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**FRAMEWORKS TOWARD POST/DECOLONIAL PASTORAL LEADERSHIPS**

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“We have seen that colonization materially kills the colonized. It must be added that colonization kills [us] spiritually. Colonization distorts relationships, destroys or petrifies institutions, and corrupts [humans], both colonizers and colonized.”<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract**

*The current state of Protestant Christianity within the U.S. context calls for prophetic pastoral leaders who resist and disrupt empire and colonial being-thinking-acting, creating space for re-envisioning and re-existencing within faith communities. Presented here is the first in a two-part series introducing post/decolonial pastoral leaderships, with this article focusing on grounding definitions and frameworks that challenge constructed westernized notions of leadership and church. The second article in the series, to be published in the following issue, will highlight various processes for engaging and embodying post/decolonial pastoral leaderships.*

**Introduction**

Postcolonial and decolonial theories and theologies, though acknowledged widely and engaged across various disciplines, have remained largely within the realms of academia due in part to their philosophical and theoretical underpinnings. In this moment of time, however, these frameworks contain critical relevance as

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<sup>1</sup> Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, expanded ed. (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1991), 151.

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events and circumstances have exposed not only the deeply racist systems of policing in the United States, but also the short- and long-term effects of racialized access to health care, mortality rates, and employment security in the context of a global pandemic, among other dynamics.

Pastoral leaders have not been immune to witnessing and experiencing these impacts, most immediately within their own congregations and communities. As pastors grapple with re-envisioning church in a COVID-19 world and congregations continue to discern what an antiracist faith might mean for their lives together, questions must be raised about the foundations that have created and nurtured these oppressive dynamics, allowing them to flourish in the U.S. context. Beyond questions, however, prophetic religious leaders and churches are needed that can resist and dismantle the systems that have allowed injustices and violences (racial and otherwise) to flourish for centuries. As this paper will argue, these collective systems and dynamics are part of the larger construction of the United States as a modern colonial empire; therefore, post/decolonial leadership frameworks that seek justice, transformation, and the re-existence of marginalized peoples and ways of being-thinking-acting are necessary for the collective liberation of all people of faith.<sup>2</sup>

That being said, what is offered here are liminal, inviting possibilities for transformation on the eschatological thresholds between the worlds that exist and the worlds we desire. To these ends, the article provides a general overview of colonialism,

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<sup>2</sup> Some definitional caveats: I choose to signify this work as “post/decolonial” in order to acknowledge the separate contextual and theoretical streams from which challenges to coloniality have arisen in the literature, as well as to highlight their common foundational aims as critiques to colonial being-thinking-acting. I use the term pastoral leadership as a reference to individuals functioning within and among the broad spectrum of Christian traditions and faith communities, with the hope that what is articulated in this article might be applicable, at least in part, to leaders and congregations beyond Christianity. Within the article, however, I speak most directly to my own religious context of mainline Protestantism as an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ and faculty member at a seminary that is connected with the United Methodist Church.

postcolonialism, and decoloniality as scholarly fields, as well as a rationale for the use of post/decolonial approaches rather than an isolated use of related frameworks. I then offer a broad survey of the scholarship to date on postcolonialisms and decolonialisms, addressing the practice of ministry and leadership, highlighting key contributions that frame some characteristics of post/decolonial pastoral leaderships. Finally, I articulate a case for the use of *leaderships* as subversion of an assumed singular model of pastoral leadership.

### **Colonialism, Postcolonialism, and Decoloniality**

It would be folly to attempt a thorough summation of the scholarship on colonialism, postcolonialism, and decoloniality; within each of these areas lie differing constructions, critiques, and analyses about the concepts and their applications to varying contexts. Nonetheless, generally accepted definitions and key contributions in each of these areas are necessary in order to obtain basic understandings of the dynamics that might inform pastoral leadership praxes.

Colonialism as “the conquest and control of other people’s lands and goods” is part of many known histories (the Inca, Byzantine, Roman, Mongol, Aztec, and Ottoman empires to name a few examples), but *modern* european colonialism “ushered in new and different kinds of colonial practices which altered the whole globe in a way that previous colonialisms did not.”<sup>3</sup> Though not the only distinguishing feature, modern colonialism was established alongside, and became inextricably bound with, western european capitalism, which led to the complete economic restructuring of colonies, “drawing them into a complex relationship with their own [economies] so that there was a flow of human and natural resources between colonised and colonial countries.”<sup>4</sup> By the 1930s, western colonial empires occupied roughly 84.6 percent of the earth’s surface.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2015), 20–21.

<sup>4</sup> Loomba, 21

<sup>5</sup> Loomba, 36.

Colonialism has taken, and continues to take, numerous forms around the globe. Administrative colonialism, for example, minimizes the movement of people from the colonizing country and functions largely through local power structures and existing administrations. Settler colonialism, on the other hand, often involves the movement of large numbers of people from the colonizing country to the colony, imposing the colonizers' military, economic, and administrative patterns on the colony. Settler colonialism also might take the form of territorial annexation, as in the case of Puerto Rico and other territories (as well as states like Louisiana, Hawaii, and Texas), plantation colonialism involving importing slaves or indentured groups from other parts of the world to the colony for crop cultivation and profit, or decimation/ghettoization in which settlers do not mix with native populations and they are systematically displaced or eliminated. Neo-colonialism (indirect control through economic means), the establishment of puppet regimes, and other controlling acts that are considered colonial and quasi-colonial continue in various parts of the world as part of modern western colonial projects.<sup>6</sup>

Situating the United States within these definitions—recognizing their permeability, confluence, and contestedness—it is clear that this country constitutes one of the leading colonial and imperialistic forces on the planet today.<sup>7</sup> From the enduring legacy of settler colonialism beginning in 1492 to the decimation and ghettoization of indigenous peoples through present times, the capture and forced labor of Africans on this “new” stolen land for colonial economic gain, the continuing territorial annexation of smaller indigenous nation-states, and corporate and governmental

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<sup>6</sup> Loomba, 23–25.

<sup>7</sup> Due to economic commonalities, colonialism and imperialism are commonly interchanged in current discourses, depending on context and historical processes. Often, colonialism is named as pre-capitalistic and imperialism is signified as capitalistic colonialism, though colonialism does not need to be in effect for imperialism to exist and vice versa. Ania Loomba offers this distinction in terms of spatiality, not temporality, as imperialism “originates in the metropolis, the process which leads to domination and control. Its result, or what happens in the colonies as a consequence of imperial domination is colonialism or neo-colonialism” (28).

neo-colonialistic practices the world over (in Central and South America, Africa, and the Middle East most recently), the United States of America is a colonial empire like few others. The ways in which western Christian theologies, biblical interpretations, and practices have justified and furthered colonialistic endeavors are intertwined with historical and present lived realities of people within and beyond the country's borders.

In this sense, the actions of resistance, subversion, and reclamation by those harmed and abused by colonialism constitute the beginnings of postcolonial and decolonial practice. This is a generalization in many respects but, nevertheless, critical to understanding the foundations from which postcolonialism developed. On the surface, the term *postcolonial* might be misunderstood as meaning simply “after” colonialism. While some situate postcolonialism within this historically focused framework, postcolonialism can be articulated more broadly as “the contestation of colonial dominion and the legacies of colonialism.”<sup>8</sup> Scholarship regarding which continuing legacies and situations should be considered postcolonial, and by what criteria, have created various discourses that shape postcolonialism's contributions to the particularities of historical contexts and larger similarities across contexts.

Theologian R.S. Sugirtharajah highlights inter- and intra-historical contextual discourses as part of the postcolonial project; however, he asserts that the discipline can be “stretched” toward other occurrences of intolerance and oppression, as well as function as “the political and ideological stance of an interpreter engaged in anticolonial and anti-globalizing” thought and action.<sup>9</sup> In this manner, it could be argued that any work bringing to the fore conflicting or suppressed voices, texts, narratives, and practices within religious settings—with the expressed purpose of challenging “vicious aspects of modernity” politically, epistemologically, ontologically, and theologically—has the possibility of being considered postcolonial. This aligns with post-structuralist

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<sup>8</sup> Loomba, 32.

<sup>9</sup> R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations: An Alternative Way of Reading the Bible and Doing Theology* (St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice Press, 2003), 4.

arguments within postcolonialism that question objectivity and investigate *a priori* sources of meaning.

The figure recognized most widely as the founder of postcolonial theory and criticism is Edward Said, who, in his groundbreaking 1978 work *Orientalism*, framed the field of Oriental studies as a western discourse that functioned as a “corporate institution for dealing with the Orient.”<sup>10</sup> This construction thus enabled the west “to manage...the Orient politically, socially, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively.”<sup>11</sup> Said issued an interdisciplinary and exhaustively cutting analysis of the ways in which understandings of the Middle East and Islam were European constructions that created an othered dichotomy between “the Orient” and “the Occident,” opening possibilities for others to offer criticisms relevant to their particular postcolonial contexts.<sup>12</sup>

As important as Said’s contributions are to the development of postcolonialism, several of his contemporaries in other parts of the world provided critical analyses of colonialism that continue to shape discourses today, most notably Frantz Fanon, Michel Foucault, Octave Mannoni, and Albert Memmi. In the 1980s and 1990s, Ashis Nandy’s work on the psychology of colonialism; Homi Bhabha’s development of the concepts of ambivalence, mimicry, and hybridity; and Gayatri Spivak’s postcolonial feminism and subalternity, contributed in important ways to a burgeoning field. Today, postcolonialism is found in nearly every discipline from the sciences to business and the humanities.<sup>13</sup>

Decoloniality as a field related to, yet distinctive from, postcolonialism situates its origins in the Americas (in what is considered South, Central, and North America) through scholars such as Aníbal Quijano, María Lugones, Walter D. Mignolo, and Catherine Walsh, among many others. Temporally, while

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<sup>10</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 3.

<sup>11</sup> Said, 3.

<sup>12</sup> Said, 2.

<sup>13</sup> For a thorough accounting of postcolonial scholarship across disciplines, as well as a concise yet exhaustive overview of colonialism and postcolonialism, see Anshuman Prasad’s introductory chapter in Anshuman Prasad, ed., *Post-colonial Theory and Organizational Analysis: A Critical Engagement* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).



postcolonialism is concerned primarily with european colonial activities of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Asia, the Middle East, and Africa, decoloniality tracks european colonial expansion in the Americas beginning in the fifteenth century.<sup>14</sup> Deemed more philosophical in nature by scholars (while still remaining rooted within the lived colonial context of the Americas), decoloniality, as articulated by Aníbal Quijano, ties together explicitly the projects of modernity and coloniality, arguing that modernity constructed knowledge as a rational, individualized endeavor by which the european self became differentiated from the “other” and denied “the idea of the social totality.”<sup>15</sup> Thus, modernity and coloniality are inextricably linked within the european self-narrative. María Lugones further argued that modernity/coloniality bonds enforced constructions of race, gender, and sexuality that “rearticulated particular european understandings of gender and sex from a bifurcation between male and female to a racialized understanding of the same embedded within a logic of colonial difference.”<sup>16</sup>

As emphasized by Mignolo and Walsh, decoloniality—like postcolonialism—does not offer new universal constructs or narratives that simply replace colonial narratives. Rather, decoloniality is expressed and engaged relationally within particular local communities and contexts, creating *pluriversal decoloniality* and *decolonial pluriversality*, with the explicit aim of continuing “to advance the undoing of eurocentrism’s totalizing claim and frame, including the eurocentric legacies incarnated in U.S.-centrism and perpetuated in Western geopolitics of knowledge.”<sup>17</sup> Rather than resistance “against the colonial matrix of power,” decoloniality seeks re-existence “for the possibilities of an otherwise.”<sup>18</sup> In the construction of post/decolonial pastoral leaderships, an emphasis on re-existence is critical for faith

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<sup>14</sup> Gurminder K. Bhambra, “Postcolonial and Decolonial Dialogues,” *Postcolonial Studies* 17(2), 2014.

<sup>15</sup> Aníbal Quijano, “Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality,” *Cultural Studies* 21(2), 2007: 173.

<sup>16</sup> Bhambra, 118.

<sup>17</sup> Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University, 2018), 2.

<sup>18</sup> Mignolo and Walsh, 3, 17.

communities to center marginalized voices, experiences, and ways of being-thinking-acting (without appropriating, fetishizing, and replicating colonial dynamics). As a result, in disruption of the binary rational construction of theory versus praxis, decoloniality prioritizes “theory-and-as-praxis and praxis-and-as-theory...the interdependence and continuous flow of movement of both.”<sup>19</sup>

Both in theory and in praxis, postcolonialism and decoloniality offer new possibilities for prophetic pastoral leaderships by examining and critiquing “church” and “leadership” as products and continuing carriers of modern western colonialism as they have been understood and practiced, particularly within mainline Protestantism. Reflecting on ways that structures and processes of church mirror eurocentric secular entities in their governance (i.e., the centering of hierarchical models of pastoral leadership, boards of directors, Robert’s Rules of Order for decision making, and so on) and organizational life (e.g., designated and separate ministries of education by age group or life stage, worship, missions, and so on) in light of the calls of postcolonialism and decoloniality to “expos[e] dominance and challeng[e] notions of authority—political, epistemological, and other kinds” is a critical move in this current national climate.<sup>20</sup> Authority, as it relates to the concept of leadership, possesses a particular historied (not herstoried) narrative within the United States. Under the lenses of postcolonialism and decoloniality, eurocentric images, symbols, bodies, qualities, characteristics, skills, practices, and ideas of leaders and leadership provide little, if any, allowance for post/decolonial pluriversality and “an otherwise.” Even the best of these frameworks on the practice of pastoral leadership cannot escape the centering of modern

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<sup>19</sup> Mignolo and Walsh, 7.

<sup>20</sup> Stephen Burns, “Introduction,” *Postcolonial Practice of Ministry: Leadership, Liturgy, and Interfaith Engagement*, eds. Kwok Pui-lan and Stephen Burns (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2016), 3.



colonial models of excellence.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, these theories and praxes of leadership must be examined, interrogated, and dismantled as they offer increasing irrelevance to the challenges present within churches and the United States as a whole.

### **Locating the Scholar**

In attempting to explicate post/decolonial approaches to pastoral leaderships, acknowledgement of, and critical reflection upon, one's own identities and contexts is part of the practice of unmasking given realities and interrupting norms that minimize multiple worldviews. I, Kristina, am a U.S.-born, biracial Latina (Puerto Rican and Italian) who has been steeped within evangelical and mainline Protestant traditions (largely within Mexican American Roman Catholic geographic and cultural contexts) throughout my life. While I have spent some time in Central America and traveled to other parts of the globe, my worldview, scholarship, and ministry practice have been shaped by U.S. western higher educational and religious institutions. Even as a biracial Latina whose race, gender, sexual identity, socioeconomic, and geographical backgrounds are "othered" and minimized/negated within this country, I acknowledge that as a citizen, I participate and am complicit in the colonial modern empire that is the United States. Whether I like it or not, I am a settler/trespasser on Indigenous land as a home/landowner and resident of this country (as are all nonindigenous

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<sup>21</sup> I offer two illustrations to this point. Edwin Friedman's *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix* (New York: Seabury Books, 2007) is a favored text on self-differentiated leadership and navigating emotional systems; yet Friedman devotes significant portions of the book to lauding the leadership and actions of Christopher Columbus in the discovery of the "New World." Doug Pagitt's *Church in the Inventive Age* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 2014) offers a framework for understanding various pastoral leadership roles in particular "ages" of the church throughout U.S. history, but only does so based on the settler history of the country and, therefore, from a solely European colonial perspective of church.

peoples in the United States), regardless of being a person of color.<sup>22</sup>

At the same time, however, being part *boriqua* comes with its own complexities that lay bare the U.S. colonial relationship with Puerto Rico and historical and present struggles for freedom and political and economic autonomy. As a product of Spanish colonization and U.S. colonialism of the island, I carry within my bones the pain of subjugation, conquest, and struggle that my ancestors lived and that I continue to shoulder.<sup>23</sup> In essence, I embody colonizer and colonized, able to bear witness and feel most profoundly the racisms, sexism, and heterosexism enacted structurally and individually by the church and its people, yet also attuned to the ways in which I benefit from and perpetuate colonialism through my participation in the flourishing of the mainline Protestant church as an ordained minister and a seminary faculty member, and thereby a coconspirator in the modern colonial milieu. In these ways and more, I resonate with Gloria Anzaldúa's identification as a bridge that "span[s] liminal (threshold) spaces between worlds...this in-between space lacking clear boundaries."<sup>24</sup> Always residing in this liminal space in which one never feels quite at "home," my abilities to be both an insider and an outsider, benefactor and castaway, have heightened my awarenesses of the coloniality of the U.S. church and its/our structures, practices, and powers.

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<sup>22</sup> See Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1(1) (2012): 5. Tuck and Yang assert, "Settler colonialism is different from other forms of colonialism in that settlers come with the intention of making a new home on the land, a home-making that insists on settler sovereignty over all things in their new domain... This violence is not temporally contained in the arrival of the settler but is reasserted each day of occupation."

<sup>23</sup> For more on this subject, see Teresa Delgado, *A Puerto Rican Decolonial Theology: Prophecy Freedom* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

<sup>24</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, "(Un)natural Bridges, (Un)safe Spaces," *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation*, eds. Gloria E. Anzaldúa and Analouise Keating (New York: Routledge, 2002), 1.

## Locating the Church

Drawing upon the definitional frameworks of colonialism, postcolonialism, and decoloniality, it can now be argued more conclusively that the modern colonial U.S. context is one in which human lives have been brutalized and othered in the name of supremacy, incarcerated and monetized for capitalistic gain, and ignored and expended through individualized economies. American Christianity, situated within this context, can therefore be understood as an entity inextricably bound together with modern colonialism. As such, the task of decolonizing American Christianity itself is always beyond reach because of its/our historical and continuing interconnections and complicities with empire, theft and claim of indigenous land, missionization efforts eradicating languages and ways of being of nonwhite others, and theologies of Manifest Destiny and white european supremacy resulting in slavery, genocides, and environmental destruction.<sup>25</sup>

On a smaller scale, churches in the United States today, while serving the public good,<sup>26</sup> also engage consciously and unconsciously in upholding and furthering colonialism through liturgies, rituals, curricula (explicit, implicit, and null), governance, and leadership preparation and credentialing, to name a few areas. Concurrently, these dynamics are actualized within models of church and ministry that replicate modern colonial structures of pastors serving as CEOs and churches being managed as businesses with laity as consumers of resources and goods, rendering faith itself as the primary good or product.<sup>27</sup> As a result, colonial ethics and praxes are inescapable for

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<sup>25</sup> See George E. Tinker, *Missionary Conquest: The Gospel and Native American Cultural Genocide* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1993); Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980); and Martin E. Marty, *Pilgrims in Their Own Land: 500 Years of Religion in America* (Boston, Mass.: Little, Brown, and Company, Inc., 1984).

<sup>26</sup> See Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Pillars of Faith: American Congregations and Their Partners* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

<sup>27</sup> See Mona West, "Metropolitan Community Church as a Messy Space for Revisioning the Other Side of Pastoral Ministry," *Postcolonial Practice of Ministry: Leadership, Liturgy, and Interfaith Engagement*, eds. Kwok Pui-lan and Stephen Burns (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2016), 54–55.

pastoral leaders and anyone else who claims status as an American Christian, especially since we are American *and* Christian.<sup>28</sup>

Precisely because of these intertwining realities, movements toward post/decolonial approaches for prophetic pastoral leadership must be attempted, knowing that this will never be a completed endeavor, nor one in which errors will elude us. This work is not to be undertaken as an act of self-preservation for a declining mainline Protestant enterprise due to a U.S. euroamerican aging population and decreasing birth rates.<sup>29</sup> Rather, this is an act of necessity arising from ontological, epistemological, and moral foundations from a faith fully conscientized to the contextual realities and theological imperatives of communities. With the words and actions of Jesus, and the urgings of myriad ancient and contemporary prophets, Christians have been called to negate colonialism in how we lead and participate in *ekklesia*.<sup>30</sup> As sociologist R. Stephen Warner articulates, “Christianity is not for European Americans to define, speak for, or even disown.”<sup>31</sup> Instead, faith is to be defined and redefined from a multiplicity of contexts, peoples, cultures, practices, and lived experiences in negation of, and transcending, the modern colonial construction that is the United States.

### Differentiating Approaches

In the process of articulating post/decolonial leadership praxes, frameworks that contain aligning values or commitments must be considered. While numerous approaches abound, two frameworks

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<sup>28</sup> See Julie Todd, “Confessions of a Christian Supremacist,” *Reflections: Narratives of Professional Helping* 16(1) 2010: 140–146.

<sup>29</sup> The decline in U.S. birth rates among whites mirrors declines in reported child baptisms and membership changes within mainline Protestant denominations, as demonstrated by John P. Marcum, “W(h)ither the Mainline? Trends and Prospects,” *Review of Religious Research* 59(2) (2017): 119–134.

<sup>30</sup> This is a direct reference to feminist theologian Rebecca Chopp’s description of *ekklesia* as counter-public sphere of justice and as a community of friends engaging in a praxis of connectedness, as outlined in her book *Saving Work: Feminist Practices of Theological Education* (Louisville, Ken.: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 62–69.

<sup>31</sup> R. Stephen Warner, *A Church of Our Own: Disestablishment and Diversity in American Religion* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 261.

commonly drawn upon within U.S. mainline Protestantism—anti-racism and diversity and inclusion—are explored in view of post/decolonial commitments. These particular approaches, while presented as separate frameworks, are interrelated in theory and practice. Moreover, it is important to note that these frameworks constitute important approaches to pastoral leadership, as both theological commitments and lived praxes within churches and other religious organizations, and are actualized in myriad contexts with equally varied outcomes. As such, references to mainline Protestant contexts may be generalized, but only as illustrations toward comparing approaches.

### *Anti-Racist Approaches*

With the election of the first black U.S. president in 2008, the rise of Black Lives Matter as a response to police killings, increased border security and separation and detainment of asylum-seeking children and families, and the growing voice and threat of domestic terrorism in the form of white supremacist individuals and groups, among other issues, a growing number of pastoral leaders and churches have gained greater awareness of racism and the impacts of white privilege. Denominations, including my own United Church of Christ, have created resources for churches to learn about and openly discuss issues of race in the United States.<sup>32</sup> Some pastoral leaders and churches have engaged in training on anti-racism and white privilege in their areas and have developed partnerships with local organizing groups or communities of color in solidarity and action.<sup>33</sup> These efforts are necessary and critical for pastoral leaders and churches in living out their faith and commitments to justice

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<sup>32</sup> United Church of Christ, “Sacred Conversations Planning Resources,” Sacred Conversations on Race, [https://www.ucc.org/sacred-conversation\\_sacred-conversation-resources](https://www.ucc.org/sacred-conversation_sacred-conversation-resources).

<sup>33</sup> See: Adelle M. Banks, “Churches Examine White Privilege,” *Religion News Service* (April 19, 2016), <https://religionnews.com/2016/04/19/churches-hold-classes-about-white-privilege/>; Jesse James Deonto, “The Church Camps That Aim to Bridge Race Relations,” *The Atlantic* (July 10, 2016), <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/07/churches-discuss-race-relations/490535/>; and James Dearie, “National Council of Churches Gears up to Combat U.S. Racism,” *National Catholic Reporter* (March 26, 2018), <https://www.ncronline.org/news/justice/national-council-churches-gears-combat-us-racism>.



and the common good, even as some of these endeavors might not fully constitute anti-racist approaches.

On this point, the meanings and practices associated with anti-racism are nuanced and varied. Alastair Bonnett offers a general definition of anti-racism as referring “to those forms of thought and/or practice that seek to confront, eradicate and/or ameliorate racism.” He continues:

Of course, different forms of anti-racism often operate with different definitions of what racism is. For example, some construe racism as an articulate, explicit faith in racial superiority, while others view racism as a system of racial discrimination, seeing its key site of operation not within individual consciousness, but in social processes that lead to racial inequality.<sup>34</sup>

Bonnett outlines various types of anti-racist practice, not as a comprehensive typology but as an illustration of intersecting—and often simultaneously practiced—forms of social participation and engagement, including everyday anti-racism, multicultural anti-racism, psychological anti-racism, and radical anti-racism, each of which might or might not include post/decolonial elements and practices.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, in his work *How to Be an Antiracist*, Ibram X. Kendi proposes intersectional definitions for varying anti-racisms, including biological, ethnic, bodily, cultural, behavioral, color, space, anti-capitalist, gender, and queer anti-racisms. Kendi identifies an anti-racist as “one who is expressing the idea that racial groups are equals and none needs developing, and is supporting policy that reduces racial inequity” and juxtaposes this description with assimilationist and segregationist definitions and actions.<sup>36</sup>

In the practice of post/decolonial leaderships within congregations as well as the broader public sphere, anti-racist approaches and actions must be included. Given the construction of race as a determining rationale for the colonizing project, thus

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<sup>34</sup> Alastair Bonnett, *Anti-Racism* (London: Routledge, 2000), 3–4.

<sup>35</sup> Bonnett, 88.

<sup>36</sup> Ibram X. Kendi, *How to Be an Antiracist* (New York: One World, 2019), 24.



cementing the modern colonial categories by which all nonwhite others have been defined, challenging and working toward disruption and dismantling of racism individually, intrapersonally, communally, systemically, and globally becomes part of the praxis necessary for post/decolonial pastoral leaderships.

That being said, anti-racist approaches *alone* might not constitute post/decolonial leaderships in their entirety. Given its very definition, anti-racism work is focused primarily on one aspect of socially constructed identity (albeit an incredibly salient one in relationship to post/decolonialism). While some in religious circles within the United States have embraced intersectional anti-racist approaches that take seriously gender, socioeconomic/class, sexuality, ability, citizenship, and other relevant identities (as Kendi and Bonnett have nuanced), the primacy of combating racist ideologies, experiences, and systemic actualizations remains the central concern of leaders committed to anti-racism work. Often, these same anti-racist religious leaders are unaware of the ways in which they perpetuate sexism, heterosexism, classism, ableism, xenophobia, and so on through their practice of leadership,<sup>37</sup> not to mention the perpetuation of coloniality/modernity through homogeneity, hierarchical power centralization, control over (economic, governing, and so on), and overt and covert minimization and negation of nonwestern peoples, values,

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<sup>37</sup> A poignant description and critique of this phenomenon is offered in the essay “Love as the Practice of Freedom” by bell hooks in her book *Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representations* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 243–250.

knowledges, and praxes.<sup>38</sup> In essence, ideas and actions might be anti-racist (whereby empire remains intact), but not necessarily post/decolonial (which assumes an inherent critique of empire/coloniality). Pastoral leaders who seek to engage and embody post/decolonial praxes must commit to the work of anti-racism, as well as challenge the very systems, epistemologies, powers, and histories that have created the constructions of race resulting in the various racisms present today.

### *Diversity and Inclusion Approaches*

Diversity and inclusion are two separate, yet often paired, concepts in organizational life (and are sometimes offered with a third concept: equity). Diversity, in its simplest meaning, is the assumed expression of differences present in and throughout the cosmos—not only biologically, chemically, and physically, but also sociologically, anthropologically, psychologically, religiously, and so on. Diversity is. However, in a western colonial context, homogeneity as a pathway to order and control has taken root as the unconscientized norm for leadership and institutional excellence. Pastoral leaders and churches have struggled during the last several decades over an intentional organizational push for diversity not only to define the socially constructed categories included in this notion, but also to follow through with diversifying the memberships of said entities. In mainline Protestantism, for example, the vast majority of pastors and churches remain euroamerican racially and ethnically, despite decades-long calls for diversity and some recruitment

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<sup>38</sup> In addition, it is important to note here that ideas and practices considered to be anti-racist may in and of themselves perpetuate racism, particularly white racism and white privilege. Shannon Sullivan's work *Good White People: The Problem With Middle-Class White Anti-Racism* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 2014, 5) outlines the ways in which anti-racist work for whites "is not necessarily an attempt to eliminate racial injustice—which, to be successful, might involve strategies or tactics that don't make white people look or feel morally good—but a desire to be recognized as Not Racist, perhaps especially by people of color." Furthermore, white liberal anti-racism's "use of white class hierarchies to perpetuate white domination of people of color" reinforces the intersectional nature of oppression not overtly recognized in anti-racist work, and it dismisses the modern colonial dynamics around maintenance of power and control at play systemically and relationally.

efforts to increase multiculturalism. In the midst of a largely unchanged church context in this area, however, some historically euroamerican traditions and congregations have managed to take strides toward racial diversity.<sup>39</sup> At its worst, diversity is seen as a strong-arming tactic forced upon pastoral leaders and churches by a society run amok with political correctness.<sup>40</sup> At its best, diversity can be an appropriately value-centered and theologically grounded endeavor to enhance the flourishing of the whole, both peoples and institutions alike. How diversity is perceived and defined can lead to any number of outcomes when efforts are made to “be more diverse,” whether in terms of race, ethnicity, age, gender, sexuality, class, ability, and so on.

Similar to anti-racist approaches, calls and actions toward increased diversity alone do not constitute post/decolonial leaderships. In his work *A Leftist Critique of the Principles of Identity, Diversity, and Multiculturalism*, Richard Anderson-Connolly debunks the common ideology among liberal Protestants that “the most important struggle for justice today is increasing the representation throughout society of individuals from historically marginalized groups by ending discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, sexual orientation, and similar characteristics.”<sup>41</sup> Naming this practice *diversity as justice*, Anderson-Connolly argues

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<sup>39</sup> See Mark Chaves and Shawna L. Anderson, “Changing American Congregations: Findings From the Third Wave of the National Congregations Study,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 53(4)(2014): 680. They assert that “congregations, especially white congregations, have become more internally diverse since 1998” but also caution that they “do not want to overstate the significance of this increasing ethnic diversity within American congregations. Eighty-six percent of American congregations (containing 80 percent of religious service attendees) remain overwhelmingly white or black or Hispanic or Asian or whatever.”

<sup>40</sup> For example, proponents of this view might argue that increased racial diversity within a congregation is correlated with decreased average church attendance. See Kevin D. Dougherty, Brandon C. Martinez, and Gerardo Marti, “Congregational Diversity and Attendance in a Mainline Protestant Denomination,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 54(4) (2015): 668–683.

<sup>41</sup> Richard Anderson-Connolly, *A Leftist Critique of the Principles of Identity, Diversity, and Multiculturalism* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2019), 32.

that ideas and actions toward increasing diversity are not only coupled incorrectly with outcomes of decreased discrimination, but also “pose no threat to the interests or agendas of the economic and political elite.”<sup>42</sup> In particular, pastoral leaders who work toward increased diversity must interrogate the underlying colonial forces at play that have kept homogeneity in place within their churches and religious organizations. In other words, energy spent questioning and disrupting shared cultural norms, assumptions, theologies, processes, rituals, and relational dynamics to expose the ways these reinforce coloniality/modernity and its commitments to homogeneity and uniformity would be a movement toward post/decolonial leadership praxes.

Inclusion, the phrasal complement to diversity, becomes the assumed enacted disposition of individuals who desire increased diversity. If a pastoral leader or congregation is committed to the idea of diversity in theory, then steps usually are taken to “be more inclusive” of others. In these instances, inclusion often emerges as an effort to bring others into the center, whereby the center embodies colonial/modern voices, perspectives, and ways of being-thinking-acting. For the socially and/or culturally “others” that the church is attempting to attract, this model of inclusion could result in outcomes that actually garner greater power for, and solidify colonial constructions of, pastoral leadership and church life, thus relegating the now “included” others to the church’s margins.<sup>43</sup> In these instances, patterns of colonialism are replicated from beginning to end through a kind of “cheap inclusion” in which

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<sup>42</sup> Anderson-Connolly, 10.

<sup>43</sup> To illustrate this phenomenon more broadly, decolonial scholar Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui describes how reforms in Bolivia have played out politically for indigenous communities: “Since the nineteenth century, liberal and modernizing reforms in Bolivia have given rise to a practice of conditional inclusion, a ‘mitigated and second class’ citizenship. Today, the rhetoric of equality and citizenship is converted into a caricature that includes not only tacit political and cultural privileges but also notions of common sense that make incongruities tolerable and allow for the reproduction of the colonial structures of oppression.” See “*Ch’ixinakax utiwa: A Reflection on the Practices and Discourses of Decolonization*,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 111(1) (Winter 2012): 97.

the rhetoric of inclusion does not translate to engaged praxis.<sup>44</sup> Ultimately, what is reinforced constitutes *gatopardismo*, a “change so that everything remains the same,” as articulated by Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui.<sup>45</sup> Although many efforts on the part of pastoral leaders and congregations toward greater inclusion have proven to be fruitful movements rooted in seeking justice (including movements and actions for inclusion of women, LGBTQ persons, and people with disabilities or neurodiversities within churches), some of these efforts have caused harm to historically marginalized peoples when not actualized authentically or fully.

Ultimately, anti-racist and diversity and inclusion approaches to pastoral leadership should not be equated with post/decolonial pastoral leaderships. However, rather than positing an either/or, zero-sum choice in the matter of frameworks, the very embrace of post/decolonial dispositions asks that pastoral leaders expand into *both/and* ways of being-thinking-acting. If pastoral leaders begin to recognize and disrupt coloniality in their church contexts, bringing into re-existence the possibilities of an otherwise, this might create the space for anti-racist and diversity and inclusion ideas and actions that hold possibilities for deepening experiences of *ekklesia*.

### **Foundations for Post/Decolonial Pastoral Leaderships**

Leaderships that are post/decolonial in notion and practice do not require these precise monikers in order to be considered postcolonial or decolonial. Religious leaders, activists, and scholars the world over have engaged critically the ideas and praxes that reflect post/decoloniality in various forms and contexts. Contributions from liberation, critical race, indigenous, queer, feminist, womanist, and *mujerista* theologies, to name only a few, are grounded within post/decolonial contexts, worldviews, and ideologies in varying degrees. Post/decoloniality’s philosophical underpinnings in

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<sup>44</sup> This is a direct reference to what Robert S. Heaney calls cheap postcolonialism in his chapter “Prospects and Problems for Evangelical Postcolonialisms,” in *Evangelical Postcolonial Conversations: Global Awakenings in Theology and Practice*, eds. Kay Higuera Smith, Jayachitra Lalitha, and L. Daniel Hawk (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2014), 29–43.

<sup>45</sup> Rivera Cusicanqui, 101.

post-structuralism, postmodernism, marxism, and critiques of Enlightenment rationalism expose a wide interdisciplinary web of engagement across continents and movements. Surprisingly, some of the most recent books on the practice of pastoral leadership display hints of post/decoloniality (even as they continue to center largely colonial/modern narratives and constructions of church typical within mainline Protestantism).<sup>46</sup>

That being said, a growing body of literature is available on postcolonialism as it relates to the practice of ministry rooted in contributions of biblical scholars such as R.S. Sugirtharajah, Fernando Segovia, Musa Dube, Stephen D. Moore, Roland Boer, Tat-Siong Benny Liew, and Richard Horsley, to name a few. These scholars have sought to interrogate “accepted” biblical interpretations in consideration of nonwestern postcolonial contexts and worldviews, thereby unmasking colonial theological legacies. From biblical studies, postcolonial approaches have made their way into systematic theology and other areas, thanks in large part to individuals like Marcella Althaus-Reid, Kwok Pui-lan, and Catherine Keller, among others. Now, most recently, attention has turned to the postcolonial in practical theology; it is through this stream that explicit conversations are starting to take place regarding post/decolonial practice of ministry in worship, ritual,

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<sup>46</sup> I reference these authors with the utmost respect for their contributions. Susan Beaumont’s *How to Lead When You Don’t Know Where You’re Going: Leading in a Liminal Season* and Gil Rendle’s *Quietly Courageous: Leading the Church in a Changing World*, both published by Rowman & Littlefield in 2019, offer nuanced approaches to leading change, with Beaumont referencing the importance of liminality, discernment within community, and emergent strategy and Rendle describing nonlinear change processes and flexible and decentralized systems, among other ideas. Yet, the assumed frameworks for these concepts continue to be the established (euroamerican) mainline Protestant church steeped in colonial/modern constructions of thinking-being-acting.



pastoral care, education and formation, and leadership.<sup>47</sup>

Several works in the last decade illustrate some of the key contributions to post/decolonial ministry practice (though this is not an exhaustive accounting by any means). Michael N. Jagessar and Stephen Burns's work *Christian Worship: Postcolonial Perspectives* (2011) applies a postcolonial optic—a framework for “critical scrutiny of liturgical discourse and texts necessary in the struggle for liberation”—to traditioned texts, symbols, hymns, and lectionaries.<sup>48</sup> Claudio Carvalhaes's edited work *Liturgy in Postcolonial Perspectives: Only One Is Holy* (2015) also considers liturgy in conversation with the post/decolonial, expanding beyond Christianity to Judaism and Islam as well.<sup>49</sup> HyeRan Kim-Cragg interrogates western conceptions of formation and ritual from a Korean-Canadian feminist perspective in her book *Story and Song: A Postcolonial Interplay Between Christian Education and Worship* (2012).<sup>50</sup> Melinda A. McGarrah Sharp, in *Creating Resistances: Pastoral Care in a Postcolonial World* (2020), introduces a postcolonial framework of individual and community care that centers on movement through five specific resistances: not me, not here, not now, not relevant, and not possible.<sup>51</sup> Each of these texts highlights insights and approaches for pastoral leadership praxes that negate and dismantle coloniality in multiple manifestations,

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<sup>47</sup> It is important to note that the postcolonial trajectory of scholarship in practical theology, and among theological disciplines more broadly, takes place within western constructions of these disciplines themselves. For example, Christian education and worship are considered in the literature as largely separate, fixed areas of faith life (though, through post/decolonial pastoral perspectives, there exists potential for these categories to be reconsidered). With the whole of Protestantism and theological education as the product of western coloniality/modernity, these delineations are, in many ways, unavoidable and a continued tension for scholars and practitioners alike.

<sup>48</sup> Michael N. Jagessar and Stephen Burns, *Christian Worship: Postcolonial Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2011), 36.

<sup>49</sup> Claudio Carvalhaes, ed., *Liturgy in Postcolonial Perspectives: Only One Is Holy* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

<sup>50</sup> HyeRan Kim-Cragg, *Story and Song: A Postcolonial Interplay Between Christian Education and Worship* (New York: Peter Lang, 2012).

<sup>51</sup> Melinda A. McGarrah Sharp, *Creating Resistances: Pastoral Care in a Postcolonial World* (Boston, Mass.: Brill, 2020).

even though they are introduced here only briefly.

Toward the specific articulation of post/decolonial pastoral leaderships, however, pastoral theologian Emmanuel Y. Lartey provides the clearest, most comprehensive vision for embodiment and transformation. Situating postcolonial leadership within sub-Saharan African contexts, Lartey outlines some characteristics of postcolonial communities and leadership activities, with the acknowledgement that these are not meant to encompass the totality of the postcolonial faith community or leadership in all expressions. Lartey's characteristics of postcolonial communities consist of:

- Eruption of subjugated, indigenous knowledge;
- Collapsing of binary oppositions;
- Pluralities of discourse, diverse truths, and divergent histories (as an affirmation of multiple positions and perspectives);
- Recognition of social constructionism, especially of identity; and
- Resurgence of the conventional (acknowledging the continuing legacy of coloniality in conformity to western doctrines and practices).<sup>52</sup>

It is important to emphasize that Lartey contextualizes these characteristics within non-U.S. (and nonwhite) faith communities that bear the historical and continuing legacies of western european colonization, including Christian missionization efforts that reinforce colonial church structures, practices, symbols, theologies, and so on. However, each of these characteristics also holds possibilities for the disruption and re-existence of church in U.S. eurowestern contexts and could create opportunities for challenging homogeneity, hegemony, socially constructed categories, and eurocentric supremacies present within these faith communities.

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<sup>52</sup> Emmanuel Y. Lartey, "Borrowed Clothes Will Never Keep You Warm': Postcolonializing Pastoral Leadership," *Postcolonial Practice of Ministry: Leadership, Liturgy, and Interfaith Engagement*, eds. Kwok Pui-lan and Stephen Burns (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2016), 23–25.

As examples, churches that make space (material/physical space, symbolic space, relational space, and theological/religious space) for eruption of subjugated, indigenous knowledges actively invite and empower people on the fringes of their communities to have an equalized role in shaping and leading in various areas of ministry, thus creating openings for new perspectives, practices, and rituals that transform the faith of the whole. Acknowledging and living into the reality that those who are designated as positional leaders or trained clergy are not the only ones with religious knowledge and authority—moreover, that everyone in the community possesses profound wisdom, experiences, and knowledges equally and in multiple forms beyond rational, intellectual knowledge—breaks open previously closed structures and systems surrounding worship, preaching, governance, and formation and discipleship, among other areas.<sup>53</sup> These disruptions, therefore, lead to faith communities in which pluralities of discourse, diverse truths, and divergent histories flourish—including “linguistic, cultural, and political differences within which multiple positions and perspectives are continually expressed.”<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, churches in which these disruptions of presumed ways of being-thinking-acting are embraced with openness, curiosity, and humility (rather than reticence, disregard, and arrogance/condescension) are more likely to engage in habits and practices that do not draw distinct boundaries and binaries between “the sacred and the secular, reason and intuition, science and art.”<sup>55</sup>

Extending beyond postcolonial faith communities, Lartey also names several specific characteristics of postcolonializing leadership, thus arriving at the heart of what post/decolonial pastoral leaderships might look like within churches:

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<sup>53</sup> See West, 55. West makes the argument, “Not only does the corporate efficient model of pastoral leadership lead to burnout, it perpetuates a binary of clergy and laity by distancing the pastor from the people in the congregation. This model focuses on organizational structure, with a hierarchical leadership structure in which the pastor is the ‘expert.’”

<sup>54</sup> Lartey, 24.

<sup>55</sup> Lartey, 24.

- Counter-hegemonic, insurgent, subversive activities (calling into question dominance and hegemony in human relations within the church, community, or world);
- Strategic (bringing into critical focus the dialogical nature of relations between theory and practice, resulting in actions with transformative intent in the church and world);
- Hybrid/variegated/plural (promoting multidimensional discourses and practices);
- Interactional and intersubjective (emphasizing the social and global nature of phenomena and encouraging approaches to subjects that engage interactively with all people's experience in the discourse on any subject);
- Dynamic (engaging in analyses that reflect time, change and movement);
- Polyvocal (recognizing and encouraging many voices to speak and be heard on the subjects under consideration); and
- Creative (calling for and producing new forms of being, institutions, and practices in the church, community, and world).<sup>56</sup>

In order to nurture (trans)formations toward post/decolonial congregations in the modern colonial U.S. context, individuals and communities that can engage and embody the kinds of characteristics that Lartey highlights are critical. Not only do practicing (hopeful) post/decolonial pastoral leaders themselves stimulate and cocreate conditions for counter-hegemonic, insurgent, subversive activities that are hybrid, variegated, plural, and polyvocal (as characterized above within faith communities), they also do so strategically, interactionally, dynamically, and creatively.

Pastors who lead with a deep motivation for transforming the ways church life has been organized, governed, and practiced toward empire and colonial thinking-being-acting—as well as

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<sup>56</sup> Lartey, 28–31.

how individuals and groups are directly and indirectly impacted by oppressive colonial systems and actions—are praxically and conscientizationally strategic. Knowing the people in their communities intimately, they engage relationally and deliberately to expand imaginations beyond comfortable norms and expectations. Pastoral leaders who are interactional and intersubjective recognize the interrelatedness of global phenomena and systems and reveal the ways in which these systems perpetuate oppressions within local, national, and international communities, continually keeping in check the “potential destructive nature of power wielded without caution, subtlety, and sensitivity” and ceding space and authority to marginalized peoples and their experiences, perspectives, and practices in all areas of congregational life.<sup>57</sup> Pastors who engage in dynamic activities recognize that reality is always in flux, thus reflecting and acting in ways that presuppose and anticipate change, as well as reactions to change that involve real and perceived losses of individual and communal colonial powers (structural, relational, religious, economic, racial, gender, and so on). Finally, pastoral leaders who are creative move beyond improvisation—“the left-overs and whatever is available in and from the colonial project that are used in the formulation of structures that are implicitly temporary”—to new, cocreated and conurtured forms of being and living together in faith that “go beyond the status quo inherited or established as standard by colonizers.”<sup>58</sup>

What Lartey offers is by no means an exhaustive list of what is needed in the practice of post/decolonial pastoral leadership and community, as other important capacities such as resilience and interdependence were not named but hold important possibilities.<sup>59</sup> These activities and/or characteristics from Lartey serve simply as beginnings toward post/decolonial pastoral leadership praxes that religious leaders are to engage within their specific settings. Aspects of each of these items have been present throughout the conversation on post/decoloniality in this article; yet, when contemplated

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<sup>57</sup> Lartey, 30.

<sup>58</sup> Lartey, 31.

<sup>59</sup> See adrienne maree brown, *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds* (Chico, Calif.: AK Press, 2017).

together in this manner, they bring into focus movements toward what is needed in the practice of prophetic ministry within the church and the current U.S. context.

Caution must be given in review of these characteristics, however, as they are not intended to serve as a checklist when, upon *mastery* of all items, one has become a “post/decolonial” pastoral leader. The assumption that anyone is ever finished with the work of post/decolonial leadership is a trapping of coloniality/modernity, as is a presumption that the totality of these activities will automatically result in post/decolonial leadership and community in all times and places. Moreover, these activities must not be engaged in ignorance of the contexts and communities within which one is leading and serving. To do so without any regard for the faith community would be irresponsible at best and destructive at worst, especially as post/decolonial pastoral leadership centers these characteristics within the community. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that these activities will produce tensions, ambiguities, resistances of several varieties (for which study of McGarrah Sharp’s work might be beneficial), and experiences of loss as measured by colonial/modern and empiric/capitalist yardsticks (including losses around finances and membership, prestige and power, and order and homogeneity); yet these experiences should not serve as the deciding factor for whether pastoral leaders are to engage post/decolonial frameworks and praxes.

### **Toward Post/Decolonial Pastoral Leaderships**

In furthering conversations on post/decolonial leadership, a re-existencing of the language of leadership emerges as an effect of considering such frameworks and characteristics. Indeed, if pastoral leaders are to take Mignolo and Walsh’s calls to pluriversality and Larney’s commitments to counter-hegemonic, insurgent, subversive activities seriously, questioning the use of a singularized *leadership* seems to be a critical post/decolonial task. Just as new and varying frameworks contain the potential to shift worldviews and inform future praxes, re-linguaging offers similar seismic shifts that nurture capacities for decentering modern colonial being-thinking-acting within faith communities.



Language as an enduring tool for colonization and continuing colonialism is well documented. In his seminal work *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o details the ways in which forced glorification of the colonizer's language (whether English, French, or Portuguese in African contexts) at the expense of the language of the colonized ensured the erasure of culture and, in essence, "held the soul prisoner." He continues, "The bullet was the means of the physical subjugation. Language was the means of the spiritual subjugation."<sup>60</sup> In the U.S. context, English language instruction has been used as a colonial hammer to eradicate indigenous languages, force Christian religious adherence, separate generations of families and communities, and inflict western worldviews, practices, and habits on indigenous populations.<sup>61</sup> The English language—including its various grammatical exceptions to rules that evolved over time—continues as the eurocentric standard employed to measure those who know "proper" English against those who do not (and who are then subject to oppression and continued harms).<sup>62</sup>

As a biracial *boriqua*, the effects of colonialism with regard to language have left their mark on me. Both of my parents were born in the United States during a time (early to mid-1940s) when speaking a language other than English was highly suspect and generally discouraged, even though the first language either of them learned as children was not English (Spanish and Italian, respectively). As a result, while I was a witness to daily household conversations in other languages, we children were not taught

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<sup>60</sup> Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (Oxford, U.K.: James Currey Ltd., 1986), 9.

<sup>61</sup> In U.S. history, this is most visible in the missionization of American Indians whose children were separated from their families, forced into boarding schools, and punished if caught speaking their native languages. See George E. Tinker, *Missionary Conquest: The Gospel and Native American Cultural Genocide* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1993), 49–50.

<sup>62</sup> Two texts that provide detailed analyses regarding language are Rosina Lippi-Green's *English With an Accent: Language, Ideology, and Discrimination in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 2012) and Eric A. Anchimbe and Stephen A. Mforth's edited *Postcolonial Linguistic Voices: Identity Choices and Representations* (Berlin, Germany: De Gruyter Mouton, 2011), which offers global perspectives on language and colonialism.

any language other than English and were thus severed from this critical facet of our cultural and racial identities. The colonial effects of assimilation (a tactic for increased homogeneity) through historical and present pressures of language adaptation, particularly for U.S. colonies like Puerto Rico but extending to early twentieth-century European immigrants, continue to present complexities and tensions within hybrid bodies—in this instance, my own—that will never be fully reconciled.

Yet, even as peoples the world over have had languages forced upon them through the machines of colonization, they also have adapted and transformed the colonizers' languages, combining them with their own tongues in many instances, as acts of resistance and re-existence. The postcolonial notion of hybridity as articulated by Homi Bhabha highlights this phenomenon as the process of cultural translation on the part of the colonized that adapts the colonizer's discourses "with a range of differential knowledges and positionalities that both estrange...[the] identity of [that discourse] and produce new forms of knowledge...new sites of power," creating a "strategic reversal of the process of domination."<sup>63</sup> As such, adaptation and transformation of "proper" uses of English constitute lived examples of the eruption of subjugated, indigenous knowledge, the collapsing of binary oppositions, the presence of pluralities of discourses and truths, and recognitions of the socially constructed nature of language that Lartey highlights as elements of post/decolonial leadership and community.

Therefore, when considering the idea of a singular-as-plural *leadership* being fit to the task of embodying the myriad constructions that this concept entails, the English language is found wanting. A subversive, subjugated re-envisioning toward *leaderships*—thus centering an "improper" use of English—delineates a direct contestation of hegemony and homogeneity in expanding possibilities for pastors and leaders, especially given the pluriversalities of contexts, experiences, and worldviews present within and beyond congregational lives. Fantastical ideas of pastoral

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63 Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 120, 112.

leaders as conforming to coloniality's default notions of pastor as CEO, lead authority figure and knowledge bearer, singular head of staff, or white, male, heterosexual, and able-bodied (usually leading a large, white, suburban Protestant congregation) are reimagined in ways that contribute to the re-existence and resilience of the whole community, not to prescribed commitments to order, success, and competition endemic within eurowestern worlds.

In my own work as a theological field educator with students from varying religious backgrounds, identities, experiences, and communities, formation for pastoral and community leaderships can look quite different given these factors and more. For an African American single mother serving on a shared leadership team that is organizing a new multiracial urban faith community, leadership looks, feels, smells, sounds, and perhaps even tastes different than a white, married male student with four small children serving a small, majority white suburban church in the process of closing its doors. Universalizing the kinds of skills, qualities, and capacities needed in order to embody pastoral leadership subverts the contextual natures of leaderships and, subsequently, results in conformity to eurocentric constructions of the pastor role. The use of leaderships in formational agendas within theological education, therefore, solidifies the pluriversal as an *a priori* disposition that challenges, dismantles, and re-envisioning pastoral and prophetic ministry within and beyond existing notions of church.

Beyond the context of the academy, the utilization of leaderships in discourse and praxis invites occasions to challenge assumptions embedded within the language of *pastoral* leaderships. The application of this unique nomenclature assumes a leadership that is set apart from (and often in eurowestern constructions, set above) the kinds of leaderships offered by others within the faith community. As has been articulated previously, notions of trained, credentialed clergy possessing positional authority and specialized knowledge to be imparted upon faith communities replicates hegemonic colonial patterns that minimize and negate leaderships (and the kinds of wisdoms those leaderships engender) present among the whole, thus prioritizing intellectual knowledge—in the form of advanced degree attainment—as paramount to faith.

Stephanie Y. Mitchem, in her conversation on womanist and postcolonial pastoral leaderships, emphasizes the historic and present exclusions that black women have endured from the profession. She remarks, “With few exceptions, black women continue to be pushed to sidelines of ministry, politics, and medicine since each of these fields developed hierarchical structures that reflected white, male, capitalist, mainstream American societies.”<sup>64</sup> Instead, Mitchem calls for a re-envisioning of pastoral leaderships, arising from black women’s “home training” through the shared, lived wisdom of elder mothers toward an ethic of communalism, care, and self-love. Drawing upon Toni C. King and Alease Ferguson’s work, Mitchem identifies this re-existencing as *kitchen table leadership*, asserting that “there is an authority given to the women who transmit wisdom, based on lived lessons, not merely pieces of paper granted by an impersonal institution.”<sup>65</sup> This offers just one illustration of the ways in which *pastoral* leaderships might be constructed anew when grounded beyond specified eurocentric academies of learning and formation, thereby nurturing decolonial pluriversality within and beyond faith communities.

Ultimately, the utilization of pastoral leaderships, rather than a singular pastoral leadership, creates critical movement toward post/decolonial re-linguaging of constructs. Lest such a vocabulary change seem insignificant, it is important to remember “how people’s choice of languages, and ways of speaking, do not simply *reflect* who they are, but *make* them who they are—or more precisely, allow them to make themselves.”<sup>66</sup> Summarily, pastoral leaderships expand theological imaginations regarding how ministry takes place, what kinds of qualities and skills are envisioned and practiced in ministry, and who can and should embody this work.

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<sup>64</sup> Stephanie Y. Mitchem, “In Conversation: Womanist/Postcolonial/Pastoral,” *Postcolonial Practice of Ministry: Leadership, Liturgy, and Interfaith Engagement*, eds. Kwok Pui-lan and Stephen Burns (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2016), 62.

<sup>65</sup> Mitchem, 69.

<sup>66</sup> John E. Joseph, “Identity,” *Language and Identities*, eds. Carmen Llamas and Dominic Watt (Edinburgh, U.K.: Edinburgh University Press Ltd., 2010), 9.

## Conclusions

Presented here are partial articulations arising from initial attempts to catalyze bodies of scholarship across several disciplines. It is hoped that these offerings will not lead to increased abstractions but, rather, to new experiments in faith leadership and community life. Unmasking the constructed and historied natures of leadership and church—as covered in the trappings of U.S. coloniality/modernity and its destructiveness to human lives and communities—individuals might reflect on the ways that “colonization distorts relationships, destroys or petrifies institutions, and corrupts [humans], both colonizers and colonized,” as expressed in the opening words by Albert Memmi. Given the global pandemic and the disruptions it has imposed upon the world and the church, in addition to all of the ways that coloniality and empire in the forms of greed and neglect of human life existed previously and have surfaced uniquely in recent months, pastoral leaders and communities who can nurture and restore relationships, cocreate life-affirming structures and resources, and seek wholeness and justice individually, communally, and systemically are needed now more than ever. In the course of this critical being-thinking-acting, care must be given to not replicate colonial ideologies, practices, or structures, remembering that post/decolonial praxes are never a completed set of endeavors and, if attempted honestly and with humility, will involve tensions, ambiguities, resistances, and losses. Ultimately, post/decolonial pastoral leaderships offer a kind of eschatological framework through which we might learn and live into pluriversal visions of *ekklesia*.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> The D.Min. and master’s students in my Spring 2020 Decolonizing Congregational Leadership course at Iliff School of Theology helped to shape some of the ideas presented in this article through online discussions. To them, I extend my sincere gratitude.