory, and Re-Imprisoned Ourselves in Our Unbearable Wrongness of Being, of *Désêtre*: Black Studies toward the Human Project," in *Not Only the Master's Tools: African American Studies in Theory and Practice*, ed. Lewis R. Gordon and Jane A. Gordon (Boulder, CO:

employment of Wynter's work in the critical geography of Katherine McKittrick. As I have argued in a previous work, the challenge of decolonial thought to theological reflection is the way in which it demands a dislocation of Eurocentric notions of space.[37] McKittrick's work is an example of decolonial challenge and offers a way of reading Williams *within* rather than as *distinct from* the decolonial project. Such a reading attends to my aforementioned effort to reflect (theologically) from within a perspective indifferent to theological discourse. My earlier reflections on Lance Bottoms's mayoral address provide a site for thinking about the politics of space that foreground Lance Bottoms's address. As a Black woman, mother, and mayor, Lance Bottoms marks her intersectional experience as incapable of resisting the anti-Blackness of the police state even while holding the office of mayor. I will argue below that this has to do with how she conceives the city of Atlanta as a space that represents the ongoing success of the civil rights movement rather than a space determined by settler colonial logics of governance. The current demand for the effective end of the carceral state is pushing for a different spatial option for the human, no longer dependent on the confining and extractive dynamics of public and private property and how those dynamics are entangled with policing. In light of Wynter's insights and the specific way the latter are leveraged by McKittrick, I want to think towards a theo-political option that leverages Williams's notion of wilderness experience but ratchets it up to think about wilderness theo-politically.

In her work *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle*, McKittrick engages in a geographical reflection on the spatial dimension of struggle as articulated through the political activity, art, and imagination of Black women living in North America and the Caribbean. Similar to Delores Williams, McKittrick is concerned with the tension between the universal and the particular and how frameworks operate to foreclose or open up human possibilities. As such, "cartographies of struggle" names the geographical dimensions of political struggle from the "intersectional" vantage point of gender, class, and race. Cartography situates how McKittrick reads Black women and their struggle to invent possibilities for living and existing under the assault of interlocking

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Paradigm, 2006), 107–169; and "Novel and History, Plot and Plantation," *Savacou* 5 (June 1971): 95–102.

[37] Rufus Burnett, Jr., *Decolonizing Revelation: A Spatial Reading of the Blues* (Minneapolis: Fortress Academic, 2018). See also Rufus Burnett, Jr., "Unsettling Blues: A Decolonial Reading of the Blues Episteme," in *Beyond the Doctrine of Man: Decolonial Visions of the Human*, ed. Joseph Drexler-Dreis and Kristien Justaert (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019), 36–59.

oppressions. While the injury of oppression is indeed considered, it is considered spatially rather than identically (or with respect to identity). Her articulation of her contribution to Black and geographical studies is worth quoting at length so that her appeal to space can be understood on her own terms.

> *Demonic Grounds* is, in its broadest sense, an interdisciplinary analysis of black women's geographies in the black diaspora. It seeks to consider what kinds of possibilities emerge when black studies encounter human geography. Drawing on creative, conceptual, and material geographies from Canada, the United States, and the Caribbean, I explore the interplay between geographies of domination (such as transatlantic slavery and racial-sexual displacement) and black women's geographies (such as their knowledges, negotiations, and experiences). This interplay interests me because it enables a way to think about the place of black subjects in a diasporic context that takes up spatial histories, as they constitute our present geographic organization.[38]

It is important to underscore here that McKittrick's project is not to deliver Black geographies from the condition of erasure. In other words, she is not out to recover Black geographies from the exclusivist practices of geographies at large. Rather, McKittrick seeks to speak to the "where" of Black life from beyond the confines of marginality. Again, here I quote her at length:

> It is not simply a marginal special-partial vantage point that divulges the workings of black womanhood or black feminism or feminism. And this is exactly where feminism(s) and other identity-theories sometimes get stuck, by recycling and politicizing biocentric modes of humanity in the margins, in the classroom, in theory; this emphasizes that hierarchical genres of human/gender difference will somehow complete the story. Instead, it is useful to imagine the ways in which the margin is a serious conceptual intervention into what it means to be/not be a black woman: the margin (or "race-class-gender-sexuality," or the garret, or "difference," and so forth) is part of the story, not the end of the story.[39]

In naming Black women's geographies "demonic" McKittrick means to signify a different way of signifying the "workings" of Black women. This different way of signifying is specifically aimed at wresting Black life from the confines of marginality. At this point, it would be all too easy to consider Williams's contribution of wilderness experience a cogent example of Black women's

[38] Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), x.
[39] McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, 158.

cartographies. After all, Hagar is read by Williams as being in the wilderness and not in the house of Abraham. However, there is a subtle difference between Williams and McKittrick in that McKittrick is overtly privileging space and bracketing identity whereas Williams is trying to foreground identity and experience more expansively via her use of "wilderness." In this process, the spatial elements of wilderness experience are underdeveloped but still substantively present. With McKittrick, I am trying to ratchet up wilderness experience so that it can be considered a theological parallel to decolonial cartographies.

Decolonial geography presents a helpful tool for theological reflection because it thinks Blackness in relationship to space. This has much to do with how McKittrick follows insights from Sylvia Wynter to consider colonial, racial, and sexual forms of domination and how they map the topography of the Americas and the Caribbean. Simultaneously, Wynter is also considering how Black struggles for dignity produce alternative geographies to settler colonialism, colonialism, and enslavement. In following Wynter's philosophical, cultural, political, and geographical analysis, McKittrick sees the margin that distinguishes Black women's cartographies but in a way that does not further the need to reify Black geographies and identities as marginal. Understanding Sylvia Wynter's notion of the demonic as a vantage point rather than a delimiting or abject category is helpful in clarifying this point.

Wynter uses the phrase "demonic grounds" to distinguish how the colonized and enslaved are forced into a vantage point from which they must think about space differently. This difference is understood as demonic but not in the way one might think at first glance. By demonic, Wynter means to signify a vantage point outside the "human perspective." This way of thinking about the demonic has its roots in physics more so than religious studies or theology.[40] In physics, the demonic refers to a mathematical problem that can only be solved with respect to a non-human vantage point and is thus essentially unsolvable.[41] Sylvia Wynter's use of the demonic allows her to rethink, and unthink, how Black and decolonial studies engage the colonized and enslaved woman. As such, Wynter delivers the enslaved and colonized woman from perpetual foreclosure in marginality and into a vantage point for thinking and rethinking the human, being, politics, struggle, etc. The demonic is also used by Wynter to resignify Africa and the Americas as inhabitable rather than uninhabitable

[40] Sylvia Wynter, "Beyond Miranda's Meanings: Un/Silencing the 'Demonic Ground' of Caliban's Women," in *Out of the Kumbla: Caribbean Women and Literature*, ed. Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido (Trenton: Africa World, 1990), 355–372.

[41] Sylvia Wynter, "Beyond Miranda's Meanings," 355–372.

zones. Demonic grounds unthink the myth that Europe, the European colony, and the modern nation state are the only inhabitable spaces of the West.[42]

McKittrick explicates Wynter's appeal to the "demonic" to describe the ways in which Black women's cartographies are disorganized processes of cognition that occur "outside" the "non-arbitrary and pre-prescribed."[43] As such, Black women's cartographies—from the perspective of Eurocentrism—are unthinkable, disorganized, and "non-linear modes of cognition"[44] that remain outside but constitutive with Eurocentric notions of the Western territory. Wynter gives a historical example of demonic grounds in her essay entitled "Novel and Narrative: The Plot and the Plantation," where she indicates that the plots of land given to the enslaved to cultivate food for their survival and sustenance were remapped by the enslaved.[45] The plot, a space deemed necessary for the survival of the plantation economy, became the space in which an alternative life-way to the plantation was envisioned and enacted. While not every plot was leveraged in *plots* to end domination, those that were can be read in ways that counter Eurocentric geographies of domination. With Wynter we can read these counterpoint geographies as integral rather than marginal to modern geography. In this regard, the plot should not be read as dismal space but rather as a space always contending with domination while inventing and experimenting with possibilities for existence.

Demonic grounds—both the book and the terminology—provide a way to think Womanist theological thought, decoloniality, and intersectionality together. While the cartographical reading of modernity is not an analytical panacea, it gives more historical consideration to the spatial reality in which the categories of race, class, and gender are wielded to dominate bodies, knowledges, and spatial relationships. Colonization and enslavement are profound spatial oppressions. Any encounter with God that emerges out of the profundity of geographical domination is bound to be greatly influenced by the reality of being forced to "represent" the uninhabitable non-human vantage point. Ironically, being rendered as the representation of the non-human that inhabits uninhabitable zones

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[42] Sylvia Wynter, "1492: A New World View," in *Race, Discourse, and the Origin of the Americas: A New World View*, ed. Vera Lawrence and Rex Nettleford (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1995), 5–57. Here Wynter sets out how the Eurocentered logic of uninhabitability and inhabitability worked to degrade African and indigenous American ways of thinking about space or mapping territory. From Wynter's perspective, modernity is haunted by the spatial logics of uninhabitable and inhabitable zones.

[43] McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds,* 17.

[44] McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, 16.

[45] Wynter, "Novel and History, Plot and Plantation," 99.

is a vantage point for reimagining the human. Such a vantage point provides space for delinking the subaltern connotation of "contextual" and "liberation theologies" from the burden of representing or legitimating the perspectival approach to theological reflection. As intuited by Delores Williams, the dichotomy of oppressed and oppressor, enslaved and enslaver need not continue to dominate how Black experience and the human/God encounter are framed. There are also rich narratives of survival and resistance that can act as basis to approach the universal through the particular.

When taken together, McKittrick's use of demonic grounds and Williams's wilderness experience offer a framework for considering intersectional differences. These frameworks make space for engaging intersectional identities while holding them in tension with a decolonial critique of the nation state. As suggested in the earlier engagement with Jennifer Nash, the future beyond the need to legitimate intersectional being would necessitate an unthinking of how diversity and inclusion are used to approximate Black liberation and freedom by reforming white feminist power. Lance Bottoms's mayoral address is a significant test case for understanding how diversity and inclusion efforts approximate Black liberation and freedom by legitimating, repressing, and sanitizing Black power. Lance Bottoms leverages her power as mayor, as many have done before her, to enforce an orderly way for civil disobedience and protest to take place. Her appeals to voting, non-violent protests, and other ways of "effectuating change" ring hollow to new Black political strategists who want the police state dismantled or radically reformed. That Atlanta can boast Black entrepreneurial success and the legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr., is not yet consequential enough to the goal of rethinking governance beyond the police state. As Delores Williams argued with her notion of wilderness experience, Lance Bottoms and many other Black mayors throughout the nation are interpreting their political achievements in terms of arrival in the promised land rather than ongoing travail through the wilderness. The pursuit of Black economic success in the realm of real estate ventures, albeit by trendy hip-hop moguls, is an attempt to legitimate black humanity through the achievement of private property. These are settler logics of enclosure and extraction. Stated in Wynterian language, it leverages the logic of uninhabitable and inhabitable zones. Lance Bottoms's address rhetorically leveraged the threat of Atlanta becoming uninhabitable to Black entrepreneurial success as a means to garner the support of Black cultural figures profiting from cheap property values in Atlanta's uninhabitable zones.

CONCLUSION

The frameworks of wilderness and demonic grounds are not a panacea but they do well to signal a spatial vantage point from which to unthink and rethink Black existence, governance, and being. Governance from demonic grounds rethinks human relations from beyond the "genre of the human"[46] enforced by modernity. As indicated in my earlier comments on Quijano and Mohanty, Lance Bottoms is harnessing civil rights discourse to enforce a certain way of envisioning governance through representational politics and voting. Understanding the *whereness* or the location of intersectional oppression is a different kind of invitation, not contained within a representational politics of identity. Intersectionality can aid theological reflection in breaking with the house of the nation state. This potential hinges upon theologians embracing both the political and theological insights of those who imagine a possibility out of the nation state, in the wilderness. Such a position may be good news to Black political figures who have mistaken the house of law and order, for a symbol—and perhaps an idol—of Black redemption. Unlike the legitimation and civility tactics deployed by Lance Bottoms, this decolonial reading of Delores Williams offers a way of framing intersectionality with respect to alternative possibilities of imaging political struggle. Such an invitation is not one begging for the inclusion of difference within a Eurocentric, male dominated theological canon or the political economy of the nation state. It is an invitation to see God's revelation within cartographies of struggle. In the same way that Nazareth was remapped as the birthplace of one who came into conflict with Empire, so too can the plots of the enslaved be remapped as robust spaces for thinking about the human encounter with divinity and a struggle for a new humanity. The plots, like Nazareth, are an invitation to substantive engagement with God in the face of the uninhabitable, in the wilderness, and on demonic grounds.

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[46] Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality," 257–337.

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