RACE, ECOLOGY, FREEDOM: CLIMATE JUSTICE AND ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM

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by
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ABSTRACT

My dissertation contributes to both critical philosophy of race and environmental ethics by mobilizing resources from Africana philosophy to critique liberal framings of environmental and climate justice. I argue that the radical critique of liberal humanism common to the work of Sylvia Wynter, Frantz Fanon, and Saidiya Hartman: (i) shows us why it is necessary to break with liberal frames of environmental justice, and (ii) offers grounds for an alternative approach to understand environmental racism and imagine its redress, which I term *ecological freedom*.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS** ........................................................................................................... vi

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS** .................................................................................................................. vii

**Introduction** .................................................................................................................................... 1

1. From Environmental Racism to Climate Justice ........................................................................... 3

2. The Problems ................................................................................................................................... 13

3. Selection of thinkers ...................................................................................................................... 17

4. Aims ................................................................................................................................................ 20

**Chapter One: A New World View? Sylvia Wynter and Environmental Racism** ..................... 23

Introduction .......................................................................................................................................... 23

1. Man vs. Human ............................................................................................................................... 26

2. The Sociogenic Principle .............................................................................................................. 31

3. The Status of Science in “the Science of the Word” .................................................................... 37

4. Particularity, Politics, Race, and Place .......................................................................................... 48

5. Territorial or Ontological Sovereignty? Problems for a Wynterian Approach to Environmental Racism ...................................................................................................................................... 53

Conclusion .......................................................................................................................................... 60

**Chapter Two: Racist Environments, Colonial Sovereignty, and Natural Allies: Frantz Fanon and Sociogeny** ........................................................................................................................................... 62

Introduction .......................................................................................................................................... 62

1. Sociogeny - Psyche, Soma, Environment ....................................................................................... 65


3. “Dominated but not Domesticated” .............................................................................................. 107

**Chapter Three: Heteropatriarchy, Extractivism and the Challenges of Decolonial Sovereignty** ........................................................................................................................................ 122

Introduction .......................................................................................................................................... 122

1. Possession: Land and Women in Colonial Sovereignty ............................................................... 125

2. Extractivism and Heteropatriarchy in Postcolonial Algeria ....................................................... 137

3. Appropriation, Land, and Decolonial Sovereignty ....................................................................... 149

4. Grounding Extractivism and Resistance ...................................................................................... 164

Conclusion .......................................................................................................................................... 168

**Chapter Four: Black Feminist Practices of Ecological Freedom** .................................................. 170

Introduction .......................................................................................................................................... 170

1. Diagnosis ....................................................................................................................................... 171

S2. Norms and Normativity .............................................................................................................. 185
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Key Texts by Frantz Fanon in English Translation

BSWM – Black Skin, White Masks
WE - The Wretched of the Earth
ADC – A Dying Colonialism
RC – “Racism and Culture” (in ADC)
TAR – Toward the African Revolution

Key Texts by Frantz Fanon in French*

PN – Peau noire, masques blancs
DT – Les damnés de la terre
RC – Racisme et culture
AV – L’An V de la revolution algérienne

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Introduction

Climate change, the Anthropocene, the relationship of nature and culture, and the categorization of matter are all established topics within philosophy. However, philosophers have given much less thought to how these topics are interwoven with race and racism. This dissertation began with the intuition that we can understand neither the kinds of ontological and ecological issues (such as those mentioned above) nor race and racism if we conceptualize them in isolation from one another. It was motivated by a fresh wave of socio-ecological violence and destruction due in part to increasingly inventive extractive technologies and responses to struggles against it by state and non-state actors that range from indifference and criminalization to militarization and murder.¹

I focus on the concept of environmental racism because it is the main way in which the relationship of environmental issues and racism has been explored. Environmental racism is generally understood as the differential distribution of environmental burdens according to race, perpetuated by the exclusion of people of color from environmental decision-making.² The emerging field of Critical Environmental Justice Studies has raised questions about the frames of distributive and procedural justice that have shaped the notion of environmental racism.³ In addition, recent work spanning fields such as Indigenous philosophy, critical geography, and Black and Native studies has begun to explore how issues such as animality,

¹In particular I am thinking of fracking, tar sands, massive networks of oil pipelines, devastation of the Amazon in Brazil and across the region. I am also thinking of marrons such as the Suriname maroons whose lands are being devastated by illegal gold mining and logging, as well as the effects of climate change. And the violence of new “green technologies” such as the conflicts over lithium and the dispossession of many forms of carbon “offsetting.” All of these projects are being resisted and this resistance tends to be met with violence. For example, “At least 1,558 people in 50 states were killed between 2002 and 2017 while trying to protect their land, water or local wildlife (…) the death toll is almost half that of US troops killed in Iraq and Afghanistan since 2001. The rate of deaths in this period increased from two to four a week, which the authors attributed to rising environmental stress as the global demand for resources pushes mining, farming and other extractive industries into ever more remote regions” (Watts 2019).

²(Bullard 1995; D. Taylor 2014).

³(Peña 2005; Pulido 2018; Pellow and Brulle 2005).
land, and ecology are connected to forms of race and racism in provocative ways. I argue that the implications of both bodies of work put liberal frames of environmental and climate justice into question.

*Race, Ecology, Freedom,* begins with two linked claims. The first is that we need alternative ways to conceptualize the nexus of race, racism, and ecology that are different from the dominant frames of environmental racism and climate injustice. The second claim is that we can find important resources to do this from within Africana philosophy. My use of the terms “ecology,” and “freedom” in the title of this dissertation signals two points that will distinguish my approach from liberal frames of environmental and climate justice. The first is that we need a way to think the relationship of racism and the environment that does not presuppose that they are initially distinct and only incidentally linked. Consequently, the term ecology is significant because it highlights my concern with *modes of relationality* that shape and are shaped by webs of complex human and more-than-human relationships. This concern with modes of relationality, or particular forms of socio-ecological entanglement, opens up questions of dwelling and homemaking that are embedded in the etymological root of ecology—*oikos*— a word which encompasses house, a family and familial line, and a household’s property. Secondly, my use of the term freedom, reflects my claim that what is at stake has less to do with issues of inequality or exclusion and more to do with freedom and domination.

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4 See (Bennett 2018; Dayle John 2019; McKittrick 2013; Lethabo King 2019b)
5 However, I show that some of the limitations of this tradition come into view when they are thought in relation with Indigenous thought. Consequently, my focus on Africana thought is not intended to offer an exhaustive or universal account of what I term *racist environments.* While I outline some general features of racist environments, I also understand them as situated and particular and thus requiring a number of approaches and traditions to explore them more fully. By focusing on Africana philosophy, I offer one way to do this work.
6 My sense of modes of relationality is informed by Ghassan Hage’s *Is Racism an Environmental Threat?* Hage voices a similar criticism of the tendency to conceive racism and the environmental as external from one another (Hage 2017, 13–14). Hage shifts from the notion of environment to ecology, and claims “the racial crisis manifested by Islamophobia and the ecological crisis not only happen to have an effect on each other; they are in effect one and the same crisis, a crisis in the dominant mode of inhabiting the world that both racial and ecological domination reproduces” (14 emphasis mine). Consequently, “one cannot be anti-racist without being an ecologist today, and vice versa” (2).
7 I show that the three figures central to this dissertation, Sylvia Wynter, Frantz Fanon, and Saidiya Hartman, strike at the assumptions embedded in *oikos* and in how ecology has tended to be understood.
In this introduction I provide a brief overview of the history of the term environmental racism. I outline what on my account are the three fundamental problems with liberal frames of environmental and climate justice: diagnostic, normative and anthropocentric. Next, I introduce the central figures of the dissertation, Sylvia Wynter, Frantz Fanon, and Saidiya Hartman. I summarize how they can help to address these problems and what I understand to be the differences between them. Finally, I end with my aims for Race, Ecology, Freedom.

1. From Environmental Racism to Climate Justice

The Environmental Justice movement emerged in the late 1960s from the grass-roots struggles of communities responding to the siting of toxic waste and hazardous facilities in residential areas. Although it is arguably a late bloom of the centuries-long battle against colonization’s socio-ecological destruction, it is significant that it emerged in the wake of the civil rights movement and was shaped by African-American (predominantly women’s) resistance in the South. These struggles led to a number of studies and a body of scholarly work. The 1987 report, “Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States,” found that nationally race, not class or income, was the single most important factor in the siting of toxic and hazardous waste dumps (Chavis Jr. and Lee 1987, xiii). The term “environmental racism” was first coined by Benjamin Chavis to comprehend this pattern and the violence of chronic exposure, as well as the exclusion of people of color from environmental policy and decision-making (Chavis Jr. 1993, 5).

The movement against environmental racism transitioned into the broader environmental justice movement and expanded beyond the early concern with disproportionate siting to a wide range of issues that are united by the movement’s expansive sense of the

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8 See (Kaalund 2004; D. E. Taylor 1997).
environment as “where we live, work, play and worship.” The Principles of Environmental Justice drafted at the 1991 “People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit” expressed a coalitional and global approach to environmental justice and articulated a vision that is arguably antithetical to the frames of justice that would be used to communicate it. Particularly significant in this respect are the following principles:

Environmental Justice affirms the sacredness of Mother Earth, ecological unity and the interdependence of all species, and the right to be free from ecological destruction (…)

Environmental Justice demands the cessation of the production of all toxins, hazardous wastes, and radioactive materials (…) Environmental Justice opposes the destructive operations of multi-national corporations (…) Environmental Justice opposes military occupation, repression and exploitation of lands, peoples and cultures, and other life forms (…) Environmental Justice requires that we (…) consume as little of Mother Earth's resources and . . . produce as little waste as possible.

(Delegates to the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit 1991).

In addition, Principle 11 affirmed Indigenous sovereignty and relationships to land as a non-negotiable aspect of environmental justice (ibid.). The justice frame allowed the movement to expand into a global and coalitional one; however, to some extent this was on the condition that racism, especially anti-Black racism and settler colonialism, become less of a focus. In addition, the radical demands and socio-ecological valorization of “Mother Earth” and “interdependence of all species” began to recede into the background.

9 Including, but not limited to food sovereignty, reproductive injustice, energy, nuclear waste, worker’s conditions, resource extraction, and uneven vulnerability to climate change.

10 “Participants wanted to establish humans’ spiritual interdependence to the sacredness of our Mother Earth; to respect and celebrate each of our cultures, languages, and beliefs about the natural world and our roles in healing ourselves; to ensure EJ; to promote economic alternatives which would contribute to the development of environmentally safe livelihoods; and, to secure political, economic, and cultural liberation that had been denied for over 500 years of colonization and oppression, resulting in the poisoning of communities and land and the genocide of peoples” (Martinez-Alier 2016, 2).
Charting its history, Robert Benford claims that “as the movement diffused and the issues grew more defuse, and as it became organized, bureaucratized, and institutionalized, its militant discourse and direct-action tactics gave way to more acceptable, less confrontational, more ‘collaborative’ framings” (Benford 2005, 50) The vision and commitments articulated in the 1991 principles are arguably lost in what came to be widely accepted definitions of environmental injustice, framed as “processes that resulted in minority and low-income communities facing disproportionate environmental harms and limited environmental benefits” (Taylor 2014, 2). Reviving the discourse of civil rights, justice became synonymous with rights, equality, and inclusion. Legislation and appeals to the state for equal protection became the strategic focus.

This strategy has had limited success. Monique Harden’s 2002 report for the National Black Environmental Justice Network concludes that:

the EPA has failed to enforce Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (. . .) According to the report, the EPA has consistently ignored complaints by African-Americans and other people of color and has recently dismissed nearly 70 percent of the complaints filed without any clear criteria for doing so (. . .) of the 129 Title VI complaints filed with the EPA, the agency has not found one case of racially disparate impact.

(As cited in Benford 2005, 46).

In 2007, the authors of a report commissioned on the twentieth anniversary of “Toxic Wastes and Race” found that although the original report:

has had tremendous positive impacts, twenty years after its release people of color and low-income communities are still the dumping grounds for all kinds of toxins (. . .) we found significant racial and economic disparities persist (. . .) We demonstrate that people of color are more concentrated around such facilities than previously shown (. .
Race continues to be the predominant explanatory factor in facility locations and clearly still matters. (Bullard et al. 2008, 372).

The emerging field of Critical Environmental Justice Studies argues that this persistence of environmental inequality can to some extent be attributed to the conceptual limitations of the dominant frame of environmental justice (Pellow and Brulle 2005; Pellow 2016). The liberal frames of distributive and procedural justice, corresponding legislative strategy, and the dominance of a social sciences approach have meant that engagements with environmental racism have for the most part been limited to the task of cataloguing and quantifying the differences in the distribution of “environmental burdens” (Pellow and Brulle 2005, 17; Pulido 2016, 525). A critical environmental justice perspective attempts to counter the lack of theoretical nuance and alternative political imaginaries.

The dominant frame of environmental justice evidences a discrepancy between diagnosis and prognosis. As Benford argues, “[R]ather than following the logic of its diagnostic framing by advocating sweeping systemic changes, the movement’s prognoses remain focused on tinkering with a system constructed from slave labor and predicated on the exploitation of disadvantaged people” (Benford 2005, 51). The liberal framing of justice has garnered critique for its failure to confront the central role of capitalism in determining environmental injustice (Faber 1998). It presumes the neutrality of law and state, which as Charles Mills argues in “Black Trash” are historically and conceptually premised on the treatment of Black people as waste (Mills 2001, 74). Mills argues that continuing to appeal to the polity to remedy environmental inequalities will not result in substantial change, since it is a racialized space from which Black people are constitutively excluded. Reform is a dead end, since for the white polity “there is a sense in which blacks themselves are an environmental problem” (4).

It is noteworthy that Mills turns to Fanon to make this argument but does not develop the engagement with Fanon further (Mills 2001, 83).
Similarly, Laura Pulido draws on Cedric Robinson’s notion of “racial capitalism” to underscore the point that racism is foundational and essential for capitalism (Pulido 2017, 525). A spatial analysis of racism allows us to see how it produces differential value not only by differentiating bodies through racial categorizations, but also through the differentiation of the landscapes in which racialized bodies live. We can then see how “environmental racism is constituent of racial capitalism” (524). This not only means that we should view the state as an “adversary” rather than a neutral force, this materialist and structural approach also forces us to break with the “additive” model in which racism and the environment are seen as external from one another and only incidentally related (528-30). Extending the work of political ecologist Jason Moore, Pulido claims that both nature and racialized bodies are organized by the same system (529).

In different ways both Mills and Pulido suggest the need for a more radical approach to environmental racism. They also highlight the failure to think about racism and the environment relationally. Although one of the successes of the environmental justice movement has been to politicize and contest the meaning of the environment (Pellow and Brulle 2005, 12), it has tended to view the aims of social justice and an ecological valorization of the more-than-human as intrinsically opposed (Benford 2005, 48). In part, this can be explained by the racist history of conservationism and its limited vision of the environment. However, this oppositional view and its implicit anthropocentrism obscures the underlying causes not only of the distribution, but also the production of many “environmental burdens.”

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12 The frame of racial capitalism is invaluable for rethinking environmental racism. However, an exclusive focus on exploitation and primitive accumulation (or racial capital) risks overlooking the importance of racism’s psycho-affective dynamics, which Hage (and Fanon) show are crucial for rethinking environmental racism (Hage 2017, 68, 77).

13 Conservationism has been limited by an imaginary of pristine wilderness and nature that are tied to the history of settler colonialism. It is marred by its historical role in the dispossession and erasure of colonized and racialized people. See (DeLoughrey and Handley 2011; Griffiths and Robin 1997; Nixon 2013).
David N. Pellow argues that it is futile to attempt to address environmental racism without adopting an ecological perspective. Pellow focuses on what he calls “the racial discourse of animality” to illuminate the links between state-sanctioned racist violence and speciesism. The approach that he calls for would connect early environmental justice scholarship, which “centers primarily around the intersection of social inequality and environmental harm, with the concept of ecological justice, which centers on the relationship of human beings to the broader nonhuman world” (ibid.). In contradistinction to the goal of a more equitable distribution of environmental harms, “this model of analysis and politics begins with humans taking responsibility for practicing transformative socioecological political work” (ibid.).

With a few exceptions, such as Charles Mills and Potawatomi philosopher Kyle Whyte, there has been an inability to see that “environmental racism,” or what I understand as racist environments, is not a peripheral but a central issue for critical philosophy of race, decolonial and feminist philosophy, and thus social and political philosophy more broadly. The implications of this point come into view in my critique of the fundamental limitations and inadequacy of justice for understanding racist environments and the struggles against them.

By contrast, climate ethics and climate justice perspectives have received more philosophical attention. By virtue of focusing on anthropogenic climate change, climate justice introduces a distinct set of concerns, such as: intergenerational justice; historical responsibility; corrective or restorative justice; ecological justice; global justice and the role of international structures of governance (Gardiner 2012). However, despite these differences, the same patterns observable within the environmental justice literature are evident (if not more so) in climate justice literature and policy. The gloss of climate justice that Ravi Kanbur and Henry

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14 These issues are arguably also raised by environmental racism but they have tended not to be framed in these terms or to have received the same philosophical attention.
Shue give in *Climate Justice: Integrating Economics and Philosophy* reflects widespread notions. Notably, they frame the issue in terms of distributive and procedural justice, often combined with rights frameworks and the added dimension of future generations:

Climate justice requires sharing the burdens and benefits of climate change and its resolution equitably and fairly. It brings together justice between generations and justice within generations. In particular it requires that attempts to address justice between generations through various interventions designed to curb greenhouse emissions today do not end up creating injustice in our time by hurting the currently poor and vulnerable. More generally, issues of distribution and justice are of paramount importance in any discourse on climate change. (Kanbur and Shue 2019, 1).

Through this lens, the benefits in question tend to be a liveable environment as well as the well-being and economic prosperity that are thought to correlate to “greenhouse emissions.” The burdens are generally thought in terms of the economic and political costs of lowering emissions, as well as climate vulnerability, exposure, upheaval, instability, and migration and climate “refugees” (Meyer and Sanklecha 2017).15 The agents in question (and their responsibilities and inequalities) tend to be understood in terms of nations and generations, although there is some awareness of internal inequities of emissions.16

As may be obvious from the units of “nation” and “generation” used to calculate emissions and conceptualize injustice, “there is rarely attention to the role of race or racism on

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15 Consequently, one major debate within policy and the literature, is whether “developing” countries should have “the right to development,” or emission, since they have not yet had their fair share of what Kanbur and Shue term the “benefits of climate change.”

16 Debates regarding intergenerational justice (what our responsibility is to future generations) and historical responsibility, such as past inequality of emissions, e.g. the “polluter pays principle” and debates over whether the current generation is responsible for the past, tend to be overly abstract and to fail to acknowledge the multiple ways in which people understand their relationship to the past (e.g. ancestors) and to the future, often serving to absolve the present generation or (past white ancestors) from responsibility. See (Frisch 2018) for an analysis of the limited notions of temporality, social ontology, and ethics that have framed climate ethics and justice.
issues of climate justice” (Tuana 2019, 2). The categories that are employed to measure inequity in climate justice policy and literature such as: “the poor,” “the vulnerable,” and to a lesser extent gender; often conceal more than they elucidate. This is particularly the case in regards to race and racism.

One notable exception is the special issue of The Black Scholar, “Climate Justice: Blacks and Climate Change.” In an interview published in it, Robert Bullard (generally acknowledged as the “father” of environmental justice) expresses a concern that nations may uphold (or agree to uphold) reduced emissions targets in ways that do not entail an equitable distribution of the benefits and burdens domestically. In other words, by conceptualizing climate justice in terms of nations, forms of climate injustice, such as “energy apartheid,” might be continued within nations: “‘clean energy’ is predicted by Zip Code—with the most affluent Zip Codes getting the lion’s share of clean and green energy and Zip Codes overrepresented by poor and people of color getting stuck with ‘dirty energy’” (Lewis and Bullard 2016, 8).

Consequently, Bullard argues that:

Much more research is needed on the differential vulnerability of energy apartheid nationally. More clean energy policy analysis is needed to clarify who gets what, when, and why, and where “green” and “clean” energy is headed and where the same old “dirty” energy plants left standing or are being proposed and sited across the country.

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17 For example, although Atmospheric Justice: A Political Theory of Climate Change opens with a discussion of Hurricane Katrina, the only mention of racism in the book is as an analogy to frame problems of group membership, collective and historical responsibility (Vanderheiden 2008, 177-8).

18 There have been some attempts at intersectional approaches to climate change. Such as (Kaijser and Kronsell 2014).

19 It is interesting to note that Nathan Hare first used the term “Black Ecology” in 1970 in The Black Scholar, to analyse de facto ecological-racial apartheid. Like Bullard and other environmental justice theorists, Hare claims that “the solutions set forth for the “ecological crisis” are reformist and evasive of the social political revolution which black environmental correction demands” (Hare 1970, 2). However, rather than framing the solution in terms of inclusion and equity, Hare concludes that “The real solution to the environmental crisis is the decolonization of the black race (…) It is necessary for blacks to achieve self-determination (…) to solve the more serious environmental crises” (Hare 1970, 8). I am interested in illuminating such alternative imaginaries and strategies to “energy” and “climate apartheid.” It is noteworthy that Hare briefly turns to Fanon in his analysis of space, race, and mental health (4).
Our Climate Justice Movement demands that clean, green, renewable energy under the Clean Power Plan be made available to all Americans without regard to race, color, national origin, or income. (Lewis and Bullard 2016, 8)

Although Bullard points to an important issue, I suggest that his analysis and framing of climate justice and “energy apartheid” in terms of distribution, equity, citizenship and procedural inclusion does not go far enough. As Nancy Tuana argues in “Climate Apartheid: The Forgetting of Race in the Anthropocene:” “what is important to recognize is that, like apartheid, we do not appreciate the complex nature of climate change apartheid if we understand it simply as differential impacts or differential treatment” (Tuana 2019, 5).

Just as understanding apartheid requires taking account of a complex assemblage of normalized and sedimented beliefs, knowledges, institutions, laws, practices, and spatial arrangements:

To appreciate the nature and import of climate change apartheid, then, requires attention to the more subtle, normalized, and often muted ways in which systematic, institutional racism circulates in societies, as well as the ways in which it is impacted by other forms of systemic oppression such as those due to gender, sexuality, or class.

(Tuana 2019, 6).

In contrast to the lens of differential impact, Tuana argues that understanding “climate change apartheid” requires the cultivation of “genealogical sensibilities,” which “target the lineages of the values, concepts, and practices that ground current climate regimes, in this case those animated by (though never exclusively by) racism” (Tuana 2019, 4). In addition to genealogical sensibilities, an adequate approach would also be informed by “ecologically informed intersectionality,” which would “recognize the inextricable entanglements of humans and

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20 Tuana’s concept of climate change apartheid responds to Desmond Tutu’s critique of the focus on adaptation over mitigation in climate justice policy and literature. The focus on adaptation is laden with assumptions about what adaptation means, what is worth preserving, and who is to adapt to what conditions, effectively retrenching global hierarchies of power. Consequently, Tutu stated that “We do not need climate change apartheid in adaptation” (as quoted in Tuana 2019, 5).
environments” attending to “how the lineages of oppressions between differences such as sex, class, sexuality, and race can be intermeshed” while also drawing “attention to the infusing of such lineages with environmental exploitation” (Tuana 2019, 3 original emphasis). My critique of hegemonic frames of environmental and climate justice, especially in regards to race and racism, and my engagement with the central figures of this dissertation are informed by Tuana’s claims about what would be needed for a satisfactory approach to race, racism, and ecology. I understand this as a genealogically informed analysis that would attend to systems of knowledge/power, while keeping multiple categories of difference in play and attending to “the inextricable entanglements of humans and environments” (ibid.).

The sole contribution to the special issue “Climate Justice: Blacks and Climate Change” that articulates an alternative to the proposal, analysis, and critique of policy and legislation is the essay “Ecowomanism: Black Women, Religion and the Environment.” In this piece Melanie Harris affirms the “ecowomanist” framework that she discerns in the socio-ecological vision, commitments, and relationships of black women. At the same time, Harris attends to how violence against black women and ecological violence are linked in a dualistic “hierarchical doctrine and logic of domination” (Harris 2016, 28). My own approach is informed by the one that Harris develops in this piece. It is by illuminating neglected and silenced imaginaries, practices, and conceptualizations of race and ecology that we can not only analyze the workings of power but also “animate our desire for new values, for new ways of feeling, thinking, and living” (Tuana 2019, 4).

My aim in this section was not to provide an exhaustive review of the many approaches and debates within environmental and climate justice. Rather, it was to indicate that there are a number of problems that repeat and cut across the most commonly accepted framings of these

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21 Although Shireen K Lewis articulates some radical claims in the introduction, these are not developed into a coherent approach or alternative. Instead, there is the same tension between diagnosis and prognosis that Benford noted in his analysis of the environmental justice movement (Lewis 2016; Fields 2016; Baptiste 2016; White-Newsome 2016)
issues. I now outline these problems, which I understand as: the diagnostic; the normative; and the anthropocentric.

2. The Problems

My claim is that liberal approaches to environmental racism and climate injustice are not only insufficient for understanding what constitutes the wrong or the harm of the phenomena grouped under the umbrella of environmental racism and thus fail to comprehend what is at stake for affected communities, but also that the imaginary of justice these approaches presuppose constricts how we might envision and make the future. I argue that there are three fundamental problems that underlie all of these frameworks: the diagnostic; the normative; and the anthropocentric.

2.1 Diagnostic

Distributive and procedural frames of injustice fail to satisfactorily interrogate the causes of the unequal distribution of environmental burdens and exclusion from institutions. There is a problem with how racism is conceived – as intentional prejudice or discrimination (which can be resolved through civil rights or legislation arbitrated by the state). When racism is thought as institutional or systematic – there is an assumption that racism is initially separate and distinct from “the environment” and is only incidentally linked to the environment or to environmental destruction. Tacking environmental issues onto a civil rights agenda obscures the ways in which racialized bodies and environments are fabricated as exploitable and disposable.

In contrast with the notions of racism that have framed environmental racism, I understand racism as material and systemic. My sense of racism combines a materialist concern with exploitation, accumulation, extraction, domination, regimes of property and
commodification of people, life and land and an analysis informed by phenomenological and genealogical approaches. Consequently, I ask questions such as: what are the conditions of experience, knowledge and subjectivation that make the material aspects of racism possible and normal? How does the spatial-ecological organization of the material world shape forms of subjectivity and modes of ethical and political relationality? My understanding of racism therefore conflicts with ideas of racism as error, ignorance, or individual intent. Rather, as Ghassan Hage puts it in Is Racism is an Environmental Threat? – racism is a “mode of inhabiting the world,” or “a mode of relating to the world that, in the process of relating, creates the very world it is relating to” (Hage 2017, 82-3).

Consequently, understanding the roots of environmental injustice requires a broadly materialist analysis of systems such as (racial) capitalism and settler colonialism. This puts into question the exclusive appeal to the law and the state for remedy (Pulido 2016). In addition, it requires taking account of complex ensembles of knowledge/power to consider how these apparatuses and technologies shape what we think of race and environmental issues, while often retrenching racism and ecological destruction. Moreover, instead of focusing on the distribution of environmental burdens, taken as givens of the social body, an interrogation of the underlying roots of the problem requires a more dynamic analysis of socio-ecological processes and conceptualizations of nature that arguably underwrite the reproduction of “environmental burdens” and the fabrication of some humans and more-than-humans as disposable.

2.2 Normative

It is important to note that in this dissertation when I use the term liberal (environmental) justice I am using it in a restricted way to refer to distributive and procedural frames of justice. I am also using it as a shorthand for civil rights framings of environmental
struggles that are also grounded in the values of equality and the legitimacy of the law and the state. The latter tend to understand environmental racism in terms of distributive and procedural justice, hence why I group them together. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to engage with the recent work that is taking up the recognition and capabilities frameworks of feminist philosophers Iris Marion Young and Martha Nussbaum to develop new approaches to environmental justice. With that caveat in mind I will outline the normative problem.22

For liberal political theorists, the distinction between the impartiality of justice on the one hand, and the debates about the good on the other, has been an important one.23 Justice, as theorized by say Rawls or Barry, purports to be value-neutral, inclusive and thus universal, but is in fact partial in problematic ways (Schlosberg 2007, 106). This tension is evident in the adoption of distributive justice frameworks for environmental issues. For example, discussions of climate justice often presuppose that a Western industrial model of development is an ideal measure for what is good for the human species.24 There is a tendency to impose or import (Western) liberal norms and values around the good life, the polis and personhood, which mean that purported solutions often mask or perpetuate what many communities understand as the harm in question (Álvarez and Coolsaet 2018). This tendency is bolstered by inattention to socio-ecological relationships, histories, values and norms of racialized (particularly Black) communities.25 While the environmental justice movement has challenged the prevalent view

22 I am unable to offer an exhaustive discussion of the debates, approaches and issues here. I focus on distributive and procedural frames, in part since they are more commonly accepted and widespread. For versions of the recognition and capabilities frameworks see (Schlosberg 2012; Whyte 2018b).
23 See (Sandel 1984)
24 See (Meyer and Sanklecha 2017) where the discussion of intergenerational ethics revolves around the allocation of responsibility for unequal development and environmental burdens and the model of climate adaptation presupposes the universal value of Western industrial development.
25 For instance, Stephen Nathan Haymes critiques the implicit expectation “that questions about the environment, nature, and ecology be framed in the moral, ethical, and epistemological traditions of Europeans and Euro-Americans without considering the lived context or meaning of concern in which the ideology itself emerges” (Haymes 2018, 34-5) In effect this tendency “negates the phenomenological origins and epistemic practices that emerged from the way black people of African descent in the Americas experienced the “natural environment” (34). I suggest that Haymes’ critique “eurocentrist environmental ethics,” which he describes as “a liberal rights-based philosophy and social movement,” (34) is applicable to hegemonic approaches to climate justice, and liberal framings of environmental justice.
that Black people do care about environmental issues, there has not been enough consideration of the diverse ways these issues are understood and the alternative ecological relationships and values this might suggest (Finney 2014; Rusert 2010; Tuck et al. 2014). In addition, work that does explore these relationships often unearths understandings of freedom, selfhood, community and what we think of as the natural world that conflict with the foundational assumptions of liberal political philosophy (Allewaert 2008; Haymes 2018; Lethabo King 2019; Malm 2018). In sum, liberal frames of environmental and climate justice may not only be unable to understand what the harm in question is but also the values and norms employed to frame and strategize remedy actually risk retrenching the injury.

2.3 Anthropocentrism

Analyses of the dehumanization of some peoples via race have tended to focus on the harm or violence of being treated as an animal or “Nature” without questioning the onto-ethical status of the latter (Pellow 2016). Similarly, despite the socio-ecological sensibility and values articulated in the 1991 principles of Environmental Justice, the movement has tended to avoid a sustained engagement with the questions treated by ecological justice (generally understood as justice towards the natural world), restricting itself to the question of justice among humans on environmental issues.

Understanding how racism and the environment are connected requires thinking in terms of ecological relationality, both in terms of grasping what is at stake for affected communities (Whyte 2016) and in terms of giving a satisfactory account of how something like environmental racism works. Moreover, rather than seeing anti-racism and anti-speciesism as analogous or competitive social projects, we need to understand how they are structurally linked (Hage 2017; Pellow 2016). Pellow argues that foregrounding these links

26 See for example (Tuana 2008).
entails “thinking through a redefinition of the concept of environmental justice itself” (Pellow 2016, 12). However, given the anthropocentrism of a number of foundational aspects of liberal justice, Pellow’s claim raises the question of how justice would be rethought and consequently how we might integrate environmental and ecological justice.

As is clear, my sense of these problems is informed by existing critical and radical work, including that which has emerged from within the movement itself. Consequently, the distinctive contribution of this dissertation is found less in my identification of problems with these frameworks than in my turn to figures within Africana philosophy to address them.

3. Selection of thinkers

I chose to focus on three prominent Africana thinkers, Sylvia Wynter, Frantz Fanon, and Saidiya Hartman because I did not see the issues that they raise being considered either in environmental philosophy or critical philosophy of race. What is common to their work is a critique of the “epistemological-ontological-ethical framework” of liberal humanism and justice that centers on the divisions between nature/culture, human/nonhuman, subject/object.

27 Although the work of Édouard Glissant has been more widely recognized for its ecological focus and contributions, I wanted to point to other resources within Africana philosophy for thinking race and ecology differently. In addition, the range of sites of the black diaspora and settler colonies that the three figures I focus on are responding to i.e. Francophone Caribbean (Martinique), French settler colony (Algeria), Anglophone Caribbean (Jamaica) Anglophone settler colony/ex-slave plantation (USA), as well as their different historical moments, and the extended dialogue between them – helps to light up the range of issues and resources within this tradition.

28 Karen Barad’s use of this term is meant to “strongly suggest a fundamental inseparability of epistemological, ontological, and ethical considerations” (Barad 1995, 25-6). Barad uses this term in a positive sense: “I propose “agential realism” as an epistemological-ontological-ethical framework that provides an understanding of the role of human and nonhuman, material and discursive, and natural and cultural factors in scientific and other social-material practices, thereby moving such considerations beyond the well-worn debates that pit constructivism against realism, agency against structure, and idealism against materialism. Indeed, the new philosophical framework that I propose entails a rethinking of fundamental concepts that support such binary thinking, including the notions of matter, discourse, causality, agency, power, identity, embodiment, objectivity, space, and time” (26). By contrast, the sense I am using it is to diagnose the kind of “binary thinking” that Barad seeks to challenge with this framework. However, my claim is that what Wynter calls “Man,” Fanon calls “Manicheanism,” and Hartman terms “fungibility,” all effectively function as an “epistemological-ontological-framework,” that orders “human and nonhuman, material and discursive, and natural and cultural factors,” although it does not present or understand itself as such.
However, unlike many posthumanist and new materialist accounts, these critiques are situated— that is, they are situated knowledges—of how racialized positions are fabricated and treated as less-than or inhuman. At the same time, however, all three figures are attentive to the negative consequences of this framework for more-than-human life. What their work shows is that we cannot think the freedom and flourishing of humans without considering the ecological conditions and relations that sustain them.

My claim is that the radical critique of liberal humanism common to the work of Wynter, Fanon, and Hartman: (i) shows us why it is necessary to break with liberal frames of environmental justice; and (ii) offers grounds for an alternative approach to understand environmental racism and to imagine its redress. I argue that in contrast to dominant frameworks, their work offers a way to understand the political and environmental as co-constitutive, and of racism as always environmental.

What is distinctive and exciting about the work of Wynter, Fanon, and Hartman is that rather than presuming that the task for anti-racist and decolonial thought is that of seeking recognition for racialized groups as citizens or humans it shows that the task lies in overcoming current configurations of both. This insight provides an importantly different starting point for understanding environmental racism and how we envision its redress. Rather than demanding distributive or procedural inclusion and equality, Wynter, Fanon, and Hartman begin from histories of slavery and genocide to challenge the ontological dualism of humans and nature and resultant ethico-political comportment. I argue that their work shows that anti-racist and decolonial projects must interrogate how the shifting categories of gender, race, and sexuality are bound up with corresponding shifts in the meaning and treatment of nature and matter. Otherwise responses to environmental racism and climate change risk reproducing the harms that it purportedly treats.
Throughout this dissertation, the diagnostic, normative, and anthropocentric problems that I outlined act as a framing device. This allows me to reflect on the extent to which the approaches to race, ecology, and freedom that I develop from each of the thinkers could in fact overcome the problems that I see in the liberal frames of environmental and climate justice. It therefore also brings the differences between the three figures into relief.

It is in respect to the first problem that Wynter, Fanon, and Hartman are most in concert. I show that they all offer important analyses of liberal humanism and its shadow doubles of colonization and anti-Black racism. I argue that these analyses enrich our understanding of the problems with common diagnoses of environmental racism. In different ways, all understand ecological destruction and racism as interwoven and as sharing the common source of the “epistemological-ontological-ethical framework” of liberal humanism, with the political fallout that this way of organizing and inhabiting the world entails. The most salient differences are the ways that Fanon allows us to grasp the specific forms of racialization and socio-ecological issues particular to settler colonialism, and the focus on racialized-gender and sexuality that Hartman illuminates with the analytic of fungibility.

It is in respect to the normative problem and the related problem of anthropocentricism that the disparities between the three thinkers are most stark. My claim is that both Wynter and Fanon elevate as universal what are in fact partial and problematic figurations of humanity and freedom. Consequently, although they help us to identify the normative issues with liberal frames of environmental and climate justice, their own responses to liberal humanism effectively repeat a variant of the normative problem. In addition, the concepts of the human and freedom that they affirm (or assume) are themselves linked to the problem of anthropocentrism that I also find in their work. Although the approach I develop through my reading of Hartman is not free from these risks, I argue that out of the three her work is
ultimately the best equipped to think race, ecology and freedom in a way that does not reproduce the normative problem and its related anthropocentrism.

My critical engagements with these figures are informed by postcolonial and decolonial Native feminisms. I suggest that this comparative and relational approach is important: for identifying the specific ways in which racist environments work; for considering how different racist environments are related; and, for reflecting on the blind spots and assumptions of different traditions and positionalities. However, the approach I am proposing raises more fundamental questions about how to ground approaches to race, ecology and freedom that do not appeal to the universality of justice, normative figurations of the human and good life, or to a common positionality and history. I briefly touch on these questions at the end of the dissertation.

4. Aims

I close this introduction with my aims for the project.

My first aim is to offer a careful and comparative reading of Wynter, Fanon, and Hartman in order to illuminate a seam of rich ecological thought within the tradition of Africana philosophy. I am particularly interested in their engagement with figures in the continental tradition, the tensions internal to their projects, and the respective political imaginaries that I understand their analyses of racist environments to give rise to. I aim to supplement work in other disciplines that has explored the linkage of race, racism, and ecology in their work, but has tended to stress the affinities between them.

Some of the claims that I read in the work of Wynter, Fanon, and Hartman (particularly regarding the dualisms of nature/culture, human/nonhuman) are in concert with those of

29 For example, the difference between what I call the racist environments of colonial sovereignty and what Christina Sharpe terms “the pervasive climate of anti-Blackness” (Sharpe 2016, 26).
30 For example (McKittrick 2013; Yussof 2018).
feminist thinkers such as Val Plumwood, Carolyn Merchant, Isabella Stengers, and Donna Haraway, as well as work in Marxian political ecology, first generation Frankfurt School, and arguably Derrida and Agamben. Although my reading is informed by these traditions my contribution is to show that we can find these insights within Africana philosophy and that these thinkers add a crucial dimension since their treatment of the categories of nature and the human is informed by their awareness of how these categories are imbricated with race and racism. Thus, I aim to point to an aspect of a tradition that has largely been overlooked, in part because of how environmentalism and environmental philosophy tend to be imagined.\textsuperscript{31}

My second aim is critical. I aim to identify and critique the problems with how the relationship between racism and the environment has tended to be thought. I propose that we reframe and reconceive environmental racism in terms of \textit{racist environments}. This reversal is an attempt to destabilize the distinction between racism and environment that holds the terms as initially separate and only incidentally related. The reversal I propose will allow us to see racism as an atmospheric force that shapes the relations of individual and milieu. This view changes what tends to be understood by the relationship of nature and race (exceeding more familiar ideas of racism as biological essentialism – or dehumanization of humans via supposedly natural hierarchical differences in which some people are deemed inhuman since “closer to nature”) and thus the strategies we might use to redress it.\textsuperscript{32}

However, my project is not only critical. I not only hope to show how racism and ecology are interwoven but also to suggest that the latter is a vital aspect of freedom dreams, practices, and struggles. In sum, the positive aspect of the dissertation is that of exploring alternative eco-political imaginaries, experiments, and situated knowledges opened up by the

\textsuperscript{31} One aim of my project is to challenge these background assumptions, assumptions about both philosophy of race and environmental thought, which often tacitly reproduce the dualism of Nature/Culture (since they assume that the environment can in part be separated from social issues such as racism).

\textsuperscript{32} Something like the global differential impacts of anthropogenic climate change on black and brown communities need to be folded into a richer account and longer historical memory, in which the destructive transformation, and constriction of ecologies is understood as an integral part of racism.
refusal of liberal humanism and politics. These eco-political imaginaries offer grounds to: conceptualize racist environments differently; the harms in question; and, the stakes and demands of the struggles and practices of freedom that unfold within and against them. *Ecological freedom* names the generative tension of freedom, relationality, and reciprocity that emerges from this tradition. *Race, Ecology, Freedom* turns to experiments in living otherwise with both human and more-than-human others, and claims that the insight they offer into *ecological freedom* offers a profoundly different understanding of the harms in question, and of the stakes and implications of struggles around racism and ecology. 

As Wynter argues, these assumptions need to be seriously challenged so that do not continue to shape responses to climate change and the related environmental issues that confront us. and I aim to challenge the problematic histories and concepts which have constituted mainstream environmentalism. There are a number of resonances between my concept of ecological freedom and Murray Bookchin’s seminal anarchist “social ecology” *The Ecology of Freedom*. However, my aim is to trace the emergence of a distinct sense of ecological freedom from within the Africana tradition. In addition, there are a number of issues with Bookchin’s account that are at odds with my aims, such as his defense of reason and an enlightenment-colonial hierarchy of humans and nature. See (Bookchin 1982; Plumwood 1993, 14-18).
Chapter One: A New World View? Sylvia Wynter and Environmental Racism

Introduction

One of the distinctive aspects of the thought of Afro-Jamaican philosopher, Sylvia Wynter, is the attempt to think issues of racism and ecology as systematically interwoven and not only incidentally linked. On her account they share the same source, which she calls Man or the order of liberal humanism. Wynter therefore offers an alternative way of understanding the connections between racism, colonialism, and ecological issues beyond liberal frames of environmental racism and climate injustice. Her work also shows why these are not merely peripheral concerns, but are in fact essential for critical philosophy of race, decolonial, and feminist social and political philosophy. My claim is that although Wynter’s thought helps us to understand the problems with liberal frames of environmental and climate justice, her proposed solution fails to adequately overcome them. I suggest that this is due to the ways in which Wynter’s proposed solution to environmental racism remains indebted to the Enlightenment humanism that it purports to definitively break with.

The “sociogenic principle” which Wynter claims to find in Fanon’s work acts as the foundation both for Wynter’s radical diagnosis of what we currently understand as environmental racism and her proposed solution to it. Despite the centrality of this notion to her mature work, commentators have largely been content to repeat that Wynter is “extending the writings of Frantz Fanon”, or is “Fanonian,” without really addressing what this means (McKittrick 2015, 145). Wynter understands autonomy as a uniquely human autarkic capacity and freedom-from the constraints otherwise common to biological life. I argue that the value she assigns to autonomy drives her framing of “the sociogenic principle” and the role that she accords it. In the following chapter I offer my own account of sociogeny in Fanon’s work,

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For example, see (McKittrick 2013) or (Ansfield 2015).
showing the important differences between it and Wynter’s rendering of the “sociogenic principle.” I then tease out the implications of these differences for their respective responses to environmental racism. My argument is that when we attend to the different senses and roles of sociogeny in the work of Wynter and Fanon, quite distinct, indeed conflicting, approaches to the nexus of racism and ecology come into view. In contrast with the common assumption that Wynter is advancing Fanon’s thought in an ecological direction, in the following two chapters I demonstrate that Fanon actually has more to offer on a number of points of central importance for reconceptualizing environmental racism: he (i) theorizes power, and extends his understanding of power to his understanding of ecological politics, (ii) establishes a critical relationship to knowledge production, particularly science, (iii) conceptualizes place, ecology and ethical relationships with the more-than-human world, and (iv) provides a grounded analysis of (settler) colonialism that is better equipped to support and think with decolonial, Indigenous, and coalitional land-based and environmental struggles.

My position is that despite its promise, a Wynterian approach to environmental racism would not be free from the diagnostic, normative, and anthropocentric problems that on my view are entailed by liberal framings of environmental justice.36 In brief, I find that Wynter’s account of the diagnostic problem fails to adequately interrogate and understand the material and systemic causes of environmental racism. The normative problem arises from the fact that although Wynter’s account purports to be universal and value neutral, it, like liberal frames of justice, actually imports a set of problematic norms and values about what constitutes the good life and the harm in question, and thereby conceals what is at stake for many affected

36 See the introduction for my outline of the three problems and a review of common approaches to environmental and climate justice. In general, philosophical discussions of environmental and climate justice have tended to shift away from the more radical and ecological bent of the early “Principles of Environmental Justice” (Delegates to the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit 1991). For the most part environmental racism has been framed in terms of distributive and procedural notions of justice, and to a lesser extent that of recognition. See David Scholsberg Defining Environmental Justice for an overview (Schlosberg 2007). I have merely offered a sketch here of these problems to help orient my engagement with Wynter.
communities. Following from the first two, her account of the problem of anthropocentrism amounts to an avoidance of the issue of ecological justice (generally understood as justice towards the natural world), restricts itself to the question of justice among humans on environmental issues, and by an extension, assumes an anthropocentric and limited notion of “the environment.” I pay particular attention to the concept of autonomy in Wynter’s project and the value she accords it, since it allows us to see how these problems are linked and repeated in her work.

This chapter is organized into four sections. In 1. “Man vs. Human,” I provide an overview of Wynter’s thought, focusing on those aspects most salient for the issue of environmental racism. In 2. “The Sociogenic Principle,” I give an account of the concept that serves as the foundation both of Wynter’s radical diagnosis of what we currently understand as environmental racism and of her proposed solution to it. In 3. “The Status of Science in the Science of the Word,” I critically examine her understanding of science and Western knowledge in her framing of the sociogenic principle. In Section 4. “Particularity, Politics, Race and Place,” I outline Wynter’s understanding of politics and power and pay particular attention to the role of Indigenous struggles within it. Finally, in 5 “Territorial or Ontological Sovereignty? Problems for a Wynterian Approach to Environmental Racism,” I make my contribution by breaking with commonly enthusiastic readings of Wynter on environmental issues. Instead, I show that a Wynterian response to environmental racism would actually repeat variants of the diagnostic, normative and anthropocentric problems which characterize liberal approaches to environmental and climate justice.

Turning to the work of Fanon and Hartman in the following chapters, I claim that their work orients us to an alternative sense of freedom in comparison with the one that animates Wynter’s project. In contrast to negative ideas of freedom, or freedom-from, their work explores what I understand as ecological freedom. In importantly different ways, both Fanon
and Hartman suggest that practices of freedom are always situated and bound up with milieus. They each show that ecological and climactic givens are not automatically seen as constraints to be managed, controlled, and overcome, but rather as enabling conditions of experiments in living. Consequently, I argue that their work orients us to relational ideas of freedom and the self, which challenge the liberal humanist subject, and the ghosts of it that I find in Wynter’s work.

1. Man vs. Human

From her earliest work, Wynter traced the emergence of what she terms “the New World” and the “coloniality of being/power/truth/freedom,” by attending to shifting ideas of nature and ecological relationships. As Wynter’s early consideration of plantations and provision grounds demonstrates, in the “New World,” ecologies and concepts of the natural world cannot be dissociated from regimes of race, labor, and property (Wynter 1970; 1971). From the late 1970’s, Wynter adopts aspects of Foucault’s archaeological method, to give her own archaeology of Man, arguing that such ecological-racial regimes have their condition of possibility in an onto-epistemic framework, or episteme, which effectively delineates who is granted recognition as human. Wynter’s claim is that the category of the human should not be confused with that of the species, or homo sapiens. What we currently think of as human, the biocentric, European-descended neo-liberal subject, or “Man”, is not natural, but was made “through a brutal invasion and conquest that led to a degree of genocidal extinction and of still ongoing ecological disaster unprecedented in human history” (Wynter 1995, 5). Yet, while

37 This phrase comes from the title of an essay in which Wynter takes up the decolonial frame of coloniality (Wynter 2003). Wynter had already been engaging with the work of Immanuel Wallerstein (whose world-systems theory was hugely influential on the decolonial school) since the mid 1970’s.

38 Wynter’s relationship to Foucault, especially her use of the term episteme deserves a fuller treatment than I can give here. It will become obvious that Wynter departs from Foucault in a number of ways, such as her focus on experience, adherence to humanism, and understanding of the relationship of knowledge and power. For a discussion of this topic, see (Bogues 2005).
terrible in many ways, Wynter insists that, “this is also the event that is going to make our own existence possible; it is going to bring the modern world into being, it is going to change reality for all of us, insert us into the single history we now live” (Scott and Wynter 2000, 191). On Wynter’s view confronting this “single history” requires a “new world view” and a corresponding shift from Man to a novel understanding and practice of being human.

As Walter Mignolo puts it, Wynter’s aim of overcoming Man is not driven by “a claim for recognition within the hegemonic concept of Humanity but a claim for recognition that the imperial (racist and patriarchal) concept of Man / Human is no longer sustainable” (Mignolo 2015, 118-9). On Wynter’s view, the episteme of Liberal Man, or homo oeconomicus, is the real driver of anthropogenic climate change, rather than human activity as such (Wynter 2015b, 22). Consequently, it is imperative that we radically transform what is currently the dominant way of being human. Otherwise our responses to climate change will be generated through the same perspective that drives ecological destruction. Wynter’s thought therefore promises a radical critique of liberal framings of environmental and climate justice. Yet, I will show that despite this critique, Wynter’s proposed solution repeats assumptions of the liberal humanism that she decries, with implications for the way environmental racism is conceptualized.

It is not an exaggeration to say that the “sociogenic principle”, which Wynter claims to take from Fanon, is meant to provide a solution to all of the political, social and environmental problems that we currently face. On her view, these issues are in fact symptoms of a more fundamental problem, that of Man, or our current genre of the human.40 What we take to be

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39 ‘In this mode of material provisioning, therefore, there can ostensibly be no alternative to its attendant planetarily - ecologically extended, increasingly techno-automated, thereby job-destroying, postindustrial, yet no less fossil fuel-driven, thereby climate-destabilizing free-market capitalist economic system, in its now extreme neoliberal transnational technocratic configuration” (2005b, 22). Consequently, “The proposals that they’re going to give for change are going to be devastating! And most devastating of all for the global poor, who have already begun to pay the greatest price” (Wynter 2015b, 24 original emphasis).

40 “We know of this brilliant concept of the performative enactment of gender from Judith Butler. I am suggesting that the enactments of such gender roles are always a function of the enacting of a specific genre of being hybridly human. Butler’s illuminating redefinition of gender as a praxis rather than a noun, therefore, set off bells ringing everywhere! Why not, then, the performative enactment of all our roles, of all our role allocations (…) All as praxes, therefore, rather than nouns” (Wynter 2015b, 33 original emphasis).
the universal, or human, is in fact an overrepresentation of the interests of a particular “ethnoclass”, that of patriarchal, bourgeois, European descended Man. Wynter outlines the stakes of this overrepresentation at the beginning of the essay “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being:”

the correlated hypothesis here is that all our present struggles with respect to race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, struggles over the environment, global warming, severe climate change, the sharply unequal distribution of the earth resources (…) these are all differing facets of the central ethnoclass Man vs. Human struggle. (Wynter 2003, 61).

Wynter’s claim, that the “Man vs. Human struggle” is the “central” one, relies on her quasi-archaeological narrative of Man. This narrative begins with 1492, or the “discovery” of the “New World”, and thus the genesis of a world order in which racism, or more specifically, antiblackness will be foundational. Wynter traces a series of epistemic shifts in which elements from pre-colonial European society eventually mutate into a new framework of knowledge/being, that is, a new episteme. This is an episteme that is overdetermined by the natural sciences, and generates a new genre of the human, “Man2”, a fundamentally racist and destructive juggernaut driven by myths of unlimited biological and economic growth.\footnote{Man1 (homo politicus) was a transformation from a notion of the human organized around original sin and divine redemption, to what she calls Man1, grounded in a calculus of rationality in the political terms of the this-worldly goals of the state: “the projected ‘space of Otherness’ was now to be mapped on phenotypical and religio-cultural differences between human variations” and/or population groups, while the new idea of order was now to be defined in terms of degrees of rational perfection/imperfection” (Wynter 2003, 296). Man2 is (homo oeconomicus) – supposedly natural hierarchical human difference is now internalized as a split within the biological itself (through race).} Man is the only genre of the human to have overrepresented itself as the universal. In Wynter’s narrative, this happened through a confluence of factors; Columbus’s millenarian belief which defined the Scholastic episteme which divided the world into habitable and uninhabitable zones, the emergence of the natural sciences, and the novel hierarchical ordering of (human)
being, or race, which arose in part as a response to the crises of legitimation and knowledge prompted by global exploration, colonization and slavery. For the first time, all difference, primarily phenotypical difference (and supposedly correlative climactic-geographic difference) are coded as derivations from the norm of a particular “ethnoclass” – the European descended male bourgeois subject, now understood as the human itself. Race in this way becomes central to the category of the human, serving as the means to distinguish the human, or Man, from his less-than-human and nonhuman subjects. With the ascendency of the “origin narrative” of Darwinian evolution that undergirds Man2 comes a fiction of “those selected-by-Evolution and the category of those dysselected-by-Evolution” (Wynter 2003, 323). All groups that deviate from the norm of Man are to various degrees imagined to be naturally less fit to survive and as threatening the survival and expansion of the species. Blackness is, Wynter argues, the zero point or absolute Other against which all other human difference is ranked.42

Wynter gives us a concrete example of this in her essay “‘No Humans Involved’: An Open to Letter to My Colleagues,” where she comes closest to articulating an explicit theory of environmental racism. Around the time of the beating of Rodney King (1991), police and public officials in Los Angeles routinely used the acronym “N.H.I” (“no humans involved”) to refer to “young Black males who belong to the jobless category of the inner city ghettos” (Wynter 1994, 42). The dehumanization that this acronym signals, and the corresponding state-sanctioned violence and terrorism that it sanctions might seem to hold little relation to the

42 “From this ultimate mode of otherness based on “race,” other subtypes of otherness are then generated – the lower classes as the lack of the normal class, that is, the middle class; all other cultures as the lack of the normal culture, that is, Western culture; the nonheterosexual as the lack of heterosexuality, represented as a biologically selected mode of erotic preference; women as the lack of the normal sex, the male (…) all were themselves generated from the central and primary representation of the black physiognomy as “proof” of the represented evolutionary determined degrees of genetic perfection, on whose basis the structuring hierarchies of the social order had, ostensibly, been allocated” (Wynter 1995, 42 original emphasis). It is not clear to what extent Wynter understands the episteme of Man to be the source of all oppressive systems of social difference. For example, elsewhere, Wynter suggests that gender hierarchy and roles functioned in an analogous manner to the “global color line”, and was essential to all societies since it mapped onto biological difference (Wynter 2006,115). I am unable to respond to this controversial claim here, but would like to question the viability and desirability of a single cause or origin for decolonial feminist thought.
destruction of the more-than-human world. Yet, for Wynter, “no humans involved” offers an opportunity to reflect on the links between “the reality of throwaway lives” and the “hitherto discardable environment, its ongoing pollution, and ozone layer depletion” (Wynter 1994, 60).

Wynter argues that the difficulty of thinking these issues together in any kind of systemic way can be explained by the partial perspectives of different groups (for example those of white affluent environmentalists and anti-racist groups) and the particular grid of knowledge, or episteme of Man, which conditions how we know the world. We are unable to see that they are essentially two faces of the same problem, that of Man, since “the New Poor, embodies a plight, which like that of the ongoing degradation of the planetary environment, is not even posable, not even resolvable, within the conceptual framework of our present order of knowledge” (Wynter 1994, 159). Consequently, Wynter claims that the solution lies in a kind of onto-epistemic shift.43

Here, Wynter departs from a more modest Foucauldian archaeological approach, since it can only take us so far. It can trace epistemic ruptures tied to a particular formation of Man, but it refuses to ask why or how these ruptures occur, and thus if and how we might prompt them.44 Wynter asks: what is the underlying dynamic or principle that drives these “onto-epistemic” shifts in how humans understand and experience themselves? Can they be attributed to blind necessity, to natural laws, or simply explained by appealing to historical contingency? Or are such shifts in fact the product of human agency? Wynter’s conclusion is that human being is “praxis” all the way down, yet epistemes, or what Wynter also describes as social codes, have served to “keep our collective agency opaque, therefore, to ourselves” (Wynter

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43 My use of the term “onto-epistemic” is meant to capture Wynter’s concern with the “the conditions of possibility for modern representation” (da Silva 2015, 97). Orders of knowledge and ways of being human, or ontology, are imbricated for Wynter. Moreover, Wynter’s concern with experience, and aim of carrying out an “objective phenomenology” entails a different focus than Foucault’s notion of the episteme.

44 In The Order of Things, Foucault presents Sade, Nerval, Artaud and Nietzsche as what Wynter might call “liminal” figures, but they are not the agents of historical change, nor are they the medium of a grander principle of intelligibility or telos (Foucault 1994). Foucault “bracketed causal explanations” of the ruptures that he traced.
Her wager is that if we could understand the underlying principle of human self-making, in turn making this unconscious dynamic transparent, then it would be possible to make ourselves differently than the “biocentric” genre of the human, which now threatens human and more-than-human life.

Wynter’s claim is that “the sociogenic principle”, which she attributes to Fanon, provides a way to do just this. In what follows, I look at its role as the basis of a solution to what Wynter termed “all our present struggles,” before critically examining it for the purposes of reconceptualizing environmental racism and ecological struggle.

2. The Sociogenic Principle

The “sociogenic principle,” adapted from Fanon’s brief usage of the term in Black Skin, White Masks, begins to play an important role in Wynter’s essays from the early 90’s. Fanon proposes the notion of sociogeny in response to the question: what is the source of the “inferiority complex” and internalized negrophobia that he discerns in himself and his black patients? This cannot be explained by phylogeny (the study of the evolution of a species or group) which would posit a natural, i.e. racial cause. Nor, can be it accounted for by ontogeny, which individualizes racial complexes, localizing them to a familial milieu and personal narrative (Fanon BSWMxv; PN96). The racial complexes that Fanon diagnoses in both Black and White can only be explained by considering the social environment that conditions subject formation. Because “society, unlike biochemical processes, does not escape human influence. Man is what brings society into being” (ibid.). Hence, the social environment is not necessary or natural, but is a result of human praxis, and thus might be changed by it.45

45 I provide my own account of sociogeny in Fanon’s thought in the following chapter. I show that this differs from “the sociogenic principle” in some important respects that have important implications for their respective responses to environmental racism.
Wynter takes Fanon’s concept of sociogeny and treats it as a discovery of what she calls “the sociogenic principle”, an evolutionary trait which is in fact the marker of human discontinuity from the rest of evolution. On Wynter’s account, subjectively experienced orders of consciousness are structured by pre-conscious social codes, or masks, which function for the adaptive advantage of particular modes of being human. What Wynter calls, “Sociogenic codes”, are “the laws or rules which govern the nature-culture processes inscripting our modes of socio-genetic being, and thereby of ‘mind,’” which, “can be identified as the human form of the psychophysical laws” common to all living beings (Wynter 2001, 48). Humanity is uniquely “hybrid” – both masks and skin, or mythoi and bios. Sociogenic codes are therefore not fixed and universal but an effect of self-narration through origin stories, myths or “cosmogonies” (Wynter 2003, 329), that are the means by which we make ourselves as particular kinds of beings, amounting to a kind of ontological self-writing. As we have seen, for Wynter this includes Darwinian myths of natural selection and Malthusian natural scarcity.

For Wynter, “the sociogenic principle” evidences our unique powers of autopoiesis. Wynter’s conception of autopoiesis has a twofold meaning. The first sense emerges from the meaning deployed by the evolutionary biologists and systems-theorists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela who coined the term. Maturana and Varela claim that living systems are homeostatic, specifying the terms through which its environment is known. These terms serve to reproduce the internal organization and thus stability of that particular system.46 Human perception and knowledge is, like that of all living beings, characteristically self-referential,

46 The term, autopoiesis, is meant to capture the self-referential nature of cognition and perception, “we wanted a word that would by itself convey the central feature of the organization of the living, which is autonomy” (Maturana and Varela 1980, xvii). Consequently, they argue that, “perception should not be viewed as a grasping of an external reality, but rather as the specification of one” (Maturana and Varela 1980, xv). This has the consequence that, “every world brought forth necessarily hides its origins. By existing, we generate cognitive ‘blind spots’ that can be cleared only through generating new blind spots in another domain” (Maturana and Varela 1987, 242).
and consequently partial. However, given the social origin of the codes that orient us, we are not oriented by species-wide codes, but by those particular to specific social systems.

While Wynter includes this understanding of autopoiesis in her account, she adds to it. Wynter claims that since we are only able to know and experience the world through these codes, and the “adaptive knowledge” they yield, this evolutionary requirement has prohibited us from knowing ourselves as we really are. On her account, humans are beings that make ourselves (as evidenced by different intrahuman sociogenic codes) in a fashion that renders us discontinuous from the rest of evolution. That is, we have created the codes that orient our knowledge and behavior, but we treat them as laws that come from an external source, like gravity, as laws of divine necessity or of nature.

Wynter thus adds to Maturana’s and Varela’s understanding of autopoiesis the conception of humans’ unique capacity of self-making. The aim of this addition is to communicate our agency and thus our autonomy from material constraint or the genetic codes that otherwise determine the behavior and knowledge of all other living beings. Wynter argues that while humans share the features common to all living beings, namely the limiting of cognition and perception by “codes”, or homeostatic “descriptive statements”, language and thus the capacity to write ourselves differently, means that humans alone are able to transcend these commonalities. Wynter claims that the sociogenic principle has “to be seen as the expression of a mutation in the processes of evolution, one by means of which a new level of existence, discontinuous with evolution, is brought into existence or, rather, brings itself into existence” (Scott and Wynter 2000, 189-90). This moment of discontinuity from material causality through the emergence of speech is what Wynter calls the “third event.”

47 Wynter also draws on Gregory Bateson, particularly his concept of the “descriptive statement” to develop this point. Bateson claims that organisms, and by extension individuals and societies, are essentially conservative, self-corrective systems. Each system, has a “descriptive statement”, which filters out what cannot easily be assimilated into that system without disturbance (Bateson 2015, 37).
The sociogenic principle supposedly reveals humans’ exceptionality because, unlike other living beings, humans create these codes: “we alone no longer had to remain subordinated to the sole set of instructions of our genome’s DNA code” (Wynter 2003, 29). Wynter’s insistence on autopoiesis is therefore not a reminder of our commonality with all other living systems, but an attempt to make us realize our unique potential for total “cognitive autonomy.” I will return to this last point, but for now we should consider how insight into “the sociogenic principle” is meant to offer a solution to the twinned problems of racism and environmental destruction. Wynter claims that Fanon’s revelation of the socio-cultural fabrication of racial difference challenges the biocentrism and racism of Man2 (Wynter 2003, 269). The “origin narrative” of Darwinian evolution and Malthusian natural scarcity (which has served as a behavior regulating threat) has meant that what we call race has hitherto been masked as ontogenic or purely biological and thus as due to processes outside of human control (Wynter 2003, 326). Race, and indeed all sense of dys/selectedness are myths, but these myths have real effects. The first uncontroversial claim that follows from this is that there is no biological basis to racial hierarchy. Wynter’s stronger claim is that the discovery of the “sociogenic principle” provides a way of overcoming the blind spots and partial perspectives which prevent us from knowing ourselves as we really are. In turn, this is meant to prompt something like an evolutionary shift or “the second emergence”, in which humans would move from the first sense of autopoiesis (in terms of limits) to the second sense (in terms of unconstrained autonomy and autarky). On Wynter’s view, this would mean an end to the mistaken exclusion of some human groups from human kinship, and thus from ethical salience.

Wynter invests what she calls “the third event”, or the “origins of the co-mutational emergent properties of language and narrative with the brain” with the greatest significance; marking the emergence of something never before seen since the origin of the physical universe (the first event) and the emergence of biological life (the second event) (Wynter 2015a, 215). As Wynter is at pains to show in her engagement with neuroscience and evolutionary biology. For example, see (Wynter 2001).

The first event is the emergence of humans as “languaging” beings: “this proposed overall mutation that I now define at the level of our Homo Narrans species itself, is nothing less than that of our Second Emergence, this time from our continued subordination – as the price paid for the Event of our First Emergence” (Wynter 2006).
Wynter argues that this properly universal and inclusive recognition of human kinship should be motivated by the imperative of species survival that confronts us in the contexts of nuclear weapons, ecological catastrophe, and climate change. At the same time, she assumes that the second emergence is the exclusive means by which we could adequately address these environmental “existential threats” since this emergence is the only way in which we would be able to see the environment as it truly is, namely, a shared planetary habitat integral to all human survival and flourishing. It would not be a resource for Man, or any other particular group.

Wynter closes both “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being” and “No Humans Involved” with a passage from Heinz Pagels’ *The Dreams of Reason*, in which he envisions a “‘distant day’” in which the sun will finally set on “domination”. This new dawn requires that “‘the narrative order of culturally constructed worlds, the order of human feeling and beliefs, will become subject to scientific description in a new way’” (quoted in Wynter 1994, 70). Wynter implies that the domination between different groups has its roots in a more fundamental cause; the domination of humans by their unconscious beliefs. Making these behavior motivating structures of belief conscious would, she believes, effectively eradicate intrahuman domination. Wynter argues that this would require an onto-epistemic shift, enabled by a “new science”, which, borrowing from Aimé Césaire, she terms the “science of the Word.” Unlike the merely “supracultural” knowledge of Man, the “transcultural constant,” of the sociogenic principle is meant to provide a basis for “an objective phenomenology on the basis of a methodology analogous to that of the natural sciences” (Wynter 2001, 55). On Wynter’s account this “objective phenomenology” would allow humans to study, and therefore make conscious the principles of human order and self-making beyond the limiting partial perspectives to which they had been “non-consciously subordinated” (Wynter 2015, 218). Wynter contends that by giving an objective view of the human which focuses on the
transcultural capacity for sociogeny, “the science of the Word” would make possible the first truly democratic, ecumenical, inclusive descriptive statement of the human.\footnote{The idea is that in each cultural code or mythos is valorized without privileging one over the other. It is not clear how this would work.}

By “emancipating” ourselves from the local, adaptive forms of knowledge and partial perspectives that have dominated us, we will recognize our universally shared capacities for self-creation, and thus our intrinsic moral freedom. The “science of the Word:” will make it possible for us to understand the rules governing our human modes of perception and the behaviors to which they lead - as in the case of the misrecognition of human kinship expressed in the N.H.I. acronym (...) It is only by this mutation of knowledge that we shall be able to secure, as a species, the full dimensions of our human autonomy with respect to the systemic and always narratively instituted purposes that have hitherto governed us - hitherto outside of our conscious awareness and consensual intentionality. (Wynter 1994, 70 first emphasis added).

Wynter’s somewhat staggering claim, that it is “only by this mutation of knowledge” that all of the world’s problems can be fixed, is in part explained, if not justified, by her messianism.\footnote{Messianism has been a constant theme and interest in her work since her novels the Hills of Hebron and in early essays such as “One love: Rhetoric or Reality?” (Wynter 1972)} Although this requires a longer treatment than I can give it here, there are a few points regarding her messianism that are crucial to note. On the margins of every system, Wynter argues, are utopian or “liminal” intellectuals and creators, who, through their “messianic” vision, manage to overstep and shift the then dominant episteme. The exemplary liminal intellectuals are Christopher Columbus and the lay Renaissance humanists, since they prompted the “epochal shift” that would in turn establish the conditions for our now globalized world and thus prepare the ground for human self-realization. Wynter makes a second claim, namely, that since it is impossible to fight power with truth, (since the terms of truth are determined in advance by power) the only thing that moves us beyond the episteme of Man is what she will call a
messianic or utopian “metanarrative” that exceeds the parameters of our episteme. Wynter then proceeds to utilize the sociogenic principle in a messianic metanarrative of her own. The proposal is that we use this truly inclusive “cosmogony,” or origin narrative, to consciously and freely remake ourselves in a way that is not overdetermined by one particular genre of the human.

Among the many questions this proposal raises is that of the supposedly unprecedented universality of Wynter’s new origin narrative and genre of the human – homo narrans, and the question of how it could ultimately transcend the limits and partiality that on her account have characterized other supposedly universal liberatory and humanist projects – such as feminism and Marxism (Wynter 2018). As I will demonstrate, Wynter’s vision of the human imports norms and values which betray their debt to the legacy of the Enlightenment – such as progress, faith in science, autonomy, and human exceptionalism. As Christin Ellis argues, “although Wynter calls out the discriminatory hierarchy that lies at the heart of the Western liberal humanist tradition, the alternative ‘genre of the human’ that she outlines ultimately looks a lot like the liberal humanist subject she proposes to displace” (Ellis 2018, 155). I will now turn to “the science of the Word,” to show how these norms and values shape in problematic ways her proposed solution to the twinned problems of racism and ecological destruction.

3. The Status of Science in “the Science of the Word”

An adequate approach to environmental racism would be able to give a robust account of the imbrication of forms of power and scientific knowledge production, the ways in which this plays out in material processes of production, consumption, waste and so forth, and a proposal for knowledge production and sharing which attempts to redress the aspects of the

This claim relies on an inventive reading of Ricoeur’s essay “Ideology and Utopia as Cultural Imagination”. See (Ricoeur 1976; Wynter 2006)
above that perpetuate injustice. While Wynter recognizes these needs, my claim is that her proposal risks, if not entails, some deeply worrying outcomes for a decolonial approach to environmental racism.

In “Axis, Bold as Love: On Sylvia Wynter, Jimi Hendrix, and the Promise of Science”, Katherine McKittrick addresses the question of the status of scientific knowledge for Wynter: it is important to reemphasize here that scientific knowledge is not posited by Wynter as an emancipatory antidote; the natural sciences do not stand alone, conveying authoritative corrections to practices of injustice and racial-sexual violence. And, perhaps most significantly, the science she integrates into her project traces, but does not endorse, the scientific objectivity we are familiar with and proposes a new science of being human. (McKittrick 2015, 147)

The issues McKittrick flags here, namely, the epistemic status of the natural sciences and the science of the word, and the connection between this and their respective emancipatory roles, are important ones which deserve far more scrutiny. How “new” exactly is the science Wynter proposes? And in what ways might its novelty (or lack of) shape our imaginaries and strategies for combatting environmental racism? Moreover, given its avowedly mythic and messianic role, what is the status of the “science of the Word” and by extension Wynter’s account of it?

As we saw, Wynter’s project is motivated by the conviction that ethical blind spots stem from the way that the epistemic blind spots common to all living systems are expressed in human social orders. This takes on monstrous new proportions with the overrepresentation of Man. Wynter’s science of the Word effectively claims that we can overcome these limitations by studying human self-making using the methodologies of the natural sciences which emerged with the “epochal rupture” of Renaissance humanism and 1492. Wynter asks: how can we come to know our social reality in the same way that Western intellectuals from Renaissance Civic-humanism and its new Studia onwards have come to know,
and brilliantly so, the physical and purely biological levels of reality in terms of the above-cited imperatively open-ended – because self-correcting – orders of knowledge/cognition that are the physical and biological sciences? (Wynter 2015a, 206).

What is missing here and elsewhere is an account and justification of the subtle but apparently crucial difference between the “self-correcting” orders of the natural sciences and the “self-corrective systems” of embodied perception and cognition. Recall that Wynter follows Bateson and Maturana and Varela in characterizing living systems as “self-corrective”, that is, as homeostatic and self-referential. In this context, “self-corrective systems” are the root of the problems which Wynter turns to the sciences to surmount; the necessarily partial nature of perception, and by extension the problem of objectivity and an “external observer” for a constructivist epistemology. But in the context of the natural sciences, “self-correcting” has almost the opposite meaning. It functions as the basis for Wynter’s claims regarding the “open-ended” and emancipatory movement of science and is apparently capable of taking us right out of the epistemic binds entailed by “self-corrective systems”. As Paget Henry notes:

As crises of technification in the European natural sciences drove Husserl to explore their transcendental foundations, in a similar way, the crises of misrepresenting the condemned of the earth forced Wynter to explore the transcendental grounds of the European humanities and social sciences. However, Wynter does not bring her crisis of the humanities and social sciences into a critical engagement with Husserl's crisis of the natural sciences. The primary reason for this is Wynter's claim that the European natural sciences have achieved a cognitive autonomy that still eludes the social sciences and humanities. (Henry 2006, 259).

I suggest that Wynter did not critically examine the crisis of the natural sciences, because she grants them an assumed, but unjustified “cognitive autonomy”, which relies on a barely
modified enlightenment teleology. If she had examined them more closely then the role she attributes to Western science, as being able to break with particular social codes and orders (rather than reproducing them) might have been complicated. Granted, Wynter does want to distinguish what she is proposing from the unfortunate realities of technoscience, sociobiology and so forth, but for her these are mere exceptions or perversions which do not disprove her broader claims regarding the epistemic status and unique ethico-political potential of (Western) scientific knowledge.\footnote{“As distinct, in both cases however, from their ongoing degradation as the now neo-Liberal, instrumentalist and market-oriented techno-sciences? Not to speak of the pseudo-science of the no less neo-Liberal distortions of sociobiology and its range of offshoots” (Wynter 2015a, 206).}

Given her attention to the way in which the natural sciences were coeval with the colonial desire for conquest and domination of humans and nature, on what grounds can Wynter separate what she takes to be a true, disinterested, universal science from its corrupted history or “degradation”?\footnote{See Wynter’s discussion of Descartes’ \textit{Discourse of Method} (Wynter 1976, 81)
Here I am responding to McKittrick’s claim that Wynter supersedes Haraway’s emphasis on situated knowledges and partial perspectives and bell hooks’ black feminist standpoint epistemology. McKittrick claims: “What is compelling about Wynter’s discussions—and where she differs, sometimes radically, from antiracist and/or feminist theories of ‘inclusivity’ and ‘special vantage points’—is how seriously she takes the flesh-and-blood human species and the grounds of the subaltern to fashion a workable and new politic (...) Recognizing that new forms of life, occupying interhuman grounds (beneath all of our feet), can perhaps put forward a new worldview from the perspective of the species—that is, from outside the logic of biocentric models: not as a genre or mode of human but as human. Consequently, if the flesh-and-blood human can know from outside the logic of biocentric models, special/partial vantage points only make sense as indicative of patterns that are inside the logic of biocentric models and familiar plots” (McKittrick 2006, 135, 168).}

One response to this history, would be to contend that while scientific knowledge has a specificity and operational value that distinguishes it from other kinds of knowledge (and that therefore it is still possible to agree on shared standards for what counts as science), such an understanding of science does not mean that it totally escapes the problem of partial perspective. A problem which (as Wynter painstakingly shows) is common to all systems. At points, Wynter seems to be close to articulating a similar position to Donna Haraway’s in “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective.”\footnote{Here I am responding to McKittrick’s claim that Wynter supersedes Haraway’s emphasis on situated knowledges and partial perspectives and bell hooks’ black feminist standpoint epistemology. McKittrick claims: “What is compelling about Wynter’s discussions—and where she differs, sometimes radically, from antiracist and/or feminist theories of ‘inclusivity’ and ‘special vantage points’—is how seriously she takes the flesh-and-blood human species and the grounds of the subaltern to fashion a workable and new politic (...) Recognizing that new forms of life, occupying interhuman grounds (beneath all of our feet), can perhaps put forward a new worldview from the perspective of the species—that is, from outside the logic of biocentric models: not as a genre or mode of human but as human. Consequently, if the flesh-and-blood human can know from outside the logic of biocentric models, special/partial vantage points only make sense as indicative of patterns that are inside the logic of biocentric models and familiar plots” (McKittrick 2006, 135, 168).} Haraway argues that in different ways both Western scientific objectivity and
relativism are based on the “God trick” of being everywhere and nowhere. This amounts to a lack of responsibility and accountability, that imperils knowledge claims, since “knowledge from the point of view of the unmarked is truly fantastic, distorted, and irrational” (Haraway 2003, 397). Haraway proposes an alternative to both uncritical scientific realism and relativism, one which begins with the eliminable facts of partial perspective and connection. Haraway claims: “only partial perspectives promise objective vision (…) Feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object. It allows us to become answerable for what we learn and how to see” (Haraway 2003, 394). Starting from here, science can be rethought as a practice of “accountability and responsibility for translations and solidarities linking the cacophonous visions and visionary voices that characterize the knowledges of the subjugated” (Haraway 2003, 399). To some extent, Haraway’s view of science seems to resonate with the “bootstrap model” Wynter proposed in “The Ceremony Must be Found” as a way of navigating the problem of partial perspective:

The proposal here is that the positing of an ‘external observer’ with respect to the inside of the ‘figural domain’ of each human order can be effected by adopting the bootstrap model offered by some quantum physicists. This model envisages the bringing together of that which is observed from many different observer positions, enabling each to extend and to cancel out elements of the other. (Wynter 1984, 38).

As Wynter envisages it, heterogeneity serves (in sufficient quantities) to cancel itself out – revealing the universal structure below, previously obscured by superficial difference.57

57The bootstrap model can be traced to the physicist Geoffrey Chew, who, like David Bohm (whom Wynter also engages with), articulated a non-hierarchical approach to matter, what he called a “nuclear democracy”. David Kaiser explains: “the single most novel conjecture of Chew’s developing S-Matrix program, and its most radical break from the field-theoretic approach, was that all nuclear particles should treated ‘democratically’”. Chew argued against the then standard division “into ‘elementary’ and ‘composite’ camps, instead picturing each particle as a kind of bound-state composite of all others; none was inherently any more ‘fundamental’ or special than the others” (D. Kaiser 2002, 231). As Chew put it: “My standpoint here … is that every nuclear particle should receive equal treatment under the law.” It is not hard to see how this ‘nuclear democracy’ could quickly slide into a kind liberalism that sees itself justified in the order of matter itself. That Chew was unapologetic about
Wynter’s explanation of how she sees the boot strap model operating arguably has more in common with Jürgen Habermas’s theory of communicative action than it does with Haraway’s feminist objectivity. Wynter fails to acknowledge a point Haraway insists on, namely, that it is impossible to be everywhere equally, “the ‘equality’ of positioning is a denial of responsibility and critical inquiry” (Haraway 2003, 395). For Wynter, however:

it can be seen that it was only when the observations made from the differing perspectives of all those who called for new areas of Studies were brought together, that each group was able to escape its own form of solipsism and to observe regularities and common features pointing to the functioning of rules of discourse (…) rules which were ‘built in’ and therefore normally invisible. (Wynter 1984, 48).

In subsequent work, even the bootstrap model is abandoned. According to Wynter, by virtue of his “double consciousness,” Fanon was able to offer the insight of the external observer, such that his “breakthrough” discovery of the “sociogenic principle” comes to occupy center stage in the eschatology of humanity’s “second emergence,” and provides unprecedented knowledge of the “transcultural” laws of sociogeny.58

Wynter uses the “sociogenic principle” to resuscitate scientific objectivity, once again conceptualized as a sortie from correlationism and making it possible to, “know this reality (and heretically so) in the terms of ‘knowledge of the world as it is’” (Wynter 2001; 2015a, 206). Situatedness is a problem for Wynter, whereas for Haraway it is the grounds of objectivity, in part because it always invites contestation. Wynter suggests that conflict and contestation are precisely what a truer scientific objectivity would surmount. This point can be

how his political and philosophical beliefs shaped his approach to physics raises further doubts about how the bootstrap model, and the natural sciences in general, escape the partial and situated nature of knowledge.

58 “How, as centrally, was it possible for Fanon himself to set afoot the possibility of our emancipation by means of his redefined conception of what it is to be human? (…) It is from this [Fanon’s] conflicted perspective that he is therefore able to alert us to the possibility of our attaining to the full dimensions of our human autonomy, one inseparable from the possibility not merely of, in Nagel's still a cultural terms, an objective phenomenology but, more comprehensively, of, in Vico's terms, a new science, specific to the human, or in the terms put forward by Fanon's fellow Martinican poet thinker Aime Césaire, in 1946, that of a new science of the Word” (Wynter 2001, 57-8).
seen in dreams of control and calculability of white male scientists at elite U.S institutions, such as Pagels and the biologist Lewis Thomas that Wynter approvingly cites. Her embrace of their views can be seen in her use of Thomas’ claim that only solution to the “evolutionary blind alley” of nationalism and the corresponding threat of nuclear extinction, can be found in “the disciplines concerned with human behavior” which, while still imperfect, could provide “new ways of getting things done, such as for instance getting rid of patriotic rhetoric and thermonuclear warfare all at once” (cited in Wynter 1984, 43).

I agree with McKittrick that Wynter does not see the natural sciences in their current state as an “emancipatory antidote” to injustice since particular interests have diverted them from their role as the conduit for increasing universality, rationality, and freedom. It is more difficult to maintain, as McKittrick does, that “the science she integrates into her project traces, but does not endorse, the scientific objectivity we are familiar with” (McKittrick 2015, 147). Despite Wynter’s repeated insistence that the science of the Word is unprecedentedly novel, it is not obvious how it is different in kind from the scientific objectivity which she not only traces, but celebrates. As Marriott puts it: “Wynter acknowledges that she does not quite believe in the veridical value of the natural sciences, but she can only imagine transcending them, and perhaps unavoidably, via a narrative that presupposes the authority of those sciences” (2011, 81).

I suggest that Wynter’s unsupported claim that the natural sciences are “self-correcting,” as opposed to “self-corrective,” and thus able to render non-partial objective knowledge, only makes sense in terms of the progressive teleology that animates her “new world view”. Wynter intimates that coloniality/modernity is a necessary and perhaps last stage

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59 Lewis Thomas served as dean of Yale medical school.
60 The rupture of the natural sciences was in “the conceptual break made with the Greco-Roman cum Judeo-Christian premise of a nonhomogeneity of substance, and thereby of an ontological distinction between the supralunar and the sublunar, heaven and earth, as the break that was to make possible the rise of a nonadaptive, and therefore natural scientific, mode of cognition with respect to the “objective set of facts” of the physical level of reality: with respect to what was happening ‘out there’” (Wynter 2003, 274-5).
in the process of human social evolution. Its developmental arc is that of increasing universality and “inclusivity,” where the latter is seen as the overcoming of the local. It is hard to see how this is different in kind from the eurocentrism of Marx’s history (which Wynter critiqued) in which the proletarianization of the world by capital, and thus the erasure of local heterogeneity, lays the ground for universal communism. But Wynter arguably goes further in this respect than Marx, understanding the emergence of the Renaissance humanists and natural sciences through Habermas’s developmental theory of social evolution:

For what Habermas sees as the coexistence of an evolutionary process based on Piaget’s analogy of the ontogenesis of the child - in which the human, as it moves into more widely inclusive aesthetic structures, begins to divest itself of the centricities of the cognitive mechanisms of the closed aesthetic orders of more local modes of being - was quite clearly here at work in the evolution of precisely these aesthetic-affective orders which program limits of co-identification (Habermas, 1979), by means of systems of figuration or group-boundary maintaining imagery systems. (Wynter 1984, 31-2).

The emergence of monotheism, Wynter claims, “marked a high point in the evolution of human cognitive mechanisms” since “the human could now come to know the world in relation to a single universal correlator”. But the multiple origins of monotheism meant that it was still too ‘particularistic’” (Wynter 1984, 25). On her account, humanism and the natural sciences took the place of monotheism, filling the evolutionary need for a single unifying principle. While to some extent both were still in the service of the particular, they “prepared” the ground for a truly universal universalism, by forging a “common environment” and the “millenarian existential imperative” of the sixth extinction that she suggests might, as a species wide threat

61 In the next section I discuss Wynter’s critique of Marxism in the essay “Beyond Liberal and Marxist Feminisms: towards an autonomous frame of reference”. See (Wynter 2018).
to survival serve to unify humans by prompting them to recognize their common interests and interdependency.\textsuperscript{62}

We can see the teleological, enlightenment theory of history which operates behind Wynter’s estimation of the natural sciences and humanities in her claims below, made in the context of the “epochal shift” from Divine to Natural Causality. Wynter claims that “it is by means of such transformations” that:

- the evolution of more inclusive modes of group integration, which are themselves linked, as Whyte and Habermas note, to increasingly generalizable concepts and evolutionary advances in the thrust of human cognitive mechanisms towards what Gellner calls ‘the autonomy and extra-territoriality of human cognition’ (Gellner, 1974), are achieved.” (Wynter 1984, 56).

Wynter’s faith in science is underwritten by a socio-evolutionary teleology in which progress is measured by secularization and generalizability. Emancipation is emancipation from ties to the local and from adaptive knowledge in terms of the “supernatural” or divine. When we consider critiques of Habermas’s own eurocentrism, the supposedly universal normative foundations of this view of historical development begin to look quite parochial (Allen 2016). Moreover, Wynter risks reproducing the division between the secular and non-secular, which as Nelson Maldonado-Torres has argued, is itself a defining feature of the coloniality of knowledge (Maldonado-Torres 2008). The problems for this in terms of environmental justice become clear when we consider how many frontline struggles (and affected communities) are not secular, but are driven by spiritual commitments, as well as by

\textsuperscript{62} Wynter adds that “it is also a history that can now be projected backward from the contemporary imperative of our global interhuman and environmental situation in which the attaining of Lieberman’s markers of what should constitute fully modern human is now the necessary condition, at this conjuncture, both of our species survival and, concomitantly, of our interaltruistic co-identification as a species” (Wynter 1995, 8). Lieberman’s markers of fully modern human beings are empathy, altruism, and “moral sense” (ibid.).
profound ties to place, or to the local. What communities, activists and theorists have made clear is the need for forms of knowledge production and decision making that do not discount these commitments, but take them as the ground for different ways of making human/more-than-human worlds.

Wynter claims that an objective description of each subjectively experienced cultural order would not be reduced or subsumed under the species perspective of the science of the Word, which like “the natural scientific description of the human experience of sound as a ‘wave phenomenon’ provides an extra-human viewpoint description which does not, in any way, negate the reality of the human’s subjective experiencing of the phenomenon as sound” (2001, 58). But if that is the case, what exactly is the emancipatory efficacy of the “science of the Word”? If it does not affect the level of behavior and beliefs, then how exactly is it a solution (in fact the only solution) to all of the problems which Wynter claims it is? What is the import of the science of the Word if it cannot or will not reach this level? And if this is in fact the aim, then this presents a new cluster of issues.

Effectively, Wynter proposes that by making the basic principles of human behavior transparent, behaviors can be programmed in line with the interests of the survival of the species through a new “cosmogony” or myth of human survival and freedom. Wynter uses Césaire’s pronouncement in “Poetry and Knowledge” that “the time will come again when the study of the word will condition the study of nature” to claim the lineage of the decolonial tradition for the “science of the Word” (Césaire 1990, xlix). But the kind of speech Césaire advocates is a surrealist, Dionysian call to counter the hegemony of Apollonian science with poetry, conceived as a surrender to our primal connection with the earth, and the release of cosmic forces of creation. This is quite a different sense of the “study of the word” than the

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63 This has particularly been the case for Black resistance to environmental destruction in the United States. See for example (Harris 2017; Kaalund 2004; Ruffin 2010).
64 The poet: “Like the tree, like the animal, he has surrendered to primal life, he has said yes, he has consented to that immense life that transcends him. He has rooted himself in the earth, he has stretched out his arms, he has
one Wynter finds. Césaire puts Wynter’s goal of total “nonheteronomously and now consciously ordered/motivated behaviors” into question, suggesting that rather than a goal, it is in fact a fantasy (Wynter 2003, 317).

How exactly would the science of the Word arbitrate, mediate and synthesize these different positions and commitments? An “ecumenical” model suggests a toleration of heterogeneity, insofar as it is within the parameters of a unifying universal framework of belief, one that assumes that our interests are all essentially the same, i.e. surviving and flourishing as a species on earth. The first question this presents is whether this is substantively different from such already circulating liberal theories of global justice as cosmopolitanism or the capacities framework. The second question is suggested by Wynter’s own analysis, whether the vision of human survival and flourishing it articulates is in fact universal. If its claims to universality lie in an appeal to the biological survival of the species, then this does not seem different enough from the biocentrism Wynter decries. If it lies in a teleological vision of human autonomy in which reason triumphs over both “first and second nature” then it is hard to see how this is universal.65 The only way that the science of the word would not amount to another overrepresentation of a particular genre of the human as universal would be if we accepted Wynter’s claims to objectivity, claims which rely on a slightly rejigged enlightenment teleology and a corresponding fantasy of science and reason. But Wynter deprives the science of the Word of even of this illusory security, since she also presents it as a “messianic” “counter-cosmogony”, for which Columbus is the precedent.66 As I argue in my reading of Fanon, his sociogenic approach and broadly materialist commitments, offer a more critical

played with the sun, he has become a tree: he has blossomed, he has sung. In other words, poetry is full bloom. The blossoming of mankind to the dimensions of the world-giddy dilation. And it can be said that all true poetry, without ever abandoning its humanity, at the moment of greatest mystery ceases to be strictly human so as to begin to be truly cosmic” (Césaire 1990, xlix).

65In The Dialectic of Enlightenment Adorno and Horkheimer had argued that the dream of human autonomy on the basis of the control and domination of first and second nature was the logic of Enlightenment, a logic which always generated a “dark side” (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002).

relationship to science in general, that might better serve us in developing an alternative relationship to environmental racism.

In the next section I continue to explore the implications of the enlightenment values of progress, autonomy, and reason (that we saw at work in Wynter’s treatment of science) in order to understand how she envisions politics and power. In the final section, I demonstrate that such an approach would reproduce variants of the diagnostic, normative, and anthropocentric problems entailed by liberal framings of environmental and climate justice.

4. Particularity, Politics, Race, and Place

In order to reveal the traces of the enlightenment humanism that Wynter purports to definitively break with, I will turn to an examination of how Wynter’s understanding of “the sociogenic principle” informs her treatment of Indigenous struggles for sovereignty. I then move to a critical account of how Wynter conceives of power and politics in general. I respond to Katherine McKittrick’s claim that Wynter’s work is distinguished by “how seriously she takes the flesh-and-blood human species and the grounds of the subaltern to fashion a workable and new politics” (McKittrick 2006, 135) and show instead that Wynter’s “New World View” results in a politics that is neither “workable” nor fashioned by the “subaltern.”

In “1492: A New World View,” Wynter acknowledges “the ongoing subjugation, marginalization, and displacement of the indigenous peoples.” She links the gross global inequality in control and use of resources, and thus “pollution” to struggles “in Brazil, for example,” [where] “more and more internal land-hungry immigrants now threaten not only to wipe out the rain forest but also to displace today’s remnants of the indigenous Amazonian peoples from the last ecosystemic niches that sustain their millennial traditional way of life”

67 As the quincentenary of Columbus’ “discovery” of the Americas approached, Wynter wrote a series of articles reflecting on how we might understand its significance.
Wynter’s attention to the environmental and territorial struggles of Indigenous peoples is consistent with her more general “archaeology” or historical narrative of the “coloniality of being,” which understands as interwoven the logics of genocide and slavery, and the racial positions they give rise to. Wynter’s work therefore appears to offer an important way to overcome the impasse between Black and Native Studies that hinges on the question of whether the frame of genocide or that of slavery is foundational for the “the New World” order. However, I will argue that Wynter’s framing of and resultant response to these interwoven positions and struggles subsumes their differences into a teleological world history that erases what is at stake, particularly for Indigenous environmental struggles.

Although Wynter begins with an acknowledgment of Indigenous struggles and perspectives, she argues that these should be folded into a more “transcultural” appreciation of the significance of 1492 in terms of the species as a whole. To this end, Wynter considers the way that the anti-colonial and Black movements of the 1950’s and 60’s “triggered a sequential series of such movements by other nonwhite groups, including, centrally, that of the indigenous peoples of the Americas. These latter would now begin the process of co-identifying themselves, transethnically, as, self-definingly, Indians” (Wynter 1995, 41 original emphasis). This “transethnic” consciousness began to break with what Wynter describes as “tightly knit models of lineage-clannic (models of identity grounded in their cosmogonic schemas and origin narratives),” which she argued were limited by a “particularistic world view” and were the “at the root of these disastrous group rivalries,” which on her account explain the success of the colonization of the Americas (Wynter 1995, 33). Unlike the overly particular “lineage-clannic” models of identity, the “transethnic” Indigenous movements of the mid-Twentieth Century challenged “the official account of the ‘Columbus-discovered-America’ legend of

See Iyko Day for a discussion of this debate (Day 2015). See Tiffany Lethabo King’s Black Shoals or Kathryn Yussof’s A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None, for attempts to use Wynter to bridge this divide, particularly by attending to her concern with conceptualizations of land and nature (Lethabo King 2019a; Yussof 2018).
1492,” which “has served (…) as a central variant of the “evolutionary” origin narrative of ‘Progress’ founding to our present techno-industrial order” (Wynter 1995, 41). As in Wynter’s consideration of other concrete struggles, such as the Watts and LA riots, here the significance of Indigenous struggles of the 50’s and 60’s is their challenge to the origin narrative that serves to found and reproduce our current genre of the human – “a middle-class model of being Man.” Wynter contends that Man’s interests currently take precedence over “the human species a whole, together with, increasingly, that of the interests of all other nonhuman forms of life on this planet” (Wynter, 1995, 47).

Despite the challenges these movements posed, Wynter insists that they remained limited to the extent that they were grounded in partial perspectives and interests. These “liminal” political struggles serve an important function on Wynter’s account, namely, they put into question the supposed universality and naturalness of our current onto-epistemic order, their real function, she insists, is that of preparing the “the path toward that really new exploration – one able (…) to effect a dimension of change that can parallel that of Columbus’ move beyond the conventional reason of his time” (Wynter, 1995, 37). Reflecting on the stalemate between Settlers and Indigenous peoples, or the “Celebrants and Dissidents” in respect to 1492, Wynter asks:

Can we therefore, while taking as our point of departure both the ecosystemic and global sociosystemic "interrelatedness" of our contemporary situation, put forward a new world view of 1492 from the perspective of the species, and with reference to the interests of its well-being, rather than from the partial perspectives, and with reference

69 As Wynter argues in “How We Mistook the Map for the Territory,” Black power and Black studies challenged the inhuman status of Blackness, but these movements were co-opted and neutralized, since they remained focused on a particular identity and limited by a partial perspective that was not able to generate a new way of being human on its own (Wynter 2006).

70 This change is a shift from our current situation, in which one genre of the human overrepresents itself as universal, in what Wynter refers to as a “supracultural” model, to a truly “transcultural” or “ecumenically human response to the question of who we are” (Wynter 2015, 193).
to the necessarily partial interests, of both celebrants and dissidents? The central thesis of this essay is that we can. (Wynter 1995, 8).

As we have already seen, for Wynter the insight that the sociogenic principle is meant to give makes possible the adoption of such a “new world view.” This adoption will be realized by intellectuals who are informed by concrete political struggles, but are able to go beyond their partial perspectives and interests: “it is we in academia who alone hold the key to ‘race.’” (Wynter 1994, 147 emphasis added).

Her 1982 talk “Beyond Liberal and Marxist Feminisms: Towards an Autonomous Frame of Reference,” is useful for understanding Wynter’s position on more familiar political movements and forms of thought. Wynter proposes that liberatory movements, such as feminism, need to shift their focus from production (and exploitation) to the level of representation. The argument is that insofar as both liberalism and Marxism assume the same genre of the human - *homo oeconomicus*, and thus a focus on labor and production, they belong to the same episteme.71 The Marxist focus on production and class is itself only a function of the order of representation that it unwittingly reproduces, what Wynter terms “classarchy” (Wynter 2018, 37). Classarchy is a division and categorization of humans that presents itself in terms of class, labor and production – but actually encompasses gender, sexuality and race (Wynter 2018, 46). Consequently, insofar as feminists remain within the bounds of liberal or Marxist approaches and the resulting focus on production, we fail to see the connections between different forms of oppression and reproduce a hierarchy that “enables the imposition of a power/prestige order of differential value between the Western class struggle, the Black race struggle, the struggle against sexism, and non-Western national cultural struggles” (Wynter 2018, 44). Consequently, insofar as Marxist or feminist analyses assume the terms of

71 This claim is similar to the one that Foucault makes in the chapter “Labor, Life, Language” in *The Order of Things*. 
our current order, they fail to disrupt it (Wynter 2018, 39). Wynter’s move from production to representation is meant to enable us to see that what is needed is a “cultural revolution” that would “effect a strategic universal coding of the multiple points of resistance” (Wynter 2018, 38, 51). Wynter concludes, “a feminism in its own name therefore turns ‘materialist logic’ on its head” (Wynter 2018, 52).

There is much that is provocative and valuable about Wynter’s argument here for understanding the limits of Marxist and feminist analyses and movements. However, as Wynter’s thought matures it continues to turn “materialist logic| on its head,” to the extent that she progressively effaces the agency and aims of the “subaltern” and the workings of power. In a subtitle of the open letter to her colleagues, “‘No Humans Involved’”, Wynter poses the question: “The speech of the street? Or the speech of a scientific humanism?” Wynter responds in her concluding remarks: “the point of this letter is to propose that the coming of that distant day, and the end, therefore, of the need for the violent speech of the inner-city streets, is up to us” (1994, 70). In effect, Wynter proposes that the work on intellectuals will supersede and make redundant the “speech of the street.” By transforming our order of representation, we would ultimately overcome domination, exploitation and thus the need for political struggles.

Wynter’s departure from the base-superstructure hierarchy of some Orthodox Marxism is in effect a reversal in which representation becomes determining in the last instance. By focusing exclusively on “representation,” Wynter presents intellectuals as the only real agents of historical change. Anthony Bogues’ formulation of the issue makes its stakes clear, “Wynter in her more recent work over-represents the role of the intellectual. This over-representation is also present in her social theory of the human” (Bogues 2005, 335). This is a serious problem for Wynter since, as we have seen, her project is an attempt to transcend the overrepresentation

72 Particularly the critique of the eurocentrism of traditional Marxism, and Wynter’s appreciative discussion of how the Italian Marxist feminist movement’s demand for “wages for housework,” challenged limited notions of production.
of the particular once and for all. Bogues goes on to develop the consequences of this overrepresentation, arguing that:

While it is historically accurate to point out the creative work of radical intellectuals in history, such a perspective becomes one-sided when it ignores the historical movements of people in their radical quest for 'freedom now'. Moments of historical rupture require both (…) Wynter makes attempts to do this, however her emphasis is only on the power of the episteme. (Bogues 2005, 335).

Bogues argues that Wynter’s relative lack of success (in terms of rupturing the hold of our current episteme) is therefore due to her “sole reliance upon the critical intellectual as the agent of transformation” (ibid. original emphasis). While Wynter’s systemic and radical approach seems to address the diagnostic shortcomings of current frames of environmental justice, it ends by demoting militant and grassroots struggles and rather focusing on the university as the exclusive locus of change. In the next section I will suggest that this diagnostic problem, namely, a “sidestepping of how power works as a material set of networks that function and morphs into social systems of domination” (Bogues 2005, 355) is linked to the normative and anthropocentric problems that would also be entailed by a Wynterian approach to environmental racism.

5. Territorial or Ontological Sovereignty? Problems for a Wynterian Approach to Environmental Racism

We will recall that for Wynter the “sociogenic principle” evidences humans’ hybrid nature, in other words, humans cannot simply be understood as biological, but as a hybrid of bios and mythos, since: “we humans cannot pre-exist our cosmogonies or origin myths/stories/narratives any more than a bee, at the purely biological level of life, can pre-exist
its beehive” (Wynter 2015a, 213) However, what distinguishes humans from bees and ‘the purely biological level of life’ is that we create social codes and these “second set of instructions” means we can depart from “first set of instructions,” or genomic programing (Wynter 2015a, 214).

Wynter’s repeated choice of bees as the background against which human’s unique capacity for sociogeny can be identified is telling (Wynter 2006, 156; 2015a; 2015b, 28-32). From Aristotle onwards, bees have served as the limit case for Western philosophy’s self-reflection on human political and social orders. We can only assume that Wynter wanted to distinguish her vision of the human from liberal political treatises of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that used the beehive as a way to naturalize and thus legitimate ideas about sovereignty and political order. Against this tradition of political sovereignty, Wynter seems to be using the figure of the bee as a way to make the case for humans’ unique autonomy. Unlike Aristotle, Wynter is not using the bee to argue for the naturalness of the state (but perhaps instead for a kind of cosmopolitanism). However, her use of the bee is not so different from Aristotle’s since both compare the socialness of human communities and beehives in order to dispel any doubts about the exceptionality of the former, an exceptionality which both agree is grounded in human’s unique capacity for speech and thus the ability to reflect upon the foundations of community. With this in mind, I suggest that enthusiastic evaluations which read Wynter as creating “ecological, posthuman(ist) and/as nonanthropocentric origin narratives” are mistaken. (B. M. Kaiser and Thiele 2017, 404). We should situate Wynter’s account in the tradition of Western political philosophy in which the more-than-human is used as a figure to either shore up human exceptionality and/or legitimate the status quo.

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73 (McFarlane 2017)
74 “Now that man is more of a political animal than bees or any other gregarious animals is evident. Nature, as we often say, makes nothing in vain, and man is the only animal whom she has endowed with the gift of speech”. While animals have mere voice, “it is a characteristic of man that he alone has any sense of good and evil, of just and unjust, and the like, and the association of living beings who have this sense makes a family and a state” (Aristotle 2001,1, 1253a7-17).
Wynter’s sustained attention to environmental issues is consistently anthropocentric, by which I mean (i) she effaces the agency of the more-than-human, in part, because her interest lies in uncovering human praxis in nature, and (ii) her ecological concern is a concern only for human habitat and survival.\textsuperscript{75} As Wynter makes clear towards the end of “No Humans Involved,” her real unease lies with the “misrecognition of human kinship” of the dehumanized “New Poor” (Wynter 1994, 70). Indeed, in “The Ceremony Found” it seems as though the true significance of the sixth extinction lies in facilitating the self-recognition of \textit{homo sapiens} as uniquely agential and autonomous. Agency and autonomy thus on Wynter’s account constitute the essential difference that separates \textit{homo sapiens} from the nonhuman.

In Wynter’s project, the “sociogenic principle” works to smuggle in a naturalized human exceptionalism. As Christin Ellis argues in \textit{Antebellum Posthumanism}, Wynter takes sociogeny as evidencing human capacities for conscious reflection, transparent self-knowledge, and free self-creation, which are meant to translate into “an intrinsic moral freedom lacking in all other forms of being” that “simultaneously guarantees the moral equality of all \textit{Homo sapiens} to each other” (Ellis 2018, 156). As Ellis goes on to argue, Wynter thus reproduces the biocentrism and hierarchical division of being that she ostensibly sought to remedy, resulting in an ethical and ontological picture that is not so different from that of enlightenment humanism” (ibid.). For instance, on Wynter’s account we now give ourselves the codes which we had previously experienced as “law-likely”, that is, as if they were in fact our genetic codes (Wynter 2015, 206). We might hear echoes of Kant in Wynter’s conviction that this results in “our nonheteronomously and now consciously ordered/motivated behaviors” (Wynter 2003, 317)

\textsuperscript{75} For example (Frazier 2016; López 2018) argue that Wynter’s thought might provide a foundation for a new materialist approach to race.
The echoes of enlightenment humanism are also evident in the value of human autonomy that Wynter champions as the basis of what she calls “ontological sovereignty.” As she explains, “we know about political sovereignty, especially with the rise of the state. We know about economic sovereignty, with the dominance of the free market all over the world, together with its economic organization of reality” (Scott and Wynter 2000, 136). However, “we do not know about something called ontological sovereignty” (ibid.). Wynter appears to be working with Western political notions of sovereignty as the legitimate exercise of absolute power. While Wynter finds the orders of “political,” “economic,” and “cultural sovereignty” of colonial modernity to be illegitimate, she nonetheless views “ontological sovereignty” as the legitimate exercise of absolute power over our ways of being human. In contrast to our “hitherto unconscious” adherence to cultural codes that we experienced as “law-likely,” in “ontological sovereignty” humans would only be subject to laws that they had freely and consciously given to themselves.

To what extent does this vision of “ontological sovereignty”, mark a radical break from the Enlightenment humanism that it purports to definitively transcend? My claim is that Wynter’s vision of the human imports values such as progress (imagined as increasing universalization), faith in science, autonomy, and human exceptionalism, values that undermine her claim to offer a truly universal and inclusive vision of the human. The implications of these values are troubling especially when we consider the place of Indigenous sovereignty and environmental struggles in her thought, and more generally, alternative ecological values and relationships.\footnote{Wynter suggests that this is the aim of “an emergent global popular cultural revolution directed against the cultural sovereignty of classarchy” (Wynter 2018, 38).} \footnote{By contrast, with Wynter’s purportedly Fanonian project, we might consider (as I do in Chapters Two and Three) how for Fanon such radical transformations of the human begin with collective and concrete struggles and engagements with land, that is, with struggles for territorial and resource sovereignty, even if these struggles open onto something other than what we currently think of in these terms.}
Although, as Kathryn Yussof rightly notes “Wynter is arguing for us to notice the creation of new material grammar outside of plantation geo-logics that humanize inhuman conditions through a relation to the earth that is planetary, not territorial”, it is not clear, as she also claims, that Wynter’s project does not displace the frame and concerns of Indigeneity, which “rightly makes specific material claims about sovereignty and territory” (Yussof 2018, 37). The notion and use of sovereignty is a contested and complex issue within Indigenous movements and thought (Barker 2005). However, whether the frames of sovereignty, nationhood, or self-determination are used, what tends to be shared in contemporary Indigenous Political Philosophy and Native Studies is the emphasis on land, not as possession, or background habitat for human agency, but as the ground of relationality with humans and more-than-humans, and by extension Indigenous ways of being and forms of life (Coulthard 2014; Nohelani Teves, Smith, and Raheja 2015a; Simpson 2017). With this in mind, Mark Rifkin asks:

From within Wynter’s analytical structure, to what extent do such Indigenous political geographies appear as merely “partial interests” that need to be transcended in favor of a vision of ‘humankind in general’? The existence of distinct peoples with their own complex (and potentially overlapping) modes of placemaking can come to appear either as a drag on the antiracist envisioning of a global ‘we’ or as a regressive investment in forms of collective identity tied to particular lands and waters. (Rifkin 2019, 24)

Wynter’s notion of autonomy, as freedom-*from* alterity and particularity, means that she is unable to see that for some people, territorial sovereignty and “the territoriality of cognition” do not constitute a hindrance to practices of freedom and “ontological sovereignty.” Rather, the ability to govern and create oneself is, as Quecha theorist Sandy Grande argues, tied to the

78 In part because of its history, and because of the possessive relation to land and others that it suggests.
79 This is not to diminish the significance of the difference of these various frames, but they deserve a far longer treatment than I can give them here.
ability to respect the laws of the more-than-human world: “Land defines a clear set of laws to live by. These laws precede the laws that have been made by five centuries of colonial government. They are the laws formed through the mutual capacities of life (people, land, and their nonhuman kin) to continue and flourish” (Grande 2015, 130-1). This establishes a norm and way of being that Wynter suggests must be overcome. Grande continues: “Contemporary issues effecting health, well-being, and literacy in Indigenous communities are interwoven in lands and waters, and in immutable laws which guide mutual rather than autonomous relationships between people and the multispecies worlds they inhabit” (Grande 2015, 135). Thus, for many Indigenous environmental and political struggles, the aim is to be able to honor responsibilities to land and thus human and more-than-human kin, rather than to establish discontinuity from the latter.

On my view, Wynter’s dream of “the extra-territoriality of our self-cognition” has serious implications concerning problems of normativity and anthropocentrism (Wynter 2015a, 245). Without appreciating the value of connections to place and the more-than-human world and the importance of place-based knowledge, Wynter will fail to fully appreciate the violence and harms that she seeks to combat. 80 This comes into view particularly acutely, but by no means exclusively, in regards to Indigenous environmental justice. Wynter seems to see the issue as the struggle for a world in which all homo sapiens will recognize each other as human kin, however there is often a different issue at stake in Indigenous environmental struggles, namely, the struggle for a world in which one is able to honor obligations to more-than-human kin. 81

80 For example, climate migration and adaptation strategies which may appear in the interests of the species but overlook connections to place, or the value and significance of collective continuance, or non-normative life-ways more generally, will inevitably reproduce the harms, even as they attempt to mitigate it (Dotson and Whyte 2013).
81 “One of the major commonalities of Indigenous perspectives in relation to IEJ, and a key way in which Indigenous peoples differ markedly from their non-Indigenous counterparts, involves the conception of humanity’s relationships with ‘other orders of beings’ (King 2013), or what Melissa Nelson (2013) calls the ‘more-than human world’” (McGregor 2018, 9).
I argue that Wynter abandons the ethics of reciprocity that she affirmed in her early essays, which, borrowing from Senghor, she had called a “double, dual relation” of nature and humans, grounded in “the African conception of the earth as a powerful sanction system, of an alternative sense of justice” (Wynter 1970, 35; Scott and Wynter 2000, 163). In her mature work, this previously reciprocal relation becomes unidirectional, since the concepts of sociogeny and praxis are meant to ensure a unique autonomy from the constraints common to all other forms of life. Citing her earlier work, McKittrick rightly notes that in “Jonkonnu in Jamaica” and “Novel and History; Plot and Plantation”, Wynter explores “the actual growth of narratives, food, and cultural practices that materialize the deep connections between blackness and the earth and foster values that challenge systemic violence” (McKittrick 2013, 10). In such works Wynter focuses on a particular plant, the yam, and its socio-ecological conditions in the “provision grounds” of the enslaved, as the foundation of a marginal order in the Caribbean, in which the sacred and the political cannot be disentangled with the matter of everyday life (DeLoughrey 2011; Wynter 1970, 1971). But in Wynter’s mature work, where are the places, creatures, and plants that make up terrestrial life? The foods and the soils? The knowledge and care it takes to live with a place? They are absent from the grand stage of her new universal history. Humans are uniquely free and alone on a strangely silent planet.

This final point informs and limits the way that Wynter conceptualizes anthropogenic climate change and loss of biodiversity. Wynter’s repeated framing of both as an “existential threat” to the human species, might initially seem appealing for the urgency and significance that it communicates. Yet, this scale risks becoming too abstract and ultimately paralyzing. As Astrida Niemanis and Rachel Loewen Walker argue in “Weathering: Climate Change and the

82 Wynter draws heavily on a passage from Senghor’s “Problème de la Culture” in both “Jonkonnu” and “Novel and History” (Senghor 1984, 93).
83 While Wynter does not explicitly argue that this should be used to exclude non-humans from ethical consideration, it is implied, since inclusion into the category of human kinship is meant to translate into moral worth.
‘Thick Time’ of Transcorporeality”, apocalyptic imaginaries of climate change often reproduce anthropocentric fantasies of progress and technological salvation. Turning our attention to the scale of the body and quotidian intra-action with the environment might better cultivate ecological attunement and sensibility that, in turn, might open onto a “feminist ethics of responsivity” (Neimanis and Loewen Walker 2014, 561). Rather than marshalling an apocalyptic metanarrative of planetary collapse, we would do better to begin to appreciate the relationships and entanglements with the more-than-human world that people already have, particularly those that racialized and marginalized people have nurtured and sustained. Such an approach will, I contend, enable us to see that these are not the limit to autonomy, but rather the grounds of freedom. This is the task that I take up in the following chapters.

Conclusion

I claimed that a Wynterian approach to environmental racism would be problematic on diagnostic, normative, and anthropocentric grounds; arguing that this could largely be explained by the way that Wynter used the “sociogenic principle” as evidence of and means to what she envisions as human autonomy. The next chapter turns to the concept of sociogeny in Fanon’s work to show that it differs from Wynter’s in ways that have significant repercussions for the respective responses to environmental racism that we might glean from their work. In the subsequent chapters I explore what I understand to be an importantly different approach to the relationship between racism, ecology, and freedom in the work of Fanon and Hartman, arguing that in different ways they orient us to ecological freedom. Ecological freedom is an alternative way of understanding the harm and stakes of environmental struggles than those

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84 Similarly, in her studies of gender and environmental racism in Martinique, particularly the ecological effects of the extended use of pesticide Chlordéchone, Vanessa Agard-Jones demonstrates “how the body and the quasi-human agents that constitute it might function as an important scalar intertext,” through which “we gain another perspective on the global” (Agard Jones 2013, 184).
assumed in liberal framings of environmental justice. The theme and problem of sovereignty that we already saw surface in Wynter’s work weaves in between the three figures. Each try and navigate the complexities and tensions between sovereignty, freedom, and reciprocity, while at the same time attempting to overcome the trappings of liberal humanism.
In the previous chapter I looked at the role that the “sociogenic principle,” played in Sylvia Wynter’s analysis of the roots of social and environmental injustice, claiming that despite Wynter’s more explicitly environmental register, Fanon’s thought actually has more to offer on a number of points of central importance for reconceptualizing environmental racism, namely, (i) theorizing power, and by extension ecological politics, (ii) a critical relationship to knowledge production, particularly science, and (iii) conceptualizing place, ecology and ethical relationships with the more-than-human world. This chapter substantiates these claims.

In response to Fanon’s analysis of the mechanisms of racist objectification (which reduce subjects to their skin, or “biologize” them), and to colonization (which constricts life to a quotidian struggle to survive), Wynter sought to find a way to free racialized subjects, and humans in general, from the constraints of biology and the limitations otherwise common to life. My claim in this chapter is that Fanon offers a profoundly different response to this problem, revaluing the entanglements of enfleshed, terrestrial life, such that they can be understood both as the basis of domination, and as the grounds of freedom.

In **Section 1: Sociogeny - Psyche, Soma, Environment**, I begin by offering an alternative reading of sociogeny to Wynter’s, introducing a constellation of related concepts: Manicheanism, environment and atmosphere. I indicate how sociogeny challenges limited views of racism in terms of individual and conscious intent, exceptional events or discrete acts, thus helping to bring aspects of the diagnostic problem with liberal framings of environmental racism into view.

My claim is that the dualism of Nature/Culture is a keystone of the Manicheanism that sociogeny aims to overcome. Consequently, I argue that we might read the concepts of
environment and atmosphere central to Fanon’s sociogenic approach as both cultural and natural. Fanon’s concept of environments therefore offers valuable resources for challenging the merely additive and incidental conceptualization of the relation of racism and environment that has limited dominant approaches, as well as the assumed division between environmental and ecological justice.

In an effort to develop an alternative approach that avoids these common problems, I introduce two Fanonian concepts: racist environments and colonial sovereignty. Whereas racist environments name the more general way in which I begin to rethink environmental racism, colonial sovereignty names a specific form that racist environments may take. Situating Fanon’s thought post 1956 in the context of settler colonialism helps to ground this analysis, while opening up generative connections with more recent critiques of settler colonialism in North America and beyond. Additionally, focusing on the socio-ecological violence of colonial sovereignty brings the shortcomings of liberal framings of environmental racism and injustice into view.

In Section 2: Nature, Race, Space: A Material and Systemic Analysis of Colonial Sovereignty I move to Fanon’s analysis of the environment of colonial sovereignty. In contrast to Wynter’s reading of Fanon, my account emphasizes Fanon’s materialist commitments, while noting how his focus on spatiality, race, and dispossession marks a departure from the Marxist tradition. I devote considerable attention to Fanon’s analysis of the category of “Nature” and its importance for the constitution of environments of colonial sovereignty, and show how Fanon presents the attempted “domestication” of the colonized and of the colonized territory as two sides of the same process.

Finally, in Section 3: “Dominated but not Domesticated,” I explore the implications of this analysis of colonialism, looking at Fanon’s claim that the colonized and the land are “natural allies” in their resistance to colonization. I introduce the term ecological freedom to
name this alliance, an alliance which I suggest puts into question the frames of justice and freedom as they tend to be thought in the liberal tradition, while opening up responses to racist environments that are importantly different from Wynter’s. Having established Fanon as attentive to the reciprocity of people and land, both for colonial domination and decolonization, I then respond to Rob Nixon’s misreading of Fanon’s remarks on DDT in *The Wretched of the Earth*, and by extension his dismissal of Fanon’s land-based ecopolitics as a whole. I show that this reading misses Fanon’s attentiveness to the reciprocity of people and land, both for colonial domination and decolonization, an attentiveness that is manifest in Fanon’s analysis of the role of pesticides for racist environments.

**Next Steps**

Fanon’s interrogation of colonial sovereignty raises the question of how we might distinguish a decolonial approach to sovereignty from that which it resists, and the extent to which it can avoid reproducing aspects of it. My consideration of colonial sovereignty in this chapter therefore serves to establish the problematic that I explore in greater detail in the following chapter. I critically consider Fanon’s affirmation of decolonial sovereignty and ask if it might serve as the basis for an alternative to the liberal notions of justice that are unable to grasp what is at stake in many land-based environmental struggles.85

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85 I am using land as shorthand to refer to “land/water/air/subterranean earth”, and the beings, entities, and relationships that constitute place (Tuck and Yang 2012, 5). This differs in important ways from the possessive and objectifying transformation of land into territory that distinguishes colonial sovereignty. I am using the term “land-based struggle,” in accordance with recent work in Native Studies, which, has “redefined land-based struggle” in an attempt to resist the possessive and commodifying relation to land and racial sense of identity, which Indigenous nations have often had to adopt as the conditions for the recognition of their sovereignty by colonial states. Consequently, “many Native studies scholars and activists have redefined land-based struggle from establishing indigenous ownership of land to transforming the way all peoples live in relationship to creation” (Nohelani Teves, Smith, and Raheja 2015a, 67).
1. Sociogeny - Psyche, Soma, Environment

The account of sociogeny that I give in this section lays the groundwork for two tasks that I accomplish in the chapter as a whole. The first is that of showing the differences between Wynter’s treatment of what she termed “the sociogenic principle,” and my own reading of sociogeny in Fanon’s thought. This helps bring into view the tensions between the respective responses to environmental racism that might issue from their work. The second task is that of showing the extent to which Fanon’s sociogenic account of racism differs from the concepts of racism which have limited how environmental racism has tended to be understood.

Theories of racism assumed in discussions of environmental racism have tended to understand it in terms of individual malicious intent, discrete acts and exceptional events. When racism is understood institutionally, that is, in more systematic terms beyond conscious or deliberate intent or spectacular events, environmental racism tends to be framed in terms of inequity and exclusion. Conceptualized through the framework of civil rights and social justice, there is often a presumption of the value and legitimacy of the state, law, and capitalism. In the context of the United States and other settler colonies, citizenship and nationhood are often taken as unquestioned goods or frames of analysis, occluding attention to the genocide and dispossession (of land) of Indigenous peoples that is arguably a constitutive feature of the many phenomena that come under the umbrella of environmental racism and climate injustice. This failure to consider racism and colonialism materially and systemically is one aspect of the diagnostic problem that Fanon’s sociogenic approach to racism helps to illuminate and address.

As I argued in the introduction, another problem arises from the tendency to presume that racism and “the environment” are initially separate and only incidentally linked. Beyond critiques of mainstream conservationism and environmentalism, theorists and scholars of environmental racism have often failed to consider how the domination of “nature” has been historically and conceptually bound up with the domination of racialized and colonized
peoples. Moreover, there is a need for an approach that is able to explore how bodies, forms of power, and “the environment” are not initially distinct but are in fact co-constitutive, and to analyze this lived, eco-somatic imbrication on multiple scales.

I draw on the insights afforded by Fanon’s commitment to a dialectical analysis of the “double process” of the psychic and material, cultural and natural, to develop my own Fanonian notion of racist environments. This is in an effort to remedy the merely additive view of racism and the environment that has characterized conceptualizations of environmental racism and justice, and by extension the attendant problem of anthropocentrism that has limited them. In what follows, I develop Fanon’s concept of sociogeny and its implications, arguing that a Fanonian approach to environmental racism prompts a rethinking of the meaning and relationship of both its terms.

Sociogeny: an alternative view of racism

Black Skin, White Masks, is a “clinical study” of the internal scission (scissiparité) of racist environments and the corresponding dualism manifest in the racial division of the world into white and non-white (BSxvi/PN67, PN71). What Fanon calls sociogeny is an attempt to counter this dualistic division by illuminating the dialectical relationality which subtends frozen antagonisms. At its most basic level, sociogeny is the study of the environments in which pathologies emerge. It is an approach designed to overcome what were then the dominant tendencies in both psychiatry and psychoanalysis; countering both psychiatry’s focus on organic and inherited constitution (phylogeny) and psychoanalysis’s focus on the individual (ontogeny). The “dialectic” that drove Fanon to write Black Skin, White Masks emerged from the apparently insurmountable opposition of these two approaches, forcing him to incorporate “certain elements” that, while “psychological,” “generate consequences in the realm of other sciences” (BS30–31/PN96). Fanon presents sociogeny in a dense passage that merits careful reading:
The inferiority complex can be ascribed to a double process:

First, economic. Then, internalization or rather epidermalization of this inferiority.

Reacting against the constitutionalizing trend at the end of the nineteenth century, Freud demanded that the individual factor be taken into account in psychoanalysis. He replaced the phylogenetic theory by an ontogenetic approach. We shall see that the alienation of the black man is not an individual question. Alongside phylogeny and ontogeny, there is sociogeny. In a way, in answer to the wishes of Leconte and Damey, let us say that here it is a question of sociodiagnostics. (BSxv/PN66).

Fanon makes it clear that attending to the psycho-affective dimensions of racism should not entail a dismissal of economic and material conditions, suggesting that these are the foundation of racism since they come “first” (BSxiv/PN66). However, the economic is not determining in the last instance, rather, it is only one side of a “double process,” together with the “epidermalization” which makes black skin a text in which overlapping and overdetermined histories can be read, such that it becomes a repository of disavowed white desires and fears. The external “economic” conditions of inferiority are thereby folded into the psyche and body of the racialized subject, and unravel again into the fabric of the world to make such gross asymmetry in economic and social conditions appear justified and natural. Both seemingly distinct sides of this process thereby reinforce and weave into each other, coalescing in an environment that constitutes Black subjects (prior to any individual trauma or event) as chronically alienated, both from themselves and from the environment that forms them. As we will see, the concept of environment is central to Fanon’s sociogenic approach. I will develop this concept and show that it allows us to explore the interconnection of (what we think of as) social and natural environments. In addition, his use of environment prompts us to critically reflect on this division (between the social and the natural).
Sociogeny answers “the wishes of Leconte and Damey” by developing the notion of “sociodiagnostics” that they coined in *Essai Critique des Nosographies Psychiatries Actuelles*. In this text, they argue that psychiatric nosography, the systematic description of diseases, is ill-equipped to describe the protean and dynamic phenomena it claims to treat in that it attempts to fit evolutive multiplicities into its pre-existing categories, with little concern for consistency (Leconte and Damey 1949, 10). They claimed that careful and dynamic analysis of an ensemble of somato-biological-social factors would weaken the ties of identification which have bound patients to mental illnesses (55). In other words, both doctors and patients would no longer see the patients as essentially defined and determined by a condition or diagnosis understood as ineluctable fate. Consequently, they believed that this nuanced and holistic aetiological approach will lead to more effective treatment of what had appeared incurable, mysterious, or constitutional (34–35).

Taking this up, Fanon will argue that the cause of Black alienation can be ascribed neither to physical constitution (as for example, the Algiers school claimed) nor to an individual’s history (as in psychoanalysis), but to the environment that constitutes them. Sociogeny shifts from the racialized body as site of pathology to the norm of a racist world and “reads colonialism as a psychopathology” (Marriott 2015, 171). Consequently, it is this pathological environment that needs treatment. Such transformative treatment is possible because an environment is not necessary or natural, but the product of (past) praxis. Sociogeny is therefore an expression of Fanon’s commitment to the eleventh of Marx’s *Theses on Feuerbach*, which Fanon alludes to on the first page of chapter 1: “It’s no longer a question of knowing the world, but of transforming it” (BS1/PN71). Enabling “the patient” to see that it is

86 For Fanon’s relationship to the Algiers school, see (Cherki 2017, ix; Macey 2012, 217–21, Turner 2011, 226–28).
87 “Sartre has shown that the past, along the lines of an inauthentic mode, catches on and “takes” en masse, and, once solidly structured, then gives form to the individual. It is the past transmuted into a thing of value. But I can also revise my past, prize it, or condemn it, depending on what I choose” (BS202/P248).
the environment which needs treatment is itself a therapeutic moment, since unlike the human and social sciences of the mid-twentieth century, a sociogenic approach is always oriented to the radical transformation of the cause of social pathology, to the environment. 88

This can help to make sense of Fanon’s seemingly apocalyptic invocation of “the end of the world” (BSxiv/PN65). The latter phrase arises in the context of Fanon’s refusal to treat his Black patient’s feeling of alienation on a purely individual level. Instead, Fanon would tell the patient that: “‘It’s the environment; it’s society that is responsible for your mystification.’ Once that has been said, the rest will follow of its own accord, and we know what that means. The end of the world” (BS191/PN237). The revelation that society and individual are the result of past praxis holds out the possibility of action. This is an essential moment in the struggle for freedom since it illuminates the potential to transform the environment, or what had previously been experienced as inescapable as atmosphere (BS80/PN142).

A Genuinely Manichean Notion of the World

On Matthieu Renault’s reading, Black Skin, White Masks is an anti-colonial rewriting of Freud’s Civilization and its Discontents, centering what is only an incidental point for Freud, namely, that aggressivity is not only interiorized (through collective sublation or repression), but must also be exteriorized, or deported to the frontiers of the community and discharged on to an Other (Renault 2011, 34).89 For Fanon, Western civilization is constituted through the projection of its disavowed, most intimate parts onto an outside. Constituted as the “non-
“Moral consciousness implies a kind of split, a fracture of consciousness between a dark and a light side. Moral standards require the black, the dark, the negro to be eliminated from this consciousness. A negro is therefore, constantly struggling against his own image” (BS170/PN218 translation modified). Blackness, then, seems close to what Jung understands as the archetypes of the collective unconscious, “an expression of bad instincts, of the darkness in every ego, of the uncivilized savage, of the negro who slumbers in every White” (BS164/PN213 translation modified). In different ways Jung and Mannoni had claimed to have found this same “imago” or “archetype” of Blackness in “primitive” peoples. However, what these claims overlook is the ways in which colonial situations destroy alternative conditions for psychic constitution (or environments), such that colonized peoples are forced to internalize the psychic structure of the colonizer (ibid.). “Considering this, and “not losing sight of the real” we are forced to depart from Jung’s claim that “the myths and archetypes are permanent engrams of the species” and conclude instead that Blackness as phobogenic object “is cultural, i.e., it is acquired” (BS165/PN214). The internal division and corresponding complexes of colonized and racialized peoples are not universal or necessary, but are the crystallization of the historical trauma which fabricate race: “White civilization and European culture have imposed an existential deviation on the black. We shall demonstrate further that what is called the black soul is a construction by white folk” (BSxviii/PN68). Blackness is a sedimentation
of systematic racial projection, in which the parts of being that are disavowed in the
construction of whiteness, such as animality, dirt and the “biological”, are exteriorized onto its
Other, which it both needs and fears.92

Through a Fanonian lens “Civilization” is characterized by an internal scission, which
means it must project those repressed and denied parts of itself onto its other, or what it deems
“non-civilized”. Consequently, colonized and racialized peoples (and territories) become
affectively charged repositories of filth and waste, but also of animality, wildness, disease, and
all those elements which the civilized or white world imagines itself not to be and defines itself
against. A life without waste, bodily needs, and so forth, is a fantasy; one with pernicious
effects, especially visible in the colonized world (Gordon 2006).93

By attending to the larger social environment as the site and condition of psychic
constitution (thereby breaking with psychoanalysis’s exclusive focus on the familial
environment) we can see that the identity of the apparently opposed poles of Black and White
is in fact an effect of their mutual, if asymmetrical mediation (BSxiv/PN65).94 A racist society
is internally divided at every level; producing subjects characterized by guilt, dishonesty, and
fear (BS170/PN218). So long as the positions of Black and White are understood in isolation
from one another they will remain unintelligible.95 In fact, the analytic division of blackness
and whiteness not only fails to elucidate, but serves the underlying logic of racist thought.

92 “to have a phobia of the black is to be afraid of the biological, for the black is nothing but biological. They are
beasts” (BS143/PN197transmodified).
93 For the linkages between race, racism and concepts of cleanliness and dirtiness in the US context see (Zimring
2016).
94 For Renault: “Fanon’s critique is above all a critique of the dualism of civilization, the racial and colonial
binarisms proceed from the interior psychic division of white-civilized man.” “La critique de Fanon est avant
tout une critique du dualisme de la civilisation, les binarismes coloniaux et raciaux procèdent de la division
psychique intérieure de l’homme blanc-civilisé.” (Renault 2011, 39) Renault attributes the notion of internal
scission and division of “civilized man” to the influence of Jung’s work on Fanon. Jung claimed that European
psychology is essentially compartmentalized. It is characterized by a fundamental dissociation between the
conscious and unconscious: ‘La personnalité consciente put être domestiquée parce qu’elle était séparée de
l’homme naturel et primitif.” Jung - Psychologie et Orientalisme” (Renault 2011, 125).
95 Fanon develops Sartre’s claim in “Anti-Semite and Jew” that, “It is the anti-Semite who makes the Jew” (as
cited in BS73/PN137) arguing that “It is the racist who creates the inferiorized” (ibid). Fanon develops this in
the context of his discussion on Mannoni and the “so-called dependency complex of the colonized.” Mannoni posited
that the Malagasy and by extension colonized peoples in general suffered from an innate inferiority complex and
The mode of relationality which binds these two positions is normally concealed because of the dualistic, or Manichean structure which characterizes a racist environment: “Black and White represent two poles of this world, poles in perpetual conflict: a genuinely Manichean notion of the world. Black or White, that is the question” (BS27/PN93-4). In Anti-Semite and Jew, one of the sources for Fanon’s analysis, Sartre writes: “Anti-Semitism is thus seen to be at bottom a form of Manichaeeism. It explains the course of the world by the struggle of the principle of Good with the principle of Evil. Between these two principles no reconciliation is conceivable; one of them must triumph and the other must be annihilated” (Sartre 1995, 40-1). Manicheanism is, on Sartre’s analysis, the form that such racist bad faith takes, working through a system of hierarchically organized binaries: “Good-evil, beauty-ugliness, black-white: such are the characteristic pairings of the phenomenon that (. . .) we shall call ‘delirious Manicheanism’” (BS160/PN210). But whereas Sartre was, at this point in his thought still unable to analyze the Manicheanism of racist consciousness in terms other than individual choice or class determinism, Fanon seizes on this insight to understand how racism, as a “a massive psycho-existential complex,” permeates and structures the environment as a whole. The aim of such an analysis is therefore less condemnation of individuals or even institutions, rather, taking the environment as a whole as its object, “by analyzing it we aim to destroy it” (BSxvi/PN67).

**Social or Natural Environments?**

In Black Skin, White Masks, the notion of milieu or environment is crucial for understanding Fanon’s break with psychoanalysis or ontogeny. The lived experience of the Black person in fact needed the superior colonizers: “What Monsieur Mannoni has forgotten is that the Malagasy no longer exists; he has forgotten that the Malagasy exists in relation to the European. When the white man arrived in Madagascar he disrupted the psychological horizon and mechanisms. As everyone has pointed out, alterity for the black man is not the black but the white man” (BS77/PN139).

96 This is a clinical term which he attributes to Dide and Guiraud’s Psychiatrie du medicin practicien, 1922, p.164 (BS160/PN210).
reveals the relativity of psychoanalysis’s exclusive focus on the site of the nuclear bourgeois family, as well as the latter’s pathology (BS121/PN179). The project of Black disalienation therefore requires an expanded sense of milieu that takes account of broader socio-political conditions (such as colonization) and cultural differences (BS130/PN187). “Environment” also takes on a special significance in Fanon’s clinical writings and practice of socialthérapie.97 Fanon’s experimental psychotherapy focused on changing the milieu rather than the patient, attempting to transform the psychiatric institution into a socially cohesive microcosm and ceasing to isolate patients from their familial, social, and professional milieu. The idea was that the right conditions would empower the patient to either reconcile themselves with or transform the environment that was the source of their alienation. In his letter of resignation from Blida-Joinville, Fanon claims that the intensification of the foundational violence of the settler colony means that it is no longer possible for him to fulfil his role as a psychiatrist, which he describes as “the medical technique which aims to enable people to no longer be estranged from their environment” (environnement) (Fanon 2015, 367; translation mine).98

So far, I have focused on the psychic aspect of Fanon’s sociogenic approach to racism. But it would be an error to understand this as separate or separable from the material. Indeed, this would be to miss one of the principal commitments of sociogeny, namely, that of thinking the psychic and physical as two sides of a “double process.” In the previous chapter I argued that the role which the “sociogenic principle” played in Wynter’s project effectively diminished the

97“From the clinical perspective, socialthérapie is thus a question of ending the division between individual alienation and group paranoia, thereby restoring the symptom to its sociopolitical context. The question of remedy is thus not solely a hermeneutic problem, but a question of how the symptom is lived as collective experience” (Marriott 2018, 56).

98 “Si la psychiatrie est la technique médicale qui se propose de permettre à l’homme de ne plus être étranger à son environnement” (Fanon 2015, 367). At this point we might ask what Fanon means by the environment and by extension the relevance of sociogeny for the question of ecology and racism. The word that Richard Philcox translates as environment (sometimes qualifying it as social environment) is milieu. As in English, the contextually dependent meanings of milieu all refer back to the sense of being in the middle of something, whether it be someone’s background, a particular social circle, or a cultural or political sphere. In Black Skin, White Masks Fanon’s use of milieu slides between these different senses. As I go on to show in his later work Fanon expands the sense of environment to include what we might call the “natural” world.
material and economic to mere epiphenomena of “onto-epistemic” ruptures, resulting in a dismissal of the concrete and of militant and land-based struggles. Yet, as Fanon reminds us in an important passage, this move would betray his own formulation of sociogeny:

The black man must wage the struggle on two levels: whereas historically these levels are mutually dependent, any unilateral liberation is flawed, and the worst mistake would be to believe their mutual dependence automatic (…) An answer must be found on the objective as well as the subjective level. (BSxv/PN67).

Here, Fanon cautions against the kind of move that I read Wynter as making, namely, one that would reduce the objective to the subjective, or vice versa, and the assumption that a change on one level would automatically result in a change on the other. Rather, what is required is a sustained attention to how the two are dynamically related in environments, and a correspondingly “total” transformative approach (ibid.).

To understand how these different levels are related in environments, and thus, the meaning of environment for Fanon, let us begin by considering how Fanon challenges the dualisms we might assume between the somatic and the psychic, reality and fantasy, and more generally, that of the natural and cultural. On Vicky Lebeau’s interpretation Fanon gives a “reading of the psychoanalytic concept of fantasy as a “real event”, a presence, or a pressure, within and on the real” (Lebeau 1998, 108). Consequently, Fanon’s psychopolitics is concerned with “the realization, the production, the making real, of unconscious fantasy through the formations of racist culture” (ibid.). We can see this in the context of his first use of the term Manichean (in the case study of Mayotte Capecia), where Fanon links this psychic structure to the spatial organization of the colonized world, thereby simultaneously identifying and challenging
assumed dualisms between psychic and physical space, while resisting the temptation to merely reduce one to the other (BS27/PN93-4).99

The racist mechanisms of projection, fantasy and so on are no less “real” by virtue of working with language, desire and imagos, rather for Fanon: “Language affects bodily experience in the material world. For the colonized, language is lived in the flesh and inscribed in the body” (Gibson and Benudece 2017, 65). Thus, in his presentation of the relation between the psychic and somatic, Fanon breaks with objectifying views of the body, “positing the issue of race and colonialism as the nucleus around which the sensorial experience of the colonized is organized” (Gibson and Benudece 2017, 71). Racism, then, cannot be located at the level of belief or error. Rather, what Fanon calls “epidermalization,” is a process in which “culture is inscribed in the body,” that “puts pay to any stable distinction between the real and the phantasmatic” (Marriott 2015, 173). It is a visceral force that transforms organisms, their affective capacities, bodily comportment, modes of engagement, and the organization of the material world.

Fanon’s dialectical approach and emphasis on the living body as a site of politics suggests that the analytical division which would treat nature and culture as discrete and separable is itself an effect of what he diagnoses as the Manichean order of a racist environment. Thus, while it may seem that Fanon is referring to social environments, taken as distinct and separable from natural environments, I will argue that when thought through a Fanonian lens the concept of the environment always implicates both what we understand as the social and the natural environment. It refers to a particular natureculture whose organization and form is in part due to a mode of world inhabitation and making.100

99 “It is commonplace in Martinique to dream of whitening oneself magically as a way of salvation. A villa in Didier, acceptance into high society (Didier is on a hill dominating the city), and you have achieved Hegel’s subjective certainty. Moreover, it is quite easy to see the place that the dialectic of being and having would occupy in the description of such behaviour” (BS27/PN93).
100 I am borrowing this term from Donna Haraway’s “Companion Species Manifesto”, using it to understand environments as dynamic, transient unities which emerge from the dialectics of nature/culture. Despite the many
How do environments affect and shape individuals? Fanon pairs the term environment with that of “atmosphere”, which he uses to give a more phenomenological description of how racist environments are differently internalized, experienced and lived, thus offering an account of racism irreducible to exceptional or discrete individuals or events. We can see this in Fanon’s comparison of the “young country fellow from the Carpathians”, who, “under the physiochemical conditions of the region, shows symptoms of myxedema”, and a “black man like René Maran, who has lived in France, breathed in and ingested the myths and prejudices of a racist Europe” (BS165/PN214). For Fanon, both the atmosphere of the Carpathians, and the atmosphere of metropolitan France, have real effects, being taken up into the bodily self and lived. The condition of the air we breathe cannot be separated from the racist “myths and prejudices” which weather racialized people, day by day. Fanon’s choice of Myxedema, which refers to the effects that hypothyroidism can have on the skin, suggests skin and limbs swollen by internal pressure, in this case as a result of the inhalation of an atmosphere hitherto believed to be necessary for existence. Yet, for all its visceral force, this passage raises the question of whether Fanon employs the language of environment and atmosphere merely analogically.

My claim is that Fanon’s use of the terms environment and atmosphere does go beyond analogy, and thus offers important resources for rethinking environmental racism. I will support this claim by i. arguing that his sociogenic approach challenges Manichean, or dualistic conceptions of nature and culture, and ii. by showing how as Fanon becomes increasingly differences between their positions, Fanon and Haraway share the target of “Biological and cultural determinism,” and in different ways their work shows that these determinisms, make the mistake of: “first, taking provisional and local category abstractions like “nature” and “culture” for the world and, second, mistaking patent consequences to be preexisting foundations” (Haraway 2003, 6). Haraway’s claim that: “Flesh and signifier, bodies and words, stories and worlds: these are joined in naturecultures” (20) is on my view also the one that Fanon is making in his analysis of how the environment is internalized through epidermalization and the corporeal fracturing of the corporeal schema in “The Lived Experience of the Black Man.”

101 “In the white world, the man of color encounters difficulties in elaborating his body schema (...) All around the body reigns an atmosphere of certain uncertainty (...) It is not imposed on me; it is rather a definitive structuring of myself and the world - definitive because it creates a genuine dialectic between my body and the world” (BS90-1/PN154 emphasis added).
informed by the decolonial war in Algeria he develops an eco-awareness that shifts from a more general rejection of what he suggests is the vitalist romanticism of *Négritude*, towards a more concrete appreciation of the centrality of land and conflicting senses of nature for colonial domination and decolonial freedom. I begin with the first part of my claim, namely, that sociogeny aims to challenge Manicheanism in general, of which the dualism of nature/culture is an important instance.\(^{102}\)

In a brief passage that Wynter enthusiastically and frequently cites in her development of the “sociogenic principle” as the ground of a new human universality and exceptionality, Fanon seems to assume a nature/culture divide: “Society, unlike biochemical processes, does not escape human influence. Man is what brings society into being. The prognosis is in the hands of those who are prepared to shake the worm-eaten foundations of the edifice” (BSxv/PN66). Here Fanon seems to work against his own commitments by opposing social environments to the sphere of the natural, that of “biochemical processes,” which are presented as independent of human interference or action. Indeed, this appears to be the kind of dualism which on my reading Fanon’s sociogenic approach is bent on exposing and overcoming. How can we make sense of this?

As we have seen, the radical force of sociogeny lies in its capacity to show that what seems to be “natural” or necessary is in fact contingent, since is the result of ossified human *praxis*. Since created by humans, there is some potential that it might similarly be recreated, or changed by *praxis*. However, the emphasis on *praxis* actually asks us to turn to what we tend to think of as natural environments, since it mediates the latter through action and labor. This is not a unilateral process by which humans merely dominate and shape the natural world according to pre-established whims and fancy. Rather, environments are created through the intra-action of

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\(^{102}\) I continue to substantiate this claim regarding the importance of this dualism for colonial modernity in parts II and III of this chapter.
what Fanon suggests are natural, or human independent processes, laws, and givens, including our own needs as living beings, and sedimented cultural values and practices. The latter become inscribed in the material world, returning to mediate the organization and possibilities of a particular society.103

Thus, adopting a Fanonian approach we might want to say that the case of acute lead poisoning in Flint, Michigan, and of Black Americans across the United States, is not natural in the sense of inevitable or necessary, but due to a particular white supremacist society at a juncture in post-industrial neoliberal governmentality (Pulido 2016). We may also well maintain that in regards to the human body’s reactions to acute lead exposure, these “biochemical processes” are independent of a society’s knowledge of them, and thus might be said to “escape human influence.” A sociogenic analysis would stress the social or cultural aspect of what it nevertheless understands as a natureculture, in order to illuminate what is contingent about a situation that would otherwise appear inevitable and necessary, and thus to pinpoint openings for radical change. As I go on to argue, an integral aspect of such change would be reconceptualizing what we currently understand by nature and the natural.

Consequently, Fanon’s suggestion that nature and culture are not identical serves an important epistemic and political role that does not amount to a simple dualism. In “Racism and Culture,” Fanon indicates that the analytical separation between the two terms is itself an abstraction, such that they must ultimately be understood as two sides of a double process, or dialectically: “culture is the combination of motor and mental behaviour patterns arising from the encounter of man with nature and with his fellow-man” (RC23/RC715). Here he suggests that culture is the result of a dynamic interplay of humans, themselves described as natural beings (i.e. their “motor and mental behaviour patterns”) and what we might tend to think of

103 See (Bernasconi 2018, 178-80) for his discussion of this point in Fanon and in Sartre’s Critique of Dialectical Reason.
as natural environments. However, neither are described in static or fixed terms, rather there is an emphasis on co-emergence and change. Indeed, this is one of the important aspects of sociogeny, that psycho-somatic behaviors and patterns (let’s not forget Fanon’s training and practice as a psychiatrist) are formed by racism. However, this is not to say that they are merely ideas or fantasies without substance or reality. Such patterns change the modes of “encounter” with the more-than-human and each other in very real ways. Put simply, through a Fanonian lens humans are living beings, always formed and shaped by milieus, or by the material worlds they inhabit, and at the same time forming and shaping milieus.

My claim is that environment in Fanon’s thought refers to the interplay of what we tend to think of as both the cultural and the natural, since, on his own account, culture emerges from a dynamic intra-action with what we tend to think of as nature. To summarize, I understand environments in Fanon’s sociogenic approach as referring to specific *naturecultures*, whose composition and organization differs depending both on ecological and climate givens and the values and organization of the culture in question.

In the second section of this chapter I show how this dialectical view is in stark contrast to the colonial imaginary which Fanon analyzes. Viewed through the colonial imaginary, “Nature,” is seen as opposed to Culture, it is fixed, inert, passive, and without ethical value, whereas the latter is thought as dynamic, uniquely autonomous, and the exclusive source of value and meaning. I argue that Fanon’s sociogenic approach offers tools for a critique of a particular understanding of nature (since as a cultural construction it is contingent and can be transformed) and the corresponding organization of the *naturecultures* which form us and within we live, which Fanon calls environments. Through a Fanonian lens, we can see that the colonial conception of nature is symptomatic of the more fundamental structure of Manicheanism. Manicheanism, we recall is a dualistic “psycho-existential complex” premised on a systematic denial of reciprocity and mutuality, where one side of the dualism opposes
itself to the “Other” that it both needs and disavows. I show that a Fanonian approach helps us to grasp that “Nature”, is itself a construction of colonial or Western society. Throughout the rest of the chapter, when I use the capitalized term Nature, I am referring to this “artefact” of racist and colonial society. Yet, this cultural construction nevertheless has very real effects. Just as Fanon described the “black soul” as an “artefact,” made by the white world, the artefact of Nature similarly has an efficacy and reality, profoundly shaping and organizing the environments, or particular naturecultures, in which it operates. In turn, environments form us and shape our experience. I turn to Fanon’s term atmosphere as a way of capturing the experiential, or phenomenological aspect of this process.

In “Colonial War and Mental Disorders,” the appendix to The Wretched of the Earth, we can begin to see how Fanon’s use of the language of atmosphere now goes beyond analogy. Here, Fanon writes that “clinical psychiatry classifies the various disorders presented by our patients under the heading ‘psychotic reaction’”; however, “we believe that in the cases presented here the triggering factor is principally the bloody, pitiless atmosphere, the generalization of inhuman practices” (WE183/DT627). What clinical psychiatry sees as individual trauma in reaction to a specific event must be folded into a “sociodiagnosis” of the patient’s “psychological, affective, and biological history, and that of his milieu” (ibid.). The cases that Fanon treats are acute symptoms of a more general condition in which:

the colonized, who in this respect is like the men in underdeveloped countries or the disinherited in all the parts of the world, perceives life not as a flowering or a development of an essential fecundity, but as a permanent struggle against an atmospheric death (une lutte permanente contre une mort atmosphérique). This close, claustrophobic death is materialized (Cette mort à bout touchant est matérialisée) in endemic famine, unemployment, a high death rate, an inferiority complex and the absence of any doors to
the future (l’absence de portes sur l’avenir). (Fanon 1994, 128/AV361 translation modified, first emphasis added).

Fanon’s mention of “endemic famine” and a “high death rate” indicates that it would be difficult not to understand “an atmosphere of permanent insecurity” in relation to political ecology, provided that we do not forget its phenomenological and psychological valence (WE207/DT648). “Atmospheric death” suggests the cumulative weight and exhaustion of an unliveable life in which the conditions of life, such as water, air, food, and labor, reduce life to a struggle for survival (Brown et al. 2005, Pulido 2016). It describes a ceaseless pressure, as well as a field of possibility, a total situation, irreducible to individuals or exceptional events. It is noteworthy that although the concept of atmosphere appeared in Black Skin, White Masks, Fanon would only systematically develop it in The Wretched of the Earth. Similarly, I suggest that in his decolonial work Fanon will develop the concept of environments in ways that allow us to explore naturecultures.

**Racist Environments**

I have shown that Fanon’s sociogenic approach departs from the limited notions of racism that I outlined earlier, since it begins with an appreciation of the dynamic co-constitution of the environmental and the political, social and individual, psychic and material. Additionally, Fanon helps us to see that analyses of institutional racism which fail to consider the underlying framework and organization of the environment the institutions in question are part of will ultimately remain superficial.104

Informed by Fanon’s concept of sociogeny, I propose that we reframe environmental racism in terms of racist environments. This reversal is an attempt to destabilize the apparently distinct terms of racism and environment. It allows us to see racism as an atmospheric force

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104 See (Bernasconi 2018, 172-4 ).
that shapes the relations of individual and milieu. Conversely, the specific tactics, imaginaries, and knowledges racism produces are themselves shaped by the ecologies they attempt to dominate and control. An analysis of racist environments prompts us to ask ecological questions that explore modes of inhabiting the world and to approach racism in terms of complex webs of human and more-than-human entanglements.

By racist environments, I mean the recursive loops by which environments, or particular naturecultures, are created and reproduced, and the ways in which they are internalized and lived, both psychically and somatically. Different systems and logics of racism are established in tandem with corresponding forms of societal (re)production, such as deforestation and terraforming, natural resource extraction and monocrop agriculture, militarism, petrochemical industries, and the massive ineliminable waste these produce. This “environment” then returns to condition and shape that particular racist society.

Racist environments constrict and suffocate alternative ways of life; psychically, somatically, and ecologically. With sociogeny, Fanon sought to show how all those living within a racist environment are affected by it, yet while all might be said to be “sick,” the form and experience of this more general sociopathology is profoundly different depending on one’s racialized positionality. Similarly, I argue that racist environments are lived as a particularly intense pressure or “atmosphere of death” on the lives of racialized and colonized subjects, while insisting that they shape the lives and experience of all within them. Consequently, this approach breaks with notions of racism imagined as initially separate from “the environment” and limited to individuals, intents or discrete acts. It tracks how racism becomes sedimented in the landscapes, cells, and climates that it animates. Additionally, I am concerned with how the flourishing of and relations with more-than-human beings and entities are ordered by racist environments. The concept of racist environments prompts us to ask how racism and speciesism are linked, and how ecological violence and other forms of violence are interwoven.
In distinction from the metrics of inequity, exclusion or differential exposure, my Fanonian approach aims to illuminate the ways in which forms of world inhabitation and making are shaped and delimited by racist environments. And, at the same time, I also aim to demonstrate how such environments are constituted by particular modes of world inhabitation and making.105 This point regarding conflicts between (often irreconcilable) values and modes of world inhabitation, tends to be obscured by liberal framings of environmental (in)justice, thus giving rise to what I term the normative and anthropocentric problems.106 The notion of ecological freedom I begin to develop at the end of this chapter is an attempt to explore this obscured dimension.

On its own, the concept of racist environments remains fairly abstract and general. Thus, it is necessary to inquire into particular modes in which racist environments are made and lived. In the rest of this and the following chapter I focus on colonial sovereignty as a particular modality of racist environments. In brief, colonial sovereignty is characterized by the dispossession of land, resource extraction, and violent domination that seeks to domesticate or exterminate all that it deems “natural” and Other. It is grounded in a fantasy of its own exceptional autarky and autonomy, creating an environment that forecloses reciprocity.


I have introduced a constellation of concepts which form Fanon’s sociogenic approach: sociogeny, Manicheanism, environment, and atmosphere; with the aim of showing how they

105 Here I am informed by Hage’s rather Fanonian formulation “Generalized existence is a mode of existence. That is, it is a phenomenologically understood mode of being. It can also be referred to as a mode of enmeshment, a mode of inhabitation, and a mode of deploying oneself in the world. These are all aimed at highlighting a mode of relating. It is, however, a mode of relating to the world that, in the process of relating, creates the very world it is relating to” (Hage 2017, 82–3).
106 By making alternatives to it unlivable and undesirable, the form of life characteristic of the colonial-white world can then present itself as the exclusive universal standard of human life. It then seems as though the options are either to attempt to assimilate it as aspirational norm, or to share the same fate as an endlessly degraded and devalued Nature.
might help us to overcome explanations of racism in terms of exceptional events, individuals, or conscious intent, and to break with a set of assumptions about the environment and (its intra-action with) the human body. Although useful, it would be a problem if my reading were to stop there. Exclusively focusing on racism as a cultural and psychological complex obscures its systematic nature and the material relations of extraction, accumulation and power that are its foundation: “Forgetting racism as a consequence, one concentrates on racism as cause.” (Fanon RC40/RC723). The problem with this, Fanon argues, is that we might then think that appeals to the values of liberal humanism or Christianity (tolerance, love, education and so forth) are sufficient to combat it.

With this in mind, it is now time to turn our attention from the psychic to the other side of a sociogenic analysis, namely, the material. This moves us to what on my account of racist environments I understand in terms of the organization of the material world, oriented by the ends of exploitation, extraction and accumulation, and correlative forms of sovereign power characterized by violence and domination.107

I focus on the racial species-divide in Fanon’s account of colonialism to develop my claim that a Fanonian approach challenges the dualism of nature/culture. One of my aims is to show how the cultural and material are woven together in racist environments. In turn, this makes the differences between Wynter and Fanon’s approaches clearer. As I argued in the previous chapter, Wynter’s attempt to break with the traditional Marxist use of class-struggle as exclusive frame of world-history, resulted in the troubling dismissal of the significance and

107 As Fanon notes, recognizing that gratuitous violence, dispossession and domination, or sovereign power, is characteristic of colonial situations does not amount to the claim that this is the only way in which power operates in these and other racist environments (RC35-6/RC719). We should not overlook the sophisticated ways in which colonial power operates through education, culture and so on. These forms of power may co-exist and reinforce each other at different moments depending on the situation. Similarly, as I suggested in my brief discussion of the modalities of racist environments, we might think of an ecology of racist environments, each with distinct logics and targets, that nonetheless support and reinforce each other. An obvious example is in the U.S., where (among others) the racist environments of genocidal colonial sovereignty and what Sharpe called the “anti-Black weather” come together to form a particular racial ecology. See (Lethabo King 2019b; Nishime and Hester Williams 2018; Pulido 2017a; 2017b).
operation of power and material systems. Similarly, Wynter’s attempt to overcome the limitations of what she saw as the “partial perspectives” of identity and land-based political struggles, through an abstract, universal history, resulted in an over-privileging of the intellectual as historical and political agent, and a tacit causal determinism between the epistemic and material. Unlike Wynter, Fanon does not make the “subjective” foundational, as Wynter does is in her assumption that a change in the onto-epistemic order would necessarily cause a corresponding change in the order of the “objective” or material. Rather, Fanon shows how both sides, or moments, must always be considered together, without assuming that one merely determines the other.

We recall that Wynter’s response to Fanon’s insight that racism functions as a species divide (separating the human from the less-than and non-human) was focused on this onto-epistemic order. Wynter’s proposed solution was an intentional and unprecedented change in this order through the “science of the Word.” Wynter claimed that such a science would supersede materialist concerns and militant land and place-based struggles. By contrast, we will see that Fanon remains committed to a materialist approach. He writes: “Race prejudice in fact obeys a flawless logic. A country that lives, draws its substance from the exploitation of other peoples, makes those peoples inferior. Race prejudice applied to those peoples is normal” (Fanon RC40-1/RC723). Fanon gives a materialist account of the racial species-divide, whilst breaking with an exclusive focus on class, indexing the ontological, epistemological and somatic violence of the Manichean division of being in ways that go beyond exploitation. Consequently, Fanon’s response to the racial species-divide is

108 It is important to note however, that through this “objective phenomenology” Wynter sought to change the conditions of experience and knowledge as embodied in the neural pathways and body. Consequently, it is not fair to say that this order is divorced from materiality as such, since her understanding of embodied cognition is central to her project. However, as I showed in the previous chapter, particularly the section which discusses the science of the Word, she presents intellectuals and scientists as carrying out the planning and implementation of these shifts.
importantly different from Wynter’s. I begin to explore this difference in the final section of this chapter.

My reading of Fanon in this section focuses on the 1956 piece “Racism and Culture,” and the first part of *The Wretched of the Earth*, “On Violence.” The latter is particularly important for my purposes since it provides an analysis of the spatial and racial dynamics of colonialism and the material conditions that these serve. I turn to later moments of *Wretched* in the next chapter, where I consider whether the concepts of land and sovereignty in Fanon’s vision of decolonization might serve as an alternative to social justice framings of environmental struggles.

*Accumulation, Extraction and Dispossession*

What is the relation between Manicheanism and the colonial dynamics of extraction, dispossession and accumulation? The Manichean psychic organization (that Fanon analyzed in *Black Skin, White Masks*) is the internal correlative of these material relations of domination. We can see this in “Racism and Culture,” where Fanon counters the dominant theories of racism of his time, claiming that racism is not attributable to a “natural” fear of the Other, error, or individual prejudice. Rather, its foundation lies in the “systemized oppression of a people” for the ends of domination, exploitation and accumulation (RC33/RC717). Such material relations require a reciprocal ordering of the social and psychic world of the racists in order to justify and maintain them, and a simultaneous destruction of the world of the racialized (ibid.) Consequently, Fanon argues that colonialism is always racist, since beneath the veneer of a civilizing mission or paternalistic benevolence, it is essentially a situation in which one group oppresses another, in order to take its land, resources, and energy: “Racism stares one in the face for it so happens that it belongs in a characteristic whole: that of the shameless exploitation of one group of men by another (...) This is why military and economic oppression generally
precedes, makes possible, and legitimizes racism” (RC37-8/RC721). While the techniques and justifications of racism may change, shifting from more brutal and explicit stages of slavery, genocide, and biological racism, to more subtle and supple forms, the basic facts of exploitation and oppression remain constant.

Fanon’s materialist analysis of racism turns our attention to the colonized world as the source of the land, energy, and resources (both human and more-than-human) necessary for the dominance of capitalist Europe (or what we might now call the Global North). It becomes clear that the progress and wealth of the “developed” world, and by extension the “equality” and “freedom”, championed by liberal humanism, rest on a foundation of massive dispossession, violence, and hyper-exploitation. Fanon argues: “The wealth of the imperialist nations is also our wealth (…) Europe is literally the creation of the Third World. The riches which choking it are those plundered from the underdeveloped peoples” (WE58/DT503).109

Fanon focuses on the violence and plunder, that while occurring outside of the market place and the sphere of industrial production, is nevertheless indispensable for capital and by extension the “civilized” world.110 Violence and theft constitute the political rationality characteristic of colonial sovereignty: “colonialism is not a machine capable of thinking, a body endowed with reason. It is naked violence and only gives in when confronted with great violence” (WE23/DT470). While colonial sovereignty may use a legal-juridical apparatus to

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109 For Fanon’s complicated relationship to debt (both psychic and material) and reparations see (Coulthard 2014; Young 2011; Vergès 2005). Fanon goes on to anticipate Ta-Nehesi Coates’ more recent comparison of the reparations given to the Jewish survivors of the Holocaust and Israel, and the refusal to consider reparations for the descendants of the enslaved (Coates June 2014). Fanon writes: “Not so long ago, Nazism transformed the whole of Europe into a genuine colony. The governments of various European nations demanded reparations and the restitution in money and kind for their stolen treasures” (WE57/DT502).
110 In regards to Fanon’s focus on violence and conquest Sekyi-Otu writes: “Concerning Violence” picks up this discarded object of historical knowledge and restores it to narrative prominence. Challenging The German Ideology, but also the Preface to a Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, Fanon’s text dramatically assigns causal primacy to the political event, in the shape of violent conquest, in the constitution of social reality. It is to this political fact, this conquest institutionalized in the ‘colonial system,’ that ‘the colonizer owes the very fact of his existence, that is to say, his property’ (DT, 6; WE, 36). There is an evident parody of the Preface here: property relations, and an entire universe of social, juridical, and symbolic practices and transactions, as consequences of a precipitate event of conquest and political domination; in brief, history as antidialectic” (Sekyi-Otu 1997, 48-9).
cloak its foundations in an assumed legitimacy, the colonized are more familiar with the technologies and atmosphere of violence that it deploys to assert its right to land, labor, and resources.

Given my earlier account of sociogeny, we know that a Fanonian approach will always consider the material and psychic as they come together in a particular environment, such that while it can be useful to distinguish them for the purposes of analysis we might better understand them as folds of a Möbius strip rather than as separable or discrete spheres. Although Fanon’s analysis of colonialism is materialist to the extent that it remains focused on the material conditions and economic organization of a particular social system it departs from some tenets of traditional Marxist thought. Starting with his observation of the lived experience of the colonized, Fanon shifts our attention from temporality as the primary mode of exploitation (as in Marx’s analysis of the exploited labor that is the source of surplus-value) to spatiality as the principal mode through which accumulation and domination operate. Ato

111 It is beyond the scope of the chapter to explore these in full, I focus on those most relevant for my analysis of the racist environment of colonial sovereignty.
112 See “The Labour-Process and the Process of Producing Surplus Value” in Capital for the relation of surplus value and the exploitation of labor via time (Marx 2008). Fanon arguably foregrounds what Marx suggests is a pre-capitalist moment of violence and theft, namely, primitive or original accumulation. See “Chapter 26: The Secret of Primitive Accumulation” (Marx 2008). Consequently, Fanon suggests that this form of accumulation (by violence and plunder) and by extension the racism and imperialism it requires, is a continuous feature of capitalism. Marxist geographer David Harvey is noteworthy here since he not only shows how spatiality can and should be central to any Marxist analysis of capital, but also, because he seems to echo Fanon’s focus on imperialism as a continuous feature of capitalism’s mechanisms of “accumulation by dispossession.” However, Fanon’s account comes closer to more recent work that foregrounds racism and settler colonialism, understood as the foundation of regimes of property, dispossession, and accumulation. In their introduction to the issue of Social Text, dedicated to Economies of Dispossession, the editors distinguish their approach from Harvey’s. They argue that: “Even Harvey’s formulation of ‘accumulation by dispossession,’ which he describes as the driver of the ‘new imperialism,’ though critical of Marx’s stagist account of original accumulation, preserves an analytical separation between the practices of primitive accumulation that institute and expand commodification and capitalist development, such as colonization and Indigenous dispossession in the Americas, and those practices of accumulation by dispossession that are developed to manage crises immanent to expanded reproduction, such as the post-1970s crises of capitalist overaccumulation” (Byrd et al. 2018, 7). We can see this problematic distinction in the following passage from Harvey: “I also think it plausible that the second step did far more damage to the long-term hopes, aspirations, and possibilities of the mass of the impoverished population than did the first. The implication is that primitive accumulation that opens up a path to expanded reproduction is one thing, and accumulation by dispossession that disrupts and destroys a path already opened up is quite another” (Harvey 2003, 137). From a Fanonian perspective, one of the problems with such a statement is that it dismisses the disruptive world destruction of colonialism, which does not “open up a path to expanded reproduction,” but rather shuts down possibilities for the colonized world in question. Another is that it overlooks the ongoing fact of settler colonialism in the present.
Sekyi-Otu elaborates on the significance of this focus on spatiality rather than temporality. On his reading, “On Violence,”

question[s] the universality of the determinant role which classical Marxism ascribes to social relations of production-social relations of time-as signifiers of inequality; and to adduce the idiosyncratic case of a logic of social hierarchy which ‘parcels out the world’ by virtue of a politics of space founded on race rather than an economy of time coadunate with class. The text goes so far as to suggest that the manifest measure of ‘colonial exploitation,’ the palpable index of its ‘totalitarian character,’ is to be found not primarily in the rate of surplus value but in the magnitude of the physical and metaphysical chasm dividing the colonizer and the colonized (DT, 10; WE, 41).
(Sekyi-Otu 1997, 77).

As I understand it, through a Fanonian lens spatiality refers to the organization of the material world, which both mirrors and informs the organization of psychic space. It is simultaneously a shaping of experience and consciousness; orienting the body, its mode of world making, as well as the world that it (in part) makes. This is in concert with Sekyi-Otu’s understanding of Fanon’s: “theory of the sociostructural organization and distribution of space as the material reality, so to speak, of which constriction and release, freedom and coercion, constitute a palpable homologous experience on the level of consciousness” (79). Building on this account, I add that Fanon’s use of the term environment is helpful for grasping how these two levels, that of physical and psychic space, are interwoven in a particular natureculture.

In a colonized world this organization of space is fundamentally Manichean. Fanon explains that “the ‘native’ sector is not complementary to the European sector. The two confront each other, but not in the service of a higher unity. Governed by a purely Aristotelian logic, they follow the dictates of mutual exclusion: There is no conciliation possible, one of them is superfluous” (WE4/DT454). Dialectical materialism typically assumes that an
antagonism gives rise to a “higher unity,” thus resulting in a dialectical, progressive movement of history. By contrast, Fanon claims that in a colonized world, spatiality, and by extension experience, consciousness, and social relations, are organized by a “purely Aristotelian logic of mutual exclusion” that does not lead anywhere or allow for reciprocal change.113 This point is a development of Fanon’s earlier analysis of Manicheanism and his response to the so-called “master-slave dialectic” in Black Skin, White Masks.114 However, it takes on a new significance when considered in the context of settler colonies (such as French Algeria).115

Reflecting on the material organization and conditions of settler colonies we see that what is primary is not labor, or at least not exclusively labor. Rather, land and the resources it harbors are the main target of settler colonialism. Unlike other forms of colonialism, in settler colonialism the settler seeks to replace the “natives,” since settlers not only seek to take land but to root themselves in it and make it their home (Tuck and Yang 2012; Wolfe 2001). Spatiality is particularly important for such settler strategies, since they seek to dispossess and replace the original inhabitants. The frontiers of colonial territories are expanded via the coerced displacement and confinement (where these often amount to attempted genocide) of colonized peoples. Indigenous inhabitancy and presence on the land is erased, and the socio-ecological knowledge and relationships central to many non-colonial cultural systems are destroyed through terraforming, large scale ecological intervention, agriculture, and the construction of built environments that assert settlers’ power, right, and domination of what it understands as a territory. In regards to the US context, Potawatomi philosopher Kyle Whyte writes:

113 “One arresting image encapsulates the apprehension of the colonial context as an antidialectic: that of the colonizer-colonized relation as an order of absolute difference and radical irreciprocity which is fixed, made manifest in space; that of the defining experience of the colonized as a visible condition of sequestration, exclusion, confinement” (Sekyi-Otu 1997, 72).
114 See Fanon’s response to Hegel and Sartre in “The Lived Experience of the Black Man” and “The Black Man and Hegel.”
115 See (Barclay, Chopin, and Evans 2017).
One should not underestimate the physicality and scale of the US settler homeland creation process. Europeans, and eventually US Americans, had to physically shape the lands and waters to reflect their future aspirations and fears, economic systems, cultures, ways of life, and heritages. They literally had to carve out, or inscribe, a homeland for themselves, within a territory whose ecosystems were already coupled with the social, political, and cultural institutions of different populations (e.g., the Anishinaabe seasonal round system). (Whyte 2016, 96).

Consequently, when considered in its context of settler colonialism, Fanon’s attention to spatiality takes on a new resonance, one that not only marks his departure from the Marxist tradition, but, as Whyte indicates, offers a way to understand how racist environments of colonial sovereignty are fabricated.

In Red Skin, White Masks, Yellowknives Dene political theorist Glen Coulthard draws on Fanon’s analysis of settler colonialism as a situation in which one group seeks to oppress and replace another, to argue that any reconciliation or supposedly “mutual” recognition that might lead to a “higher unity” (which in the case of Canada is imagined as an inclusive and multicultural nation state) is in fact a ruse, since settler colonialism is by nature antithetical to Indigenous sovereignty (Coulthard 2014). Since many Indigenous nations and communities are comprised of both human and more-than-human kin, and grounded in corresponding relations of responsibility and reciprocity with them, the exploitative and destructive use of land characteristic of settler colonialism severely compromises the ability to honor these responsibilities and maintain a non-colonial way of life, or sovereignty.116

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116 There is much more to be said here than I can do justice to. I return to these issues in relation to Fanon’s own thought of land and sovereignty in Chapter Three. Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg thinker, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson writes: “Considered in this context, my understanding of ‘Kina Gchi Anishinaabeg- ogaming’—the place where we all live and work together,” means something vastly different than a defended tract of land where a single state government makes all the decisions for the people it defines as citizens. Sovereignty is not just about land; it is also a spiritual, emotional, and intellectual space that spans back seven generations and that spans forward seven generations. The word place includes animal nations and plant nations, the water, the air, and the soil—meaning the land is part of us and our sovereignty rather than an abstract natural resource for our unlimited
My intention in briefly tracing some links between contemporary Indigenous thought (particularly that which explicitly engages with Fanon) and Fanon’s own analysis of settler colonialism is not to ignore the internal differences of all those who are “colonized,” between and within settler colonies. Rather, it is to indicate some of the stakes of Fanon’s insistence on the importance of land, and his analysis of the role that “Nature,” plays in racist environments of colonial sovereignty that materially and psychically subjugate the colonized. This process will of course differ in particulars depending on the situation and respective groups involved, however some commonalities obtain in regards to how the settler treatment of land (which is transformed into a territory) and “Nature,” are central to “the destruction of cultural values, of ways of life” that settler colonialism entails (RC33/RC717). Significantly, the destructive socio-ecological interventions characteristic of settler colonialism are often justified by appeal to the state of the land and the perceived inability of the “natives,” to properly cultivate or manage it. Historian Jennifer Sessions gives a sense of this process in the context of French Algeria:

Nineteenth-century French observers increasingly blamed the supposed ignorance, indolence, or nomadism of the Arab “race” as a whole for the desertification, deforestation, and sterilization said to have ruined the former ‘granary of Rome.’ In 1833, the Algerian Commission claimed that Arabs plowed the land only superficially and abandoned land once the soil had been exhausted. The Ministry of War’s Tableaus concurred in the following years that the unfulfilled potential of the soil was attributable to mismanagement by absent, imprudent, or vicious natives. Parts of the province of Oran, for instance, were found to be entirely deforested, and ‘the nomadic peoples who wander the country [to be] the cause of this desolation.’ Rather than planting, use. The word place includes sacred and spiritual dimensions that transcend both time and space. It includes my body, my heart, and my mind” (Betamosake Simpson 2015, 19).
pastoralist groups ‘without any worry for the future’ destroyed the land by driving their herds through fields and burning pastures. (Sessions 2017, 215).

The settler response of supposedly exploiting an untapped fertility or productivity of the land is one that has (across different contexts) disastrous effects for both land and colonized people. This in part due to the fact that what the colonial gaze perceived as the lack of cultivation of or knowledge of the land, is more often a reflection of the settlers’ profound ignorance of the milieu in question and peoples’ complex and pre-existing relations with it.

Sessions continues:

Algerians would hardly have recognized themselves in such descriptions, which misrecognized the finely tuned systems of crop rotation and soil enrichment that characterized precolonial agriculture. Light, maneuverable plows had real advantages in fields studded with dwarf-palm roots, and both shallow tilling and pasturing herds helped preserve the soil. A few military officials recognized the logic of local agriculture, but most observers agreed ‘that [productivity] could be much greater and that the lands of the plains could compare with our good French lands. But to achieve this, sedentary colonists must replace the nomadic tribes, and we must necessarily introduce European methods; these are the sine qua non conditions’ for restoring Algeria’s former fecundity. (Sessions 2017, 215-6).

I will now go on to consider how this colonial relation to land is connected to the racial-species divide. My claim is that through a Fanonian approach we can see how land and race are underwritten by the dualism of nature/culture. This will have important implications for how we might understand decolonial freedom.

117 Similarly, Eyal Weizman shows how Israel’s self-congratulatory strategy of “making the desert bloom,” has, materially and culturally served as an important method of erasure of Bedouin and Palestinian prior cultivation and inhabitancy of land, literally covering the evidence and sites, while at the same time, the ecological fallout of such strategies renders non-colonial forms of life increasingly difficult (Weizman and Sheikh 2015).
The Racial-Species Divide

Following from Fanon’s insight that it is space, not time, that is primary for colonial situations, is his claim that here it is race, not class, that is the most essential category for a materialist analysis. In contrast to Marxist accounts that stress the organic nature of class relations, Fanon argues that in colonialism race is imposed from outside: “the social panorama is destructured; values are flouted (bafouées) crushed, emptied (...) In their stead a new system of values is imposed, not proposed but affirmed, by the heavy weight of cannons and sabers” (RC33-3/RC717 translation modified). This system does not emerge from the pre-existing relations of the colonized world(s) in question, rather, it seeks to destroy and replace them with a world divided in two, where the life of one bloc is dependent on the domination (if not elimination) of the other. Fanon claims that:

Looking at the immediacies of the colonial context, it is clear that what divides this world is first and foremost what species, what race one belongs to. In the colonies the economic infrastructure is also a superstructure. The cause is effect: You are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich. This is why a Marxist analysis should always be slightly stretched when it comes to addressing the colonial issue. (WE5/DT455). 118

In different ways, depending on the type of colony and one’s positionality within it (e.g. slave, exogenous or settler colony or some combination of these) racialization serves as a massive form of dispossession, radically devaluing the labor, lives, and land of racialized groups, justifying the “civilization” of what had (on the colonial) view not been exploited or cultivated

118 “The classes of this dependent social world represent gradations of functionality, privilege, and immiseration within an externally determined socioeconomic reality; however significant, the differences among them are the consequence of their common subjection to an exogenous mode of production, an epiphenomenon of the violent rupture of social reality from its natural history both in its generically human forms and in its local particulars” (Sekyi-Otu 1997, 132). The passage continues, “It not just the concept of a pre-capitalist society, so effectively studied by Marx, which needs to be re-examined here. The serf is essentially different from the knight, but a reference to divine right is needed to justify this difference in status. In the colonies the foreigner imposed himself using his cannons and machines” (ibid.).
in accordance with properly human norms. I will argue that this Manichean division is the \textit{racial-species divide}. This divide works to radically separate those considered properly human from all other beings, where those who are considered not fully human are collapsed into the “Nature,” and assumed to need governance, mastery, and exploitation. The racial-species divide is thus intertwined with the Nature/Culture dualism that on Fanon’s account plays an important role in Manichean consciousness. This dualism serves to justify the dispossession, unfettered extraction and dumping that (from the perspective of the colonized) leaves their home barely liveable or recognizable, making the land a hostile and alien landscape, or territory.

In his reading of “On Violence,” Achille Mbembe focuses on the relation between animality and (colonial) sovereignty, showing the centrality of the racial-species divide and the category of “Nature” for Fanon’s analysis of colonialism.\footnote{Mbembe understands (colonial) sovereignty as both a structure of consciousness and a political rationality. Developing this analysis of sovereignty in “Necropolitics,” he writes: “‘To exercise sovereignty is to exercise control over mortality and to define life as the deployment and manifestation of power’ (Mbembe 2003, 12). Mbembe continues, stating that unlike liberal political theory he is interested in: ‘those figures of sovereignty whose central project is not the struggle for autonomy but the \textit{generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations}. Such figures of sovereignty are far from a piece of prodigious insanity or an expression of a rupture between the interests and impulses of the body and those of the mind. Indeed, they, like the death camps, are what constitute the \textit{nomos} of the political space in which we still live’ (4).} Mbembe identifies what are on his account the two central features of colonial reason, features which are relevant for my attempt to understand and explore the racist environment of colonial sovereignty.

The first predicate of colonial reason is the conception of animality in terms of immediacy and immanence, where the human is defined by its ability to transcend itself through the differentiation of self-consciousness. To be human is to be a self-conscious being, capable of identifying as an “I” by positing oneself as a conscious subject: “essentially different from nature through thinking and doing, and ready to oppose it—to deny it, if need be, even though living in it—free from nature’s laws, autonomous and independent. Only in this way can the human being create himself/herself” (Mbembe 2001, 190). Freedom and humanity
then, are understood in terms of an essential difference from Nature, and “according to this view, what goes for the animal goes for the native” (190). The apparently untransformed environment in which the native lives, is evidence of their essential similarity to it. It is evidence of the absence of the uniquely human capacity to freely shape it and themselves in accordance with their conscious desires. This idea is, as Mbembe demonstrates, “at the root of colonial violence” (ibid., emphasis added).

Complementary to the first, ‘the other chief predicate to be found in colonial reason is the radical opposition between the I and the non-I’ (ibid.). Mbembe draws on Merleau-Ponty’s analysis of the “other” as an affront to objective thought. Objective thought resolves the difficulty of simultaneously comprehending the in-him/herself and for-him/herself “only by privileging a definition of the non-I and the other which makes this latter a “thing” or “object”—at any rate, a reality external to me” (191 original emphasis). This objectification and negation of what is external to me, is “from the standpoint of colonial reason”, the only logical and properly human response:

I have to project myself intentionally outwards and treat what is not myself in a certain way: in the terms of opposition, by distancing myself from it and, if need be, projecting against this non-I an inhuman gaze. I may for example, transform it, suppress it, deny it, assimilate it, destroy it, annihilate it. The ‘thing’ – and, by extension, others, the Other – can be made mine. In this case I have ownership of it; I possess it (ibid.).

The identity of the autonomous and autarchic sovereign subject that constituted the first predicate of colonial reason requires the second, that is, the objectification, possession, and use of what it views as external to it. This vision of the autonomous subject, is “only thinkable if defined in opposition to another, external reality reduced to the condition of object, of thing posited as inessential because ‘it barely is.’” Mbembe concludes that the interaction between
such a subject and “this thing benumbed in natural existence can only be a relation of unilateral sovereignty” (191).

Mbembe’s reading of “On Violence,” brings to the fore important resources in Fanon’s analysis of colonialism that have for the most part been overlooked. It shows how the structure of colonial sovereignty is dependent on the “Nature” that it fabricates by exteriorizing and projecting all those aspects of itself that it represses and fears. Nature and the “native” are, in this imaginary, the manifestations of absolute otherness, which must be objectified, possessed or killed. The category of Nature thus serves an essential function as the background for the drama of colonial consciousness, since it is only through this oppositional relation of violence that it comes to know itself as sovereign and free.

We can see this in the following passage, where Fanon diagnoses the role that the racial-species divide and the colonial imaginary of Nature play for the mechanisms of projection and exteriorization that characterize colonial sovereignty:

Sometimes this Manicheanism reaches its logical conclusion and dehumanizes the colonized subject. In plain talk, he is animalized (il s’animalise). And consequently, when the colonist speaks of the colonized he uses zoological terms. Allusion is made to the slithery movements of the yellow race, the odors from the ‘native’ quarters, the hordes, the stink, the swarming, the seething, and the gesticulations (…) the colonist refers constantly to the bestiary (WE7/DT456-7 translation modified).

The “swarming,” “seething” movements and forces which apparently threaten the identity and boundaries of colonial selfhood, are in fact integral to it, since against this perceived threat to identity the colonist buttresses his sense of self through a relation of opposition and violence. Fanon continues in his analysis:

This explosive population growth, those hysterical masses, those blank faces, those shapeless, obese bodies, this headless, tailless cohort, these children who seem not to
belong to anyone, this indolence sprawling under the sun, this vegetating existence, all this is part of the colonial vocabulary. (WE7/DT457).

In this colonial vocabulary Nature is viewed as the potential destroyer of civilization. Even the climate conspires to create a “vegetating existence” of incurable “indolence” that both threatens and grounds colonialism’s regime of property, labor, and possession. The “children who seem not to belong to anyone,” these “masses,” suggest a view of the colonized children as nameless bands of stray pups, ceaselessly issuing from the dangerously fertile bodies of colonized women copulating without regard for Christian heteropatriarchal norms and biopolitical regulation.

The imaginary of the colonized as part of a kind of wild and threatening Nature, contributes to colonial and racist mechanisms of population control (such as forced sterilization or abortion), confinement, and death. Such strategies arguably cut across species lines, since they are used both on populations of racialized-colonized women, and “feral” dogs and other animals, that are similarly understood as a threat, in need of control and intervention. I understand Fanon’s analysis of the colonial vocabulary as anticipating Hage’s claim that:

racialized animalistic categories can sometimes tell us more about the racism as an everyday practical orientation toward the other than the more general intellectual definitions of racism. This is because the metaphors embody a practical orientation. They are carriers of a ‘manual’ with complete ‘what to do’ instructions. (Hage 2017, 10)

Hage continues: “we know what a racist wants to do when they associate a “Jew” with a “snake” or a “virus” (...) ‘The animalistic metaphor is not just an ‘observational racist category’ but a declaration of intent” (11). In turn, this tells us much about how the racist views

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120 See for example Francoise Vergès and Kelsey Dayle John who make similar points in different colonial contexts (Réunion and the U.S. respectively) (Dayle John 2019; Vergès 2017) Particularly notable are the convergences between conservation, whitestream environmentalism and such racist forms and discourses of population control.
the animal in question and by extension what they think of as Nature, indicating the ways in which racism and speciesism are linked. The insectoid register that Fanon employs in these passages in which the colonized are imagined as “slithering” and “swarming,” conjuring images of pests and pestilence, is therefore instructive. As I argue in the final section, this colonial vocabulary thus suggests a mode of engagement with the colonized of the kind that colonial sovereignty also uses to deal with what it sees as “pests.” As I go on to show, Fanon’s analysis of Nature as enemy and opposite, that must for that reason be controlled, confined, and killed, is part of the more general view of Nature characteristic of racist environments.

**Nature**

From the colonial point of view a colonized people and territory (and all of the more-than-human entities and beings which constitute it) are simply the Nature, which must be domesticated, mastered and exploited for colonial ends. The domination and appropriation of local ecologies is part of the same process as the subjugation of Indigenous peoples, in which violent dispossession, hyper-exploitation, and the destruction of non-colonial psychic organization and forms of life, come together to make the colonized. Fanon formulates this relationship in the following terms:

A hostile, ungovernable, and fundamentally rebellious Nature is in fact synonymous in the colonies with the bush, the mosquitoes, the natives, and the disease. Colonization has succeeded only once this untamed Nature has been brought under control. Cutting railroads through the bush, draining swamps, and ignoring the political and economic existence of the native population are in fact one and the same thing. (WE182/DT626).

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121 A point already suggested in the entomological and zoological imagery which registers that the Black is a “new species” in *Black Skin, White Masks* (BS95–96/PN158).  
122 See (Whyte 2018) for an account of this process.
Here, Fanon is not only analyzing the colonial consciousness which dehumanizes the “natives” by viewing them as indistinguishable from an untamed, wild and criminally unproductive Nature, but underscoring the point that the subjugation of both is “in fact one and the same thing” - exceeding mere analogy or ideology. Fanon therefore develops Césaire’s “equation” in *Discourse on Colonialism* that “colonization = thingification” (Césaire 2001, 42). This refers to “millions of men torn from their gods, their land, their habits, their life – from life,” their inferiorization, exploitation and objectification, and “natural *economies* that have been disrupted (…) food crops destroyed, malnutrition permanently introduced, agricultural development oriented solely toward the benefit of the metropolitan countries (…) the looting of products, the looting of raw materials” (Césaire 2001, 43). Similarly, I read Fanon as insisting that the transformation of living and open systems and beings into “things” which can be used as tools and toys (through the dualistic species divide which race permits) is materially, spiritually, and culturally bound up with the objectification of the natural world. I understand this as close to what Robert Nichols terms dispossession, in which:

property is generated under conditions that require its divestment and alienation from those who appear, only retrospectively, as its original owners. In this formulation, the term therefore names not only the forcible *transfer of* property but *transformation into* property, albeit in a manner that is structurally negated for some, i.e. “the dispossessed”.

I theorize this in terms of its *recursive logic*, in which theft paradoxically precedes, rather that presupposes, property. (Nichols 2017, 3 Original emphasis).

Nichols continues, because the language of dispossession and expropriation “gain their normative force from a perceived violation or corruption of actually existing property relations, they are generally fairly conservative concepts that tend to reinforce a proprietary model of social relations that critical theorists generally seek to undermine” (2). By contrast, by foregrounding dispossession as a process of transformation into property, we can see how, for
example, the harm of settler colonialism lies not only in its “theft,” of land, but rather in the transformation of the beings, entities, and relationships that constituted place into a “territory,” understood as alienable object and property. In slavery, peoples are transformed into “property,” in an ontological violence which exceeds what is encompassed by the category of alienation. Thus, the issue is not only theft or exploitation, rather, it is the radical transformation of an environment, into one structured by a dualism, with things that can be possessed and used on the side, and on the other, those who can possess and use them.

The conquest and expansion of territory that drives settler colonialism first requires the creation of territory, understood as object and property. Fanon indicates the importance of the racial-species divide for this process:

In Algeria there is not simply domination but the decision, literally, to occupy nothing else but a territory. The Algerians, the women dressed in haïks, the palm groves, and the camels form a panorama, the natural backdrop for the human French presence (WE182/DT626 translation modified. Original emphasis).

This “decision” to “occupy nothing else but a territory,” requires (i) a particular view of “Nature”, as passive and inert, as potential resource and property, which should be made productive and valuable, and (ii) the folding of the colonized into it through the racial-species divide. This is exemplified in the principal of terra nullius (nobody’s land) or the doctrine of discovery, where the perceived lack of human habitation (since indigenous inhabitants and their dwellings were seen as part of the natural “vegetal” life) justified the possession and use

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123 Fanon’s reference to how the bodies of racialized women are folded into this “natural backdrop” begins to indicate how gender intersects with race in the colony via the category of “Nature”. See “Dualism: The Logic of Colonialism” in (Plumwood 1993). I develop this important point in the next chapter.
of the land and all the beings and entities within it. This objectification and erasure thus relied on a Manichean view of Nature, as opposed to Culture, thereby creating the grounds for the transformation of the “terra nullius” into a territory. Both the colonized and the Nature they are collapsed into are seen as without agency or ethical standing as seen through the colonial lens. Both are perceived as essentially passive and thus as requiring the colonizer’s activity for value and purpose. Such value and purpose rests exclusively in the ability of nature, and by extension the colonized, to meet the needs and desires of the colonial world. As we have seen beyond that Nature is conceived of as a threatening menace and enemy to properly human interests.

The psychic topography of the Sovereign, characterized by internal scission, and a form of sovereignty premised on the denial of reciprocity is made manifest in the colony’s physical geography and political ecology (and by extension, the planet):

The oppressor, ensconced in his sector, creates the spiral, the spiral of domination, exploitation and looting. In the other sector, the colonized subject lies coiled and robbed, and fuels as best he can the spiral which moves seamlessly from the shores of the colony to the palaces and docks of the metropolis. In this petrified zone, not a ripple on the surface, the palm trees sway against the clouds, the waves of the sea lap against the shore, the raw materials come and go, legitimating the colonist’s presence, while more dead than alive the colonized subject crouches forever in the same old dream. (WE14/DT463).

124 “discovery in (in international law): A method of acquiring territory in which good title can be gained by claiming previously unclaimed land (terra nullius). In the early days of European exploration, it was held that the discovery of a previously unknown land conferred absolute title to it upon the state by whose agents the discovery was made. However, it has now long been established that the bare fact of discovery is an insufficient ground of proprietary right. The distinction between acquisition by cessation and acquisition by discovery was based upon the difference between organized and unorganized societies. The North Island of New Zealand, for example, was treated as a case of acquisition by cession; whereas the South Island, which was largely uninhabited and not generally under the rule of any chiefs, was treated as a case of discovery. Equally, since the discoverers believed that the Australian aborigines were incapable of intelligent transactions with respect to land, Australia was treated as a terra nullius” (Law 2018).
Here, Fanon ties the idea we saw earlier, namely that the natural landscape (of which the colonized is part) is the backdrop for the colonial imaginary of itself as exclusive agent of history and activity, since the former are presented as static and unchanging, a living fossil of a prehistoric moment. Fanon pushes us to see how, while illusory, this imaginary of the colonized territory as a “petrified zone” in fact comes to shape the landscape, since, it works in tandem with the extraction “the raw materials come and go” and export (often) monocrop agriculture that now animates and shapes this “zone.” Such a vision thus takes on a life of its own, because it shuts down and constricts other possibilities for life, and reduces both colonized and the territory to objects whose existence has value only insofar as it serves the ends of colonial sovereignty.

A static imaginary of “primitive Nature,” enables the colonial world to dismiss and erase the history of the land that it rests on, and the extracted labor, energy, and materials (human and more-than-human) which it in fact requires for its existence. This allows it to sustain the delusion that it is the exclusive source of energy, activity, and value. Val Plumwood, terms this operation “backgrounding,” suggesting a similar conclusion to Fanon in regards to how the category of Nature serves the ends of colonialism:

Backgrounding is a complex feature which results from the irresoluble conflicts the relationship of domination creates for the master, for he attempts both to make use of the other, organising, relying on and benefiting from the other’s services, and to deny the dependency which this creates. Denial can take many forms. Common ways to deny dependency are through making the other inessential, denying the importance of the other’s contribution or even his or her reality, and through mechanisms of focus and attention. One way to do this is to insist on a strong hierarchy of activities, so that the denied areas are simply not ‘worth’ noticing. A related way to solve this problem is
through treating the other as the background to the master’s foreground. (Plumwood 1993, 48).

Backgrounding thus allows colonial sovereignty to deny the value and agency of all that it deems “natural,” thus allowing it to disavow its own parasitic relation of dependency on the former, and, through a staggering reversal, to present the colonized world as needing colonialism for survival. Fanon expresses this point in the following:

The colonist makes history (…) ‘We made this land.’ He is the guarantor for its existence: ‘If we leave, all will be lost, and this land will return to the Dark Ages.’ Opposite him, listless beings washed away by fevers and consumed by ‘ancestral customs’ compose a virtually petrified background to the innovative dynamism of colonial mercantilism. (WE15/DT463).

While fabricated by the colonial situation, it is important to note this dependency and petrification is not altogether illusory. The organization of the material world in accordance with the Nature/Culture dualism, gradually takes on a material reality of its own. Through expropriation, extraction, and ecological destruction the colonized are gradually dispossessed of much of their land and the socio-ecological knowledges and relationships that sustained non-colonial forms of life. This can happen directly, through violence and/or attempted genocide, or indirectly, such that non-colonial forms of land-based life become unliveable. For example through policies that require the implementation of settler agricultural practice and land use, or through the siting of extractive industries and waste. Such changes in land use and ownership strike at non-colonial forms of knowledge, life, and cultural systems. The colonized are thereby increasingly forced into some degree of dependency on wage labor, further decreasing self-sufficiency and the ability to maintain environments that are autonomous from those of colonialism.125

125 See (Dayle John 2019) for an account of this in the context of the Navajo nation.
As Hage notes in regards to the domestication of both human and more-than-human populations initially seen as “wild,” through the process of domestication that which is domesticated is to some extent made to, or at least thought to “need” the conditions established by the domesticator or owner (Hage 2017, 89-91). The dependency that is artificially fabricated in the very process of capture, confinement and domination is often used as to justify the process as one of “mutual benefit.” Similarly, the situation systematically fabricated by colonialism, one in which it becomes increasingly difficult for the colonized to flourish or even sustain themselves independently and on their own terms, is thus marshalled as evidence of the colonized’s “natural” state of need, thereby justifying the colonizer’s presence and giving the appearance that the Manichean environment is premised on a symbiotic relationship.126

Given the role that the appearance of reciprocity (itself often dependent on the fabricated dependency of the colonized) can play in the maintenance and justification of colonial systems, Fanon argues that decolonization begins when the colonized collectively recognize the situation for what it is, that is, one of “mutual exclusion,” in which one group dominates, exploits, and attempts to eliminate the Other. In the colonial situation, this realization by the colonized of its true nature may engender feelings of envy, the desire to “replace” the colonizer and to possess what they have: “dreams of possession. Every type of possession” (WE5/DT454). This may lead to self-hatred and/or complicity with the colonial apparatus in the desire for recognition from it. Or it may provoke fantasies of violent possession and extermination: “he is ready to change his role as game for that of hunter” (WE16/DT464). However, decolonization, understood as a fundamental change in the order of the colonial environment, becomes possible only when the colonized both recognize its Manicheanism and

126 See Fanon’s response to Mannoni in “The So-Called Dependency Complex of the Colonized” in Black Skin, White Masks.
(rather than merely reproducing or aspiring to it) collectively undermine its foundations, thereby making possible the re-creation of a different environment.

Attempts to overcome this Manichean structure that rely on asserting the colonized’s humanity in opposition to “Nature,” risk reproducing it. In response to the “colonial vocabulary” of the bestiary and zoological, “the colonized know all that and roar with laughter every time they hear themselves called an animal by the other. For they know they are not animals. And at the very moment that they discover their humanity, they begin to secure its victory” (WE8/DT457). Importantly, the colonized discover “their humanity” in such a way as to undermine the dualisms which found and delimit the colonial understanding of the properly human. The colonized’s ferocious “roar of laughter,” opens the door for the recognition of their own power, and the fact that they are both needed and feared like the wild “Nature,” that the colonizers seek to possess and dominate. While the colonized know their own difference from animals, their humanity does not necessarily take the form of a Manichean opposition to what is deemed natural, rather, “As soon as the colonized begin to strain at the leash,” they “pose a threat to the colonist” (ibid.). I suggest that Fanon’s statement that the colonized: “is dominated but not domesticated” (WE16/DT464) might be read less as a declaration of human exceptionality, which asserts the essential difference of humans from that which can be domesticated, and perhaps more of an insight into how colonialism cuts across both human and more-than-humans, seeking to transform what was considered “wild” and ungovernable into docile and productive possessions.127 As I go on to argue in the final section, this insight opens onto a different response to racist environments than Wynter’s, itself grounded in an alternative understanding of freedom.

127 Despite the promise of Fanon’s analysis of domestication in colonialism in the next chapter I show how Fanon’s conceptualization of decolonization reaffirms human difference from nature.
The implications of Fanon’s analysis of the Manichean dualism of Nature/Culture are that a substantive change in the self-understanding of the colonized, and by extension what we think of as the human, cannot occur without a reciprocal dissolution of this dualism. Thus, decolonization requires a transformation of the categorization and standing of the colonial view of “Nature.” As we have seen, environments are *naturecultures*, an organization an interaction of both the psychic and physical, the human and more-than-human, such a transformation cannot take place in abstraction.

3. “Dominated but not Domesticated”

In this final section, I begin to move from the critical moment of Fanon’s project to his understanding of decolonization. I continue my discussion of decolonization in the next chapter focusing on the issues of land and sovereignty in relation to contemporary land-based environmental struggles. The rest of this chapter is a preliminary exploration of what is grounding Fanon’s emphasis on land and sovereignty, a grounding that (as I show in my Fanonian analysis of industrial pesticides and insecticides) opens up an importantly different approach to racist environments than common framings of environmental injustice.

*Combat Breath: An Initial Exploration of Ecological Freedom*

We will recall that although Wynter was ostensibly critical of the liberal humanist tradition, and by extension negative ideas of freedom, her deployment of the “sociogenic principle” ultimately reproduced it in mutated form – imagining freedom as uniquely human cognitive autonomy from the terrestrial, organismic constraints and entanglements common to all other forms of life. By contrast, I suggest that we might draw on Fanon’s thought, “to develop an understanding of freedom that consists in an engagement with matter instead of freedom from material constraint” (Clare 2013, 62). Whereas Wynter ultimately offers a vision
of autonomy from ecological entanglement, Fanon’s thought begins to orient us to what I am calling ecological freedom. In distinction to Wynter, Fanon does not understand liberation negatively, that is as freedom-from material constraint and the conditions common to organismic life. Such an idea of freedom, and the dualistic system that subtends it, is in fact what Fanon is fighting against.

As we saw in the previous section, Fanon showed how the occupation and control of land and its transformation into a colonized “territory,” was part of the same process through which a people are dominated and transformed into a colonized population. Fanon’s analysis of colonialism, which begins from the interrelatedness of speciesism, racism, and ecological destruction, has important implications for how he understands decolonization.

I begin to explore these implications by turning to the section “From the North African’s Criminal Impulsiveness to the War of National Liberation,” in the appendix to The Wretched of the Earth. Here, Fanon is responding to the Algiers school, which proposed explanations such as the following: “the configuration of the North African’s brain structure accounts for the indolence of “the native,” his mental and social inaptitude as well as his virtual animal impulsiveness (…) It is a neurologically comprehensible reaction, written into the nature of things, of the thing which is biologically organized” (WE228/DT668 first emphasis added).

Fanon’s response to the dehumanization of Algerians in this colonial medical discourse – their reduction to the level of thing or animal via appeal to the “natural,” is more sophisticated and useful than mere outrage or protest. For Fanon, the language of animality offers an important insight into the logic of colonialism, its understanding and treatment of all that it deems thing, animal, natural and less-than-human. Such an understanding is not incidental to it but rather at its core. Fanon goes on to relate the conclusion that a préfet reached and had conveyed to him:
‘These instinctive beings,’ he told me, “who blindly obey the laws of their nature must be strictly and pitilessly regimented. Nature must be domesticated, not convinced [Il faut domestiquer la nature, non la convaincre].” Discipline, tame, subdue, and now pacify are the common terms used by the colonialists in the occupied territories. (WE228/DT668 Translation modified).

Such a phylogenetic, essentialist explanation of perceived behaviors and traits was precisely what Fanon was attacking with his proposal of the concept of sociogeny. Fanon responds that such “indolence” is not biologically determined but is in fact a response to a particular social situation, that of the dispossessive and exploitative regime of colonialism. But his response takes us further than an assertion of the social against the natural, and thus of unique “autonomy” from the natural and biological (as in Wynter’s rendering of the sociogenic principle). Rather, Fanon takes seriously the ways in which both the colonized and the occupied territory are dominated by the same strategies, those of domestication and subjugation. The links with “Nature” that the colonizer posits are therefore instructive for understanding how colonialism works.

Fanon suggests that rather than being something that must be denied or overcome in the struggle for decolonization, the commonalities and ties between the milieu and colonized might be revalued. These commonalities might then serve as the ground for struggle and by extension an alternative sense of freedom. He continues:

The resistance of the forests and swamps to foreign penetration is the natural ally of the colonized. Put yourself in his shoes and stop reasoning and claiming that the ‘nigger’ is a hard worker and the ‘towelhead,’ great at clearing land. In a colonial regime the reality of the ‘towelhead,’ the reality of the ‘nigger,’ is not to lift a finger, not to help the oppressor sink his claws into his prey. (WE220/DT661).
Fanon warns against attempts to counter such deterministic racist explanations of “native indolence” with declarations that “they” meet the same standards of humanity as those prescribed by the white world. Rather, Fanon argues that this “indolence” is itself a form of “non-cooperation” or resistance (ibid.). The clearing of land and the hunting of “prey” that he refers to in this passage are part of the same process by which the Indigenous population are colonized and dominated. Hence, the “forests and swamps” are the “natural ally” of the colonized’s refusal of the colonial values of property, work, and Manichean selfhood.

This revaluation of the shared interests and bonds of such “natural allies” is an important point that we do well to consider when thinking environmental issues through a Fanonian lens. The ties of complicity and solidarity that exist between forest, swamp, and decolonial struggle are recognized as one of the defining characteristics and strengths of maroons, where the “natural environments” that they used as means of escape, ground of community, and base for guerrilla insurgency. The resistance of such milieus (as in jungles, mountains or swamps) to exploitation, domination and “inhabitation,” were the condition of their freedom.128 The power of such “natural allies” is well known by colonial and imperialist forces. For instance, it is attested to in “operation ranch hand,” the massive use of defoliant Agent Orange in the Vietnam War, to target the jungle that was the condition of the successful guerrilla insurgency.129 And, as Rob Nixon and Achille Mbembe have noted, it is precisely the...

128See (Haymes 2018; Malm 2018).
129“Dow Chemical Corporation manufactured the infamous chemical herbicide Agent Orange, which is widely viewed as having played a central role in one of the worst cases of toxic warfare and environmental racism in history: the U.S.-Vietnam War. During this war, the U.S. military employed Agent Orange to destroy foliage that offered Vietcong soldiers camouflage. Agent Orange has extraordinarily high concentrations of dioxin, the most toxic substance known to science, and has caused irreparable harm to the health of U.S and Vietnamese soldiers and civilians, as well as Vietnam’s ecosystem. Operation Ranch Hand was the name given to the military campaign involving the dumping of an estimated 12 million gallons of Agent Orange and other chemicals on South Vietnam, causing physical deformities in tens of thousands of children and destroying 14 percent of that nation’s forests. The Vietnamese government recently reported that more than 70,000 of its citizens suffer from medical diseases related to Agent Orange exposure. Other estimates are closer to 1 million because many people who suffer were not born at the time. As one researcher writes, ‘Today the Vietnam ‘war’ is still being waged. The military hostilities are long gone, of course, but some ‘battles’ still rage daily and hourly. These battles are fought quietly, individually—mostly in the blood and body tissue of too many living things—in Vietnam, America, and other far-flung places seemingly unconnected to the war’ (Pellow 2007, 159–60). See also (Vo 2017).
recognition of this complicity by colonial and imperial forces that has led to increasingly sophisticated military technologies and tactics that explicitly target a milieu, resulting in some instances in a “slow violence” that is devastatingly effective and incalculable.\textsuperscript{130}

In contrast to narcissistic fantasies of autarky and sovereignty, Fanon emphasizes the relations of interdependency that not only bind colonizer to colonized, but life to its milieu. Rather than being seen as a hindrance or obstacle to be surmounted, such entangled relations of reciprocity that characterize terrestrial existence are the ground of freedom - by which I mean the creation of forms and visions of life other than those imposed by colonial sovereignty. Fanon writes:

There is not occupation of territory, on the one hand, and independence of persons on the other. It is the country as a whole, its history, its daily pulsation that are contested, disfigured, in the hope of a final destruction. Under these conditions, the individual's breathing is an observed, an occupied breathing. It is a combat breathing. (ADC65/AV300).

In the struggle for liberation, the soil, the sky, and the people are bound together, not simply through the objectifying categories of colonization and attendant violence, but through the force of “combat breath”, the circulation, inhalation, and exhalation of a common air and “aspiration” for another way of life.\textsuperscript{131} As Stephanie Clare argues, for Fanon “the space for politics is the space that life requires to continue living” (Clare 2013, 68). Life as open future-oriented action is compromised and obstructed by the ecological practices of racist environments. Consequently, Anna Agathangelou claims that, “this combat breath of the living disrupts and exceeds the dominant implicit spatial schism of ecology and body, sovereign

\textsuperscript{130}(Mbare 2003, 31; Nixon 2013, 201).
\textsuperscript{131} Informed by a reading of Fanon, Sharpe writes that: “The word that I arrived at for such imagining and for keeping and putting breath back in the Black body in hostile weather is aspiration (and aspiration is violent and lifesaving)” (Sharpe 2016, 113).
subject and its soma or flesh, person and living being (…) in political projects and their desired contingent orders” (Agathangelou 2011, 210).

In sum, Fanon contests and undermines the Manichean Nature/Culture dualism of colonial sovereignty that dictates that the only way of being properly human is to violently dominate and domesticate Nature. Instead, Fanon finds evidence of resistance and freedom in the commonalities that link the colonized population to the territory. The sense of freedom here is therefore not that of freedom-from responsibility and relations with human and more-than-human others, but rather springs from these connections. By extension, what is arguably being fought for by such groups is the capacity to live with a milieu in ways that conflict with the atmospheres of death characteristic of racist environments. In the next section I argue that this is what Rob Nixon misses in his brief engagements with Fanon’s decolonial work.

**DDT: Pests, Waste and Race**

In *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, Rob Nixon offers a hybrid of postcolonial and ecological theory, attending to the diffuse temporalities and wide-reaching effects of environmental violence, as well as its imbrication with longer histories of racism and colonialism. Nixon makes an important point when he cautions readers to remember the ways in which conservationism and whitestream environmentalism has buttressed and served settler colonialism, racism, and eugenics. Consequently, we would perform a grave error if we were to erase this history. Nixon thus advances an important “caveat” regarding his project:

It is tempting to return to influential anticolonial thinkers like Fanon, Césaire, Kenyatta, and Said to unearth overlooked environmental concerns seaming through their work. While there is value in doing so, we should not forget the historical circumstances that,…

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132 I take the term “whitestream” from Sandy Grande, to underscore how mainstream environmentalism is itself racialized since it has developed to serve the interests of whiteness and/or been implicitly developed from a white perspective (Grande 2015).
almost without exception, made such thinkers hostile or indifferent to environmentalists and vice versa. There is a risk of retrofitting flexible contemporary meanings of environmentalism anachronistically to earlier eras when anticolonial struggles over land rights and political independence clashed, again and again, with colonial legacies of conservation that were invariably racist and became emblematic of environmentalism in a decolonizing age. (Nixon 2013, 260-1).

Nixon suggests that what is required is a careful reading that attends to the specificity of the ecopolitical thought that emerges from these different thinkers and their particular moments.

Yet, in the introduction to the book, Nixon offers an almost contradictory reading of the relation of Fanon to what became “emblematic of environmentalism in a decolonizing age.” Nixon notes that “we can certainly read Fanon, in his concern with land as property and as fount of native dignity, with an environmental eye,” yet “our theories of violence today must be informed by a science unavailable to Fanon, a science that addresses environmentally embedded violence that is often difficult to source, oppose, and once set in motion, to reverse” (6–7). Here, Nixon’s point seems to be less that we should be wary of assimilating the ecopolitics of Fanon into the environmentalism that carries the inheritance of racist and colonial conservationism, and more that because of this difference from whitestream environmentalism, we should be cautious of turning to Fanon’s land-based politics as a source of ecological thought. In response to this characterization, I will argue that the sense of ecological freedom that I have begun to explore is precisely what Rob Nixon, in his critical appraisal of the relationship between violence and land in Fanon’s thought, fails to appreciate.

133 In the chapter “Stranger in the Eco-Village: Race, Tourism, and Environmental Time,” Rob Nixon draws on Fanon’s analysis of racism and colonialism, situating contemporary conservation and wildlife tourism in post-Apartheid South Africa within a longer history of colonial spatial and ecological strategies that divide and contain both human and more-humans according to a racialized logic. Yet, here Nixon mostly focuses on Black Skin, White Masks, to unpack the experience of one visitor to the ecovillage.
On Nixon’s view, Fanon’s concern with land is overshadowed by his oppositional vision of violence:

Fanon’s drama of decolonization is (. . .) studded with the overt weaponry whereby subjugation is maintained (. . .) or overthrown (. . .) Yet his temporal vision of violence (. . .) was uncomplicated by the concerns that an as-yet inchoate environmental justice movement (. . .) would raise about lopsided risks that permeate the land long term. (6–7).

Nixon supports this point through a reading of Fanon’s brief discussion of DDT (dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane). I question this quick dismissal of Fanon as an ecological thinker, especially since Fanon is, I contend, attuned to “slow violence”. Returning to the passage in question, I show how it relies on a misreading, and build on it to consider DDT through a Fanonian approach.

First used in the Second World War as an insecticide for the control of the typhoid, malaria, and yellow fever spread by mosquitoes and lice, DDT was widely used for commercial purposes in intensive mono-crop agriculture, before being banned within the United States in 1972. Feted as a “miracle” insecticide, the apparently neutral technological development of DDT emerged in tandem with a racist imaginary that pivoted on fantasies of extermination. As Bonnueil and Fressoz note in regards to the development and use of DDT and other similar pesticides, “During the Second World War, insect phobia and racism mutually fueled one another” (Bonnueil and Fressoz 2017, 134). Such “insect phobia,” logics of extermination, and racism came together in the increasing sophistication and industrialization of technologies of war.

134 “During the Second World War, insect phobia and racism mutually fueled one another: Japanese and Germans were often caricatured with the features of insects, beetles, or vermin to be exterminated by means of chemical insecticides. Nazi Germany took this process of dehumanization to its culmination. Connections both ideological (degeneration, purity, species health) and technological (Zykon B was a pesticide developed by Haber) linked the extermination of pests with that of Jews and others in the death camps” (Bonnueil and Fressoz 2017, 134).
These connections are apposite for understanding the role of DDT in racist environments. The campaign of “eradication” of mosquitoes that was waged in the face the deployment of U.S. military personnel to “tropical regions” in WWII, reflected such a logic, while also drawing on a longer-term imaginary of the tropics as places unsuitable for “civilization,” and inhospitable to settlement by “civilized” peoples. Significantly, the supposedly uncivilized “Nature” of the tropics as spaces of disease, was to some extent an effect of the ecological transformations of colonialism, which allowed for malaria and yellow fever to thrive to new epidemic proportions. This is part of a more general trend in the creation and management of racist environments, where what is an artefact of racist and colonial practices is taken as “primitive Nature.” In the history of DDT, the longer climactic imaginary of the tropics as racialized spaces of disease, combined with large scale projects that carried on this trend: “the massive environmental transformation of Panama added to the mosquito problem there. The disruption of tropical ecosystems created new mosquito breeding grounds, while the influx of human labor made disease transmission more likely” (Kinkela 2011, 87).

The entry of U.S. military into the “tropics” forced a shift. Rather than simply consigning such areas to a kind of primeval moment in human development, it was now imagined that technology and human ingenuity could make such regions “habitable” and brought up to speed with modernity. Not only could disease and hunger be ameliorated, through the use of technology they could be “eradicated” once and for all. DDT was therefore the

135 For a thorough analysis of the significance of this imaginary of the “tropics,” its ties to climactic racism and its enduring legacy in Settler Colonialism and Anti-Blackness see (Asaka 2017).
136 Reified as “hostile, ungovernable” nature, the fabrication of “climactic-geographic differentiation” has typically gone hand in hand with “the ecological othering of colonial subjects” (McBrien 2016, 20). McBrien discusses one instance of this in slave plantations, where the creation of the ‘tropical’ climate through colonial intervention was combined with a variant of climatic racism which reasoned that the solution was to forcibly import ‘uncivilized’ populations deemed to be ‘naturally’ adapted to the climate and thus able to withstand the diseases that had now become a central feature of life there” (ibid.). This “ecological othering of colonial subjects,” has also taken the form of imagining some populations to be natural carriers of disease.
centre of “linear narratives of progress and development that came to define the politics and practices of American cold warriors” and the corresponding strategy of global U.S. dominance and exceptionalism (Kinkela 2011, 57).

One of the uncanny things about DDT exposure is that its effects are so diffuse and far ranging that it is hard to localize both in space and time. It “is associated with increased risk of pancreatic and breast cancer, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, hypertension, impaired neural functions, liver disease, reduced psychomotor function, obesity, elevated cholesterol, and reduced fecundity and other reproductive problems” (Taylor 2014, 7). This slow ecological violence was too subtle for the short-term war-time calculus of survival and annihilation that led to increased research and use of DDT and other persistent organic pollutants (Kinkela 2011, 21).

However, with the publication of texts such as Carson’s *Silent Spring*, which brought the effects of DDT home, it and other Persistent Organic Pollutants were eventually banned within the United States. In response to this domestic legislation, corporations and governments cooperated to export such banned pesticides (and a corresponding dream of progress and development) to the Global South on a massive scale. An export-oriented monocrop model of agricultural production was commonly imposed by the IMF and World Bank on newly decolonized countries as a condition of international loans. This entailed a much higher volume of pesticides than was required in the production of crops for domestic consumption.138 Consequently, industrial pesticides and insecticides (often banned in the Global North) were coercively pushed in the “Green Revolution” that begin in the 70’s.

Now that we have a sense of what DDT is, let us return to Nixon’s reading of Fanon. Nixon claims that, “Fanon, in the opening pages of *Wretched of the Earth*, had comfortably

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138“Between 1988 and 1995, the World Bank financed the purchase of $250.8 million worth of pesticides, mostly from agrochemical TNCs in northern nations, which were then sent to southern nations as part of international development aid packages” (Pellow 2007, 157).
invoked DDT as an affirmative metaphor for anticolonial violence: he called for a DDT-filled spray gun to be wielded as a weapon against the ‘parasites’ spread by the colonials’ Christian church” (Nixon 2013, 6). Turning to the passage in question, we actually find a prescient critique of DDT’s role in (post) colonial environments. Ventriloquizing the colonial psyche, Fanon gives a socio-ecological diagnostic of DDT:

Values are, in fact, irreversibly poisoned and infected as soon as they come into contact with the colonized. The customs of the colonized, their traditions, their myths (. . .) are the very mark of this indigence and innate depravity. This is why we should place DDT, which destroys parasites, carriers of disease, on the same level as Christianity, which roots out heresy, natural impulses, and evil. The decline of yellow fever and the advances made by evangelizing form part of the same balance sheet. (WE7/DT456).

Fanon names DDT in the context of the French colonial government’s attitude toward the colonized as a kind of contaminant or disease. The use of DDT, in Fanon’s account, expresses a total disregard for the values of the colonized, objectifying them through mechanisms of regulation and extermination, including them in the same annihilating calculations as perceived pests. Hence DDT is comparable to Christianity, for both are linked in the “same balance sheet.”

It is noteworthy that Algeria was an early site of U.S. experimentation with strategies of combatting typhus using GNB (barium sulphate) and DDT. The Algerian civilian refusal to unveil or disrobe to receive delousing treatment posed a problem for scientists and researchers who needed access to exposed bodies (the population of prisoners that they had initially used as test subjects presumably had no choice) (Kinkela 2011, 28). The solution, that of using agricultural dusting machines to spray Algerian populations, shows how atmospheric technologies flatten racialized bodies and land into one object to be managed and controlled, connected through the chemicals which percolate through the atmosphere, water, blood, breath
and soil. This solution of crop-dusting, which seeks to promote some forms of life by killing others on a mass scale, disregards the more general well-being of the colonized and their milieu, and continues to suffocate the creation of alternatives to colonial environments. In “Spray,” Vanessa Agard-Jones writes that:

In Martinique, contemporary anxieties about bodies, chemicals, and the environment have coalesced recently around two key issues related to spray: first, relative to concerns about the legacies of the 1972-1993 manual application of an insecticide called chlordécone (kepone) to combat charonçons du bananier (banana borer weevils) on the island’s northern banana plantations, and second, about the more recent aerial application of a variety of fungicides to combat cercosporiose noire (black sigatoka fungus) on those same parcels of land. Épandage aérien (crop-dusting), the spray from ‘up there,’ has re-energized local conversations about environmental contamination, particularly exposures to industrially-produced chemical particles circulating in the air. (Agard-Jones 2014, 1).

*Chlordéchone* is a pesticide that was banned within the EU in 1993 because of its known toxicity. Echoing the more general trend of the “green revolution,” it continued to be imported to the French “departments” of Martinique and Guadeloupe (seemingly exempt from protections for environmental and human health) to treat a “pest’ that threatened the monocrop banana plantations, bananas grown largely for export and domestic French consumption. Large swaths of the waterways, oceans, land and human bodies of Martinique are now poisoned, thus further compromising the Martiniquais’ ability to determine their own future and independence from French rule and imports (Boutrin and Confiant 2007). This case reminds us of Fanon’s emphasis in “combat breath” on the interdependency of land and decolonial freedom. Colonial and imperial knowledge of this interdependency is perversely demonstrated in the strategies used to domesticate and subjugate peoples and land at the same time.
Fanon’s analysis of the Manichean structure of colonial sovereignty therefore proves valuable for considering DDT and other similar Persistent Organic Pollutants. The values of health and progress at work in the industrial use of insecticides and pesticides are premised on the total death of some forms of life. Such technologies aim to optimize and control select strains of (human and more-than-human) life through the purported “eradication” of others. The fantasy in which life can be cleanly opposed to death, and health divorced from sickness, is symptomatic of the Manichean dualism characteristic of racist environments, and the logic of colonial sovereignty. David Pellow captures this point:

What is distinct about pesticides, when compared to other kinds of pollution and waste, is that they are produced for the expressed purpose of killing something, of ending the lives of plants or insects deemed to be invasive or alien pests or weeds in an agricultural context. This is all intended to allow the unfettered production of food—a life-giving substance—but this goal is significantly undermined by the contradiction embodied in killing or poisoning elements of the environment (the soil, water sources, and flora and fauna) that make food production possible (…) Pesticides (…) are created to enable production through the death of significant components of nature. Thus, through pesticide application, we are at once engaged in imagining the environment as a lifegiving resource and as a force with which we are at war. This logic dictates that we must control and do violence to the ecosystem in order to make it work for us. (Pellow 2007, 149).

Promising progress and development through increased food production, pesticides and insecticides have the perverse effect of polluting soil and waterways, and violently upsetting ecosystems. This has the effect of destroying Indigenous and alternative lifeways; eventually

139 Pellow begins to draw some analogies with intrahuman forms of domination here. Although his more recent work has attempted to address links between different forms of domination head-on (2016) Pellow draws our attention to the conflicting valuations of life and death, human and nature, at issue but shies away from exploring them further. “Global inequality” remains his principal analytic frame (150).
rendering the land toxic, either forcing people off it or fabricating increased dependency on agribusiness, aid and “development.”

As we have seen, the Fanonian notion of the racial species-divide gives us a way of making sense of how this Manichean logic of domination and violence cuts across both human and more-than-human worlds. This can help us to think through Pellow’s chilling insight that: “The practice of harming the ecosystem around us in order to produce food for life-sustaining purposes should be cause for concern. The life-harming purpose of pesticides is perhaps most disturbingly obvious in the thousands of suicides by pesticide ingestion over the past several years by farmers in numerous countries in the South who find themselves locked in hopeless spirals of debt to international banks” (ibid.). If the colonized and the land are “natural allies,” then the attempt to wage war on the land through technologies of extermination is in fact an act of self-sabotage.140

Fanon’s sneering dismissal of DDT’s victorious role in the “decline in yellow fever”, clearly cannot be attributed to a disregard for the lives of the colonized. Rather, it is an extension of the point that he makes in “Medicine and colonialism”, namely, that “the colonized native's mistrust of the colonizing technician” and general suspicion towards the purported objectivity of Western science is not due to irrational primitivism or superstition: “Acts of refusal or rejection of medical treatment are not a refusal of life, but a greater passivity before that close and contagious death” (ADC128/AV361).141 The refusal of the “life” imposed by colonialism, in this case through the medical apparatus, is itself a sign of life, or resistance.140

140 This is not to apportion blame on said farmers for the situation that they have systematically been ensnared in, but rather to note the reciprocity of land and people. What we do the land we also do to ourselves.
141 We might also think with “Algeria Unveiled” in which Fanon analyzes the colonial desire and forcible unveiling of colonized women. This is not a benevolent “feminist” intervention, but rather is linked to the Othering of colonized women, routine sexual violence and harassment and a more general attack on their values and world. In case of typhus treatment, such a refusal or reticence to unveil is (not as the colonizer’s would have it) evidence of a “fanatical or religious primitivism” but was in fact grounded in a justified suspicion of the colonial medical apparatus as an attack, since they were upon unveiling and disrobing to be sprayed with toxic chemicals. More generally, we can think about this in relation to communities affected by racist environments who either reject or are further harmed by environmental justice solutions such as buy-outs and relocation, gag settlements, medical research and so forth.
Given Fanon’s analysis of DDT, we should therefore dismiss the temporal lag Nixon posits between *The Wretched of the Earth* and Rachel Carson’s contemporaneous *Silent Spring* (1962), since the passage Nixon uses as an example of the ignorance and obsolescence of Fanon’s thought actually exhibits the “socioenvironmental shift in awareness” he credits Carson with (Nixon 2013, 11).

As we saw with the concept of “combat breath” part of the power of decolonial violence lies in its capacity to make the connections between the self, the life of a people, and the milieu that sustains it clear. I develop this point in the following chapter where I explicitly take up the question of land and its importance for Fanon’s thought of decolonization. I suggest that Fanon leaves us with the question of whether violence can be a creative, disruptive force that shatters Manichean dualisms, or whether it is bound to reproduce and reify them.

From a Fanonian position, the connection of a people and a milieu is not in itself a problem, it is simultaneously a fact of being a living being, the condition of struggle, and its goal. He presents decolonization as the struggle to be able to live with and relate to the environment(s) one inhabits free from the overdetermination of one way of being. The problem, then, is the way in which bodies and land are treated in colonial and imperial strategies. In the next chapter I turn to Fanon’s response to such colonial treatments of land and nature critically exploring the nexus of land, sovereignty and ecological freedom that I argue is at the heart of his vision of decolonization. I ask whether it might provide an alternative to the liberal frames of justice that are currently serve to delimit the horizon of many environmental struggles.
Chapter Three: Heteropatriarchy, Extractivism and the Challenges of Decolonial Sovereignty

Introduction

In the previous chapter I developed a Fanonian approach to racist environments and focused on environments of colonial sovereignty. I argued that colonial sovereignty was characterized by a Manichean division between nature and culture, and constituted through a relation of opposition to and possession of all that it deemed part of nature. Colonial sovereignty creates environments based on the denial of interdependency and reciprocity. I argued that by contrast Fanon begins to develop a sense of ecological freedom that emerges from ecological entanglement and the bonds between life and land as grounds of resistance. These bonds are what colonial sovereignty attempts to constrict. I suggested that Fanon’s insight into ecological freedom can help to explain the significance of land and sovereignty in his vision of decolonization. Fanon’s analysis of colonial sovereignty raises the question of what decolonial sovereignty might mean and how to distinguish between different kinds of sovereignty. This chapter considers what resources Fanon has to respond to this question. My aim is to evaluate whether we can develop Fanon’s theory of decolonization into a framework to understand and orient land-based environmental struggles within and against colonial environments. I argue that Fanon’s analysis of colonial sovereignty as a patriarchal and possessive mode of world inhabitation is useful as a diagnostic since it shows how race, gender, sexuality, extractivism and land dispossession are bound together in a racist environment.

142 Lenape theorist Joanne Barker claims: “Sovereignty is historically contingent. What it has meant and what it currently means belong to the political subjects who have deployed and are deploying it to do the work of defining their relationships with one another, their political agendas, and their strategies (...) Therefore to understand how it matters and for whom, sovereignty must be situated within the historical and cultural relationships in which it is articulated” (Barker 2005, 26).

143 “Extractivism refers to activities that overexploit natural resources destined particularly for export to world markets. As such, it is not limited to minerals and oil: it extends to productive activities which overexploit land,
Extractivism refers to activities that overexploit natural resources destined particularly for export to world markets. As such, it is not limited to minerals and oil: it extends to productive activities which overexploit land, water and biodiversity, such as agribusiness, intensive forestry, industrial fish farming and mass tourism” (Hamouchene 2019, 5). The first two parts of the chapter explore what is valuable about Fanon’s conceptualization of sovereignty for a diagnostic approach. I turn to postcolonial Algeria to illustrate the importance of the linkage of patriarchy and extractivism. I read Fanon as making a distinction between two kinds of sovereignty: one essentially neo-colonial, and the other properly decolonial. The significance of this distinction between sovereignty as proprietorship and sovereignty as appropriation is that it allows us to understand how racist environments persist and mutate and to differentiate between kinds of sovereignty. This distinction means that it is not necessary to reject or dismiss sovereignty altogether. It therefore allows us to counteract the tendency to equate all forms of sovereignty with the pitfalls of postcolonialism such as the state form, heteropatriarchy, xenophobia, and hierarchical power. The problem with the equation of all forms of sovereignty with such tendencies and political forms, is that it can be used to foreclose engagement with movements and demands for Indigenous sovereignty, and other land-based movements, since they are dismissed as necessarily reactionary and exclusionary. Yet, for many decolonial and Indigenous feminist theorists sovereignty is the way that they are challenging the heteropatriarchal, eco-genocidal violence of (settler) nation states (Betaxamosake Simpson 2015; Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill 2013). Indigenous theorists such as Glen Coulthard (Yellow Knives Dene) and Eve Tuck (Unangax) have turned to Fanon as a way

water and biodiversity, such as agribusiness, intensive forestry, industrial fish farming and mass tourism” (Hamouchene 2019, 5).

144 Decolonial feminist Andrea Smith comments on this tendency: “In these ‘postcolonial’ times, terms such as sovereignty and nation have gone out of fashion (...) Nationalism and sovereignty, it is suggested, inevitably lead to xenophobia, intolerance, factionalism, and violence (...) the assumptions behind some of this analysis are that nations can be equated with nation-states and that the end goal of a national liberation struggle must be the attainment of a state or statelike form of governance” (Smith 2008, 311).

145 This is not to erase the debates regarding sovereignty in Indigenous thought and nations. See (Barker 2005; Goeman 2015)
of critiquing social justice framings of Indigenous struggles and to insist on transformed relationships with land as a criterion of properly decolonial sovereignty (Coulthard 2014; Tuck and Yang 2012). In the final section I argue the same body of work that explores the value of Fanon for conceptualizing decolonial sovereignty also highlights a number of problems with how Fanon conceptualizes it, particularly in regards to gender, sexuality, and land. When comparatively and critically read through the lens of Indigenous decolonization, it appears that the same issues on which Fanon is most promising also evidence the limits of his vision of decolonization. My claim is that Fanonian decolonization begins to move away from the sense of ecological freedom that I had read in his work. I suggest that one explanation for this shift and the related limitations is Fanon’s failure to consider non-colonial culture as a viable source of alternatives futures. My claim is not that we need to abandon Fanon or the frame of sovereignty altogether. Instead, we might use Fanon’s critical analysis of colonial sovereignty as proprietorship, in order to understand how extractivism, racism, and heteropatriarchy come together in environments of colonial sovereignty (however nominally postcolonial they may be) and guard against its reproduction in land-based environmental struggles. At the same time, we might perform an immanent critique of how Fanon envisioned decolonization proper that returns to the sense of ecological freedom that I argue he begins to explore but does not develop fully.

This chapter takes a different route than the one Sylvia Wynter proposed. In Chapter One I understood this route as the rejection of territorial sovereignty altogether in favor of a uniquely human “ontological sovereignty.” By contrast, my conclusion is not that we should dismiss land-based frameworks of sovereignty and radical decolonial movements, but rather that attending to these movements raises important challenges to how race, ecology, and freedom have tended to be thought in liberal, postcolonial, and Africana thought.
1. Possession: Land and Women in Colonial Sovereignty

In this section I develop the Fanonian analysis of the racist environments of colonial sovereignty that I began in Chapter Two, and consider how patriarchy and extractivism are interwoven in the imaginary of sovereignty as possession. Recall that Fanon sought to identify and overcome the interlocking set of Manichean dualisms which organize environments of colonial sovereignty, namely, “Nature/Culture” and the racial-species divide between human and “native.” In this chapter I turn to Fanon’s analysis of the role that the possession of Indigenous women and land plays in colonial imaginaries and strategies, and show how racialized regimes of gender and sexuality are interwoven with the aforementioned dualisms. I argue that Fanon’s attention to patriarchy adds an essential dimension that we need to consider in diagnoses of racist environments. Taking this into account means that properly decolonial sovereignty would not only need to challenge the overcome the Manicheanism of the racial divide and the colonial categorization of the natural world, but also patriarchy. I develop Fanon’s account to argue that racialized regimes of heteropatriarchy are integral to the (re)production of the racist environments of colonial sovereignty. Heteropatriarchy is a way to name a society characterized by male political, social, economic, and cultural dominance and leadership, often modelled on a patriarchal family structure, itself predicated on dualistic and hierarchical concepts of gender, and normative heterosexuality. The context, history, and related features which shape the environments that can be said to share these characteristics mean that they will be different and variable. These differences and complexities should not be overlooked. For example, in the case of Algeria, I explore how heteropatriarchy is bound up with the history of colonial domination (of both men and women) even if it is irreducible to it. While emphasizing that heteropatriarchy undergoes mutations and has culturally and

146 When I use the capitalized term Nature I am referring to a socially constructed category that plays a central role in the colonial order. See Chapter Two for a fuller explanation of this point.
historically specific nuances and forms, I also stress how in Algeria, as well as many other post- and anti-colonial visions of national sovereignty, it acts as an important thread of continuity which binds such projects to the very structures of colonialism that these movements aimed to break with. To be clear, these categories of gender and sexuality are not free-standing and universal, but rather form part of dynamic systems that inform and sustain each other. Consequently, overcoming one of the aforementioned dualisms also requires overcoming the others.

In this section I focus on two pieces from *A Dying Colonialism*, “Algeria Unveiled” and “The Algerian Family,” to show that through a Fanonian lens we can see how race, gender, sexuality and the Manichean category of “Nature” are interwoven in racist environments of colonial sovereignty. In “Algeria Unveiled,” Fanon analyzes the place of Algerian women in the colonial “dream of a total domestication of Algerian society” (ADC39/AV276). Early on, Fanon notes the internal heterogeneity of Algerian women in terms of class, ethnic group and location, alerting us to the point that Kabyle or Amazigh, and rural women tend not to wear the veil (36/273-4). Fanon’s focus on the veil as the central node of colonial strategies and fantasies of domestication is therefore not due to the fact that it is worn by all Algerian women. Rather, Fanon is concerned with the colonial perception which does not register the internal heterogeneity of the colonized, seeing only a great homogenous mass of Algerian women. Taken as a sign of Algerian identity, the veil “was to become the bone of contention in a grandiose battle, on account of which the occupation forces were to mobilize their most powerful and most varied resources, and in the course of which the colonized were to display

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147 As Val Plumwood puts it, “The set of interrelated and mutually reinforcing dualisms which permeate Western culture forms a fault-line which runs through its entire conceptual system. While the human/nature contrast is one of the more recent of these dualisms, like the others, it can be fully understood only as part of the interrelated set. Each of them has crucial connections to other elements, and has a common structure with other members of the set. They should be seen as forming a system, an interlocking structure” (Plumwood 1993, 42-3).

148 From this point on unless stated otherwise parenthetical references for Fanon will be to essays published in *A Dying Colonialism* (Fanon 1994). See (Fanon 2011) for French citations.
a surprising inertia” (274/37). This “inertia” should recall my discussion in Chapter Two of Fanon’s claim that within racist environments of colonial sovereignty, the land is a “natural ally” of the colonized (WE220/DT661). That which the colonizer perceives as innate inferiority, natural wildness, and sterility, are in fact signs of passive resistance to the colonial strategies of domestication which target both the colonized population and land.149

Fanon’s remark in Wretched, that “the Algerians, the women dressed in haïks, the palm groves, and the camels form a landscape, the natural backdrop for the French presence (…) Colonization has succeeded once this untamed Nature has been brought under control” (WE182/DT626) is relevant for understanding the role of heteropatriarchy in environments of colonial sovereignty. In Colonial Lives of Property, Brenna Bhandar shows how “colonial representations of indigenous land” present it “as feminized, available for appropriation, or as waste land in need of being rendered fertile through cultivation” (Bhandar 2018, 30). The colonial feminization of the land is tied to the construction of a racialized regime of gender. The construction of “Nature” on the one hand, and colonized women on the other, are in fact two sides of the same process. In colonial environments both colonized women and land are viewed as “available for appropriation,” or in “need of being rendered fertile through cultivation” (ibid.). Colonial Algeria was no exception to this tendency. On Jennifer Sessions’ account: “debate about Algerian colonization was premised on observers’ beliefs about the nature of the Algerian soil and couched in the sexualized language of fertility and sterility. Advocates of settlement argued from an almost blind faith in Algeria’s fabulous fecundity, while opponents denounced the soil as barren” (Sessions 2017, 208).150

149 My use of the term land is shorthand for “land/water/air/subterranean earth” and for the relationships that connect both human and more-than-human beings with these entities (Tuck and Yang 2012, 5). This relational aspect is ignored and disrupted by settler colonial relations to land as territory or property.  
150 “The arguments of anticolonialists quickly lost traction, however, and colonialists’ claims about the great beauty and fertility of the land gained a nearly unimpeachable position in the French imagination” (Sessions 2017, 208).
availability and need for improvement is linked to the “emasculaton” of colonized men since they are deemed unable to manage colonized women and land properly.

As T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting notes, the symbolic and material “Western penetration” of Algerian women was tied to the possession and domestication of the land: “it was hoped that the unveiled women would, like tilled, fertile soil, facilitate the sowing of Western colonial seeds throughout Algeria” (Sharpley-Whiting 1998, 66). Just as the colonial discourse of improvement promises to increase the yield and productivity of land and advance life through “modernizing” and “civilizing” agriculture, infrastructure, and extractive industries, while in fact serving the ends of domination and (in a settler colony) the attempted elimination of the “natives”, so too, on Fanon’s account, will the seemingly benevolent and feminist “modernizing” colonial interventions that target Algerian woman, serve as means to the ends of domestication and (dis)possession.

In the colonial imaginary, nature is essentialized, yet the content of this essence is unstable, often reflecting multiple, sometimes contradictory meanings. This extends to the “native women” collapsed into it. What unites the meanings attributed to both nature and colonized women is the need for domestication. We can see this in Fanon’s analysis of the ethnographic and sociological studies used by the colonial apparatus:

Beneath the patrilineal pattern of Algerian society, the specialists described a structure of matrilineal essence (…) the Algerian woman, an intermediary between obscure forces and the group, appeared in this perspective to assume a primordial importance. Behind the visible, manifest patriarchy, the more significant existence of a

151 Those communities who lived as rational, productive economic actors, evidenced by particular forms of cultivation, were deemed to be proper subjects of law and history; those who did not were deemed to be in need of improvement as much as their waste lands were. Prevailing ideas about racial superiority were forged through nascent capitalist ideologies that rendered race contingent on specific forms of labor and property relations. Property ownership was not just contingent on race and notions of white supremacy; race too, in the settler colonial context, was and remains subtended by property logics that cast certain groups of people, ways of living, producing, and relating to land as having value worthy of legal protection and force” (Bhandar 2018, 8-9).
basic matriarchy was affirmed. The role of the Algerian mother, that of the grandmother, the aunt and the ‘old woman,’ were inventoried and defined. (ADC37-8/275).

Fanon continues: “this enabled the colonial administration to define a precise political doctrine: ‘If we want to destroy the structure of Algerian society, its capacity for resistance we must first of all conquer the women’” (ibid.). Here Fanon brings to our attention an important point also made by many decolonial and Indigenous feminists. Namely, that colonized women are seen as passive victims or objects of colonized men in need of rescue through assimilation into colonial norms of heteropatriarchal bourgeois gender and sexuality, while at the same time, they are viewed as centers of a threatening and mysterious matriarchal order integral to the societies in question.152 In the case of many Indigenous nations, such a strategy (despite its skewed perception of the societies in question) was devastatingly effective, and the plan to “conquer the women” was integral to the attempted destruction of the society in question and the dispossession of land.153

In colonial strategies the agency of colonized women is thus simultaneously acknowledged and denied; a denial that sanctions a strategy of domestication and control. Fanon writes: “the dominant administration solemnly undertook to defend this woman, pictured as humiliated, sequestered, cloistered … it described the immense possibilities of woman, unfortunately transformed by the Algerian man into an inert, demonetized, indeed dehumanized object” (ADC38/275). Denouncing the barbaric backwardness of colonized men the colonial administration performs the very objectification of colonized women that it decries: “converting the woman, winning her over to foreign values, was at the same time

152 “European explorers and settlers who ‘described Aboriginal women of the plains as slaves and drudges’ bequeathed their racist-sexist imagery to colonial administrators and modern-day anthropologists, who in their turn saw reserve life as a way of providing aboriginal women with the potential for respectable domesticity” (Bhandar 2018, 159-60).
153 The 1886 Indian Act in Canada is a significant example. It instated patrilineal conditions of “Indian Status” dispossessing First Nations Women, while instating patriarchal structures of governance and land ownership that continue to constrict the lives of Indigenous women and notions of Indigenous sovereignty. See (Bhandar 2018; Barker 2008). See (Maria Lugones 2010) for an analysis of this process in the forging of global, colonial modernity.
achieving a real power over the men and attaining a practical, effective means of destructuring Algerian culture” (39/276). Colonial sovereignty thus understands colonized women as mere pawns in its game of conquest and possession that it can manipulate and use at will.

Recall Fanon’s analysis of how the “zoological” register is used by the colonizers to refer to the colonized. In Chapter Two I read it as an expression of the Manichean divide of “Nature/Culture,” particularly the racial-species divide, and what Ghassan Hage describes as “an everyday practical orientation toward the Other” (Hage 2017, 10). As Achille Mbembe notes towards the end of his reading of “On Violence”: “what holds for the animal holds for the colonized, as what holds for the act of colonizing holds for the act of hunting” (Mbembe 2001, 193). On the basis of this analysis, we can see that the colonial “commonplace” remark regarding Algerian women, that “Islam still holds its prey” is instructive. Given the colonial view of nature, the perception of the colonized (woman) as prey serves as an instruction and license for gratuitous violence and possession. Colonized women are imagined as vulnerable possessions without agency that can be used and molded either by colonial or colonized men. At the same time, colonized men are imagined as both predator and prey; they lack the fully human attributes of self-consciousness, reason, and maturity, which would allow them to differentiate between different religions and cultural practices. On Fanon’s account, “the method of presenting the Algerian as a prey fought over with equal ferocity by Islam and France with its Western culture reveals the whole approach of the occupier” (41/279). This remark indicates “that the occupier, smarting from his failures, presents in a simplified and pejorative way the system of values by means of which the colonized person resists his innumerable offensives” (ibid.).

154 “What is in fact the assertion of a distinct identity, concern with keeping intact a few shreds of national existence, is attributed to religious, magical, fanatical behavior” (41/279).
The “sadistic” and possessive view of Algerian women is revealed in the “oneiric fantasies” and desires of the colonizer, who imagine unveiling in violent terms of possession and rape, where unveiling is tantamount to “breaking her resistance, making her available for adventure” (43/282). According to Fanon, beneficent feminist interventions barely conceal the European man’s “will to bring this woman within his reach, to make her a possible object of possession” (44/281). This view of colonized women as possessions is not limited to European men. Fanon highlights the active role that white women play in this strategy of domestication and possession. Their involvement takes a number of forms that when thought together evidence the way in which essentialization does not entail stable meanings, but rather allows for the projection of contradictory meanings onto the object in question. The involvement of colonial women takes the form of “mutual aid societies” that gave essential food stuffs to colonized women in exchange for discourses of women’s solidarity and liberal proto-feminist propaganda.155 Yet, this discourse of “sisterhood” and equality was combined with the denigration of Algerian women who wear the veil as deceptive and promiscuous merchants of their bodies.156 In response to the Algerian women who do unveil and assimilate, “European women will exclaim, ‘these unveiled women are quite amoral and shameless’” leading Fanon to conclude that, “integration, in order to be successful, seems indeed to have to be simply a continued, accepted paternalism” (44/282). In this respect, Fanon anticipates Black and decolonial analyses which highlight white women’s central role in the oppression and

155“Mutual aid societies and societies to promote solidarity with Algerian women sprang up in great number. Lamentations were organized. The indigent and famished women were the first to be besieged. Every kilo of semolina distributed was accompanied by a dose of indignation against the veil and the cloister. The indignation was followed up by practical advice. Algerian women were invited to play ‘a functional, capital role’ in the transformation of their lot. They were pressed to say no to a centuries- old subjection. The immense role they were called upon to play was described to them. The colonial administration invested great sums in this combat. After it had been posited that the woman constituted the pivot of Algerian society, all efforts were made to obtain control over her” (38/276).

156For example, Fanon describes how in response to the wearing of the veil white women “claimed that the intention is to mislead the customer, and that the wrapping in which the ‘merchandise’ is presented does not really alter is nature, nor its value” (45/282).
domination of colonized and racialized women. They therefore shift attention from the default whitestream feminist focus on the patriarchy as the source of oppression (a focus which as Fanon suggests can be used to cloak and further the domination of colonized women) to a more nuanced analysis of how racialized-regimes of gender and sexuality operate, and are formed in accordance with colonial and racist ends of possession, domination, and dispossession. In Sharpley-Whiting’s words, “Fanon reveals the hypocrisy of these ‘colonialist’ feminists; he points to the reality of the unequal distribution of intragender power as well as the complicity and benefits derived from the expropriation of resources, raw materials, and labor to colonialist women at the mere cost of Algerian cultural identity” (Sharpley-Whiting 1998, 67 emphasis added). Fanon’s critique of a variant of liberal feminism as a tool of colonialism suggests that the struggles of colonized women for liberation will take a different form. However, it is important to note how this analysis might lend itself to a response which identifies feminism tout court with colonialism and imperialism, a response which we will see has unfortunately characterized the postcolonial situation of Algeria.

Those Algerian women who did unveil and assimilate were not welcomed into a progressive society of gender equality. Rather, “these test-women, with bare faces and free bodies, henceforth circulated like sound currency in the European society of Algeria” (42/279). The equivalence of dispossessed Algerian women’s bodies with “currency” and the circuits of exchange and accumulation offers some insight into the linkage of desire and the “racial regime of ownership” of colonial sovereignty; a regime founded in the dispossession of the land and its transformation into domesticated possessions, or territories.158

157This has led some Indigenous and Black women and women theorists to eschew the label feminism – since they see it as bound to the white women who were involved in their oppression. For an account of this debate see (Arvin, Tuck, and Morril 2013). For analyses of white women’s active engagement in the oppression of Indigenous women see for example, “Whitestream Feminism and the Colonialist Project: Toward a Theory of the Indigenista” in (Grande 2015). For white women’s oppression of black women see, for example (Hartman 1997, 157-161).

158 The term “racial regime of ownership” comes from Brenna Bhandar but is also informed by the account of colonial sovereignty that I developed in the previous chapter through my reading of Fanon. Bhandar advances a similar reading: “thinking through his concept of ‘epidermalization’ (whereby the racial schema of colonization
Fanon develops an analysis of the figure of the colonial sovereign as gendered and racialized, that is, white and masculine. In this respect Fanon is close to ecofeminist philosopher Val Plumwood’s analysis of “the master” and the dualistic logic of Western/colonial reason. Plumwood argues that:

The key exclusions and denials of dependency for dominant conceptions of reason in Western culture include not only the feminine and nature, but all those human orders treated as nature and subject to denied dependency. Thus it is the identity of the master (rather than a masculine identity pure and simple) defined by these multiple exclusions which lies at the heart of Western culture. (Plumwood 1993, 42).

In terms close to Fanon’s analysis of Manichaeanism, Plumwood identifies this identity with “the dominant conception of reason”, as one that “gives rise to a dualised structure of otherness and negation” (ibid.). Similarly, for Fanon this structure of consciousness is constructed through a set of Manichean dualisms – where the supposed masculinity and freedom of the sovereign is constituted through his opposition to the “Nature” and “native” women that he violently masters, objectifies, and possesses. Fanon claims that:

the history of the French conquest in Algeria, including the overrunning of villages by the troops, the confiscation of property and the raping of women, the pillaging of a country, has contributed to the birth and crystallization of the same dynamic image. At the level of the psychological strata of the occupier, the evocation of this freedom given to the sadism of the conqueror, to his eroticism, creates faults, fertile gaps. (45/282).

Once again, Fanon links conquest and the dispossession of land to the colonial possession of Indigenous women: “we witness here a double deflowering” (ibid.). Such a form of absolute power and violence, in which land (and the women equated with it) are transformed in

is grafted onto the figure of le nègre and resides parasitically on black skin), alongside the critique of colonial and anti-colonial bourgeois nationalism in the later Wretched of the Earth, one gleans how relations of ownership, propriety, and racial subjectivity can be better grasped through a more expansive understanding of property law as a form of colonial domination” (Bhandar 2018, 5).
accordance with the sovereign’s needs and desires, is constitutive of this sense of selfhood and “freedom,” a freedom that is “the sadism of the conqueror.” This allows us to see how patriarchy and exploitative and dominating relations with the land are interwoven. It also offers insight into an important point that Bhandar makes. On this account, the possessive, patriarchal subject is “defined in contradistinction to the racial, gendered subject of colonial domination” such that the “very concepts of appropriation and ownership were shaped, in the colonial context, by a thoroughly racial and gendered logic” (Bhandar 2018, 152). I go on to show that Fanon’s analysis of how possession and patriarchy are linked in colonial sovereignty, and thus his critique of sovereignty-as-possession, gives us tools to understand how the underlying structure of colonial environments may be taken up and reproduced up by colonized (and postcolonial) subjects.

**Petrification and Patriarchy**

As we have seen, colonial strategies of “improvement” and assimilation seek to dissolve and eliminate the colonized society as a distinct entity, and by extension liquidate decolonial resistance and claims to land. For Fanon, this means that the “inertia” is a sign of “the phenomena of resistance observed in the colonized,” which “must be related to an attitude of counter-assimilation, of maintenance of a cultural, hence national, originality” (42/279). Fanon argues that supposedly traditional gender norms such as the wearing of the *haik* and an insistence on Islamic Arab culture are not the signs of an essentially static and backward people.

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159 Fanon’s analysis of the possessive and patriarchal relation to colonized land and women is also close to what Aileen Moreton-Robinson (Quandamooka) calls the “possessive logics of patriarchal white sovereignty” (Moreton-Robinson 2015, xi). Moreton-Robinson claims that the possessive, patriarchal logic that she describes might be understood as a “mode of rationalization, rather than a set of positions” which a range of subjects can “embbody” (Moreton-Robinson 2015, xi, xii).

160 For example, “when Manifest Destiny is reexamined at the intersection of colonization and patriarchy, it is evident that the strategy is not at all benign, but a convenient rationale that has permitted genocide. Manifest Destiny relied upon gendered and arrogant notions of the dominion of man over the earth” (Arvin, Tuck, and Morril 2013, 26).
(as the colonial “specialists” would have it) but rather are “phenomena of resistance.” It was the colonizer’s attacks: “that were to provoke the native’s bristling resistance. The deliberately aggressive intentions of the colonialist with respect to the haïk gave a new life to this dead element of the Algerian cultural stock – dead because stabilized, without any progressive change in form or color” (47/284). Fanon goes on to claim that, “we here recognize one of the laws of the psychology of colonization. In an initial phase, it is the action, the plans of the occupier that determine the centers of resistance around which a people’s will to survive becomes organized” (47/284). What Fanon describes as the inertia and petrification of the colonized culture is therefore an effect of a situation of constraint – that is, the constriction of the flourishing of the dominated society.

While this passivity is itself a sign of life within and against “an atmospheric death” it is on Fanon’s account only one moment that must ultimately be overcome (Fanon 1994, 128/AV361).

It is the white man who creates the Negro. But it is the Negro who creates negritude. To the colonialist offensive against the veil, the colonized opposes the cult of the veil. What was an undifferentiated element in a homogenous whole acquires a taboo character and the attitude of a given Algerian woman with respect to the veil will be constantly related to her overall attitude with respect to the foreign occupation. (47/284).

Here Fanon anticipates some of the issues that will dog Algerian and other postcolonial nationalisms, namely, the ways in which anti-colonial resistance can take the form of a rigid adherence to petrified customs and traditions, themselves artefacts of colonial encounter. Fanon explains: “holding out against the occupier on this precise element means inflicting upon

161 “The colonialists’ relentlessness, his methods of struggle were bound to give rise to reactionary forms of behavior on the part of the colonized. In the face of the violence of the occupier, the colonized found himself defining a principled position with respect to a formerly inert element of the native cultural configuration” (46/283).
him a spectacular setback; it means more particularly maintaining ‘co-existence’ as a form of conflict and latent warfare. It means keeping up the atmosphere of an armed truce” (ibid.). The life and identity of the nation thus becomes identified with the behavior and comportment of colonized women, who are now burdened with maintaining its existence in opposition to the colonial stranglehold. Fanon’s comparison of “the cult of the veil” and negritude is important, since it underscores how in both situations the dominated respond by elevating cultural aspects of their identity in opposition to the white-colonial world. However, Fanon argues that this response by racialized groups overlooks the fact that both Black and “Arab” identity, are to some extent artefacts fabricated by the dominating force.162 Such a response thus risks turning into the “cult of the veil,” reproducing the Manicheanism of colonial sovereignty and by extension its identification of freedom with mastery and possession.

In the colonial era Algerian men were presented as emasculated – a connection that underscored the imbrication of race, gender, sexuality, and land. In “En-gendering the Nation-State: Women, Patriarchy and Politics in Algeria,” Malika Mehdid tracks the repercussions of this perceived emasculation. She explains that:

Western hegemony is equated with maleness, the dominated is associated with the female principle, the former having entered history through conquest and rape of the land/culture defeated, the latter having been vanquished in its forced subjection to the colonial act, chased out of history. In a symbolic formulation, the land, culture and community thus conquered have become 'feminized', that is, made to correspond to a model of femininity, resisting and yielding to a movement thrusting forward for conquest and domination. (Mehdid 1996, 80).

162Fanon makes this argument in Black Skin, White Masks, “White civilization and European culture have imposed an existential deviation on the black. We shall demonstrate further that what is called the black soul is a construction by white folk” (BSxivii/PN68). Fanon argued that negritude essentialized a racist construction of blackness while avoiding engagement with the material and political conditions that produced it. See (WE154-7/DT594-7)
Fanon suggests that in response to this perceived “feminization,” the space of the home and the regulation of supposedly traditional relations governing gender and sexuality becomes the means by which Algerian men tend to “re-establish” their “collapsed sovereignty” (ADC104/337). There is a danger then that masculinity may be re-established through a Manichean divide between it and realms devalued by colonialism (namely, nature and women) understood as possessions. This move retrenches the dualistic logic of the colonial world even as it attempts to resist it. The equation of women with “tradition,” and the biological and social reproduction of the nation is in essence not substantially different from the colonial view of colonized women, their metaphorical equation with the natural world, and their strategical significance in the colonial dispossession and “improvement” of land. On Fanon’s account decolonization proper will entail a dialectical transformation of the petrified relations of gender and sexuality that characterized the colonial world.

2. Extractivism and Heteropatriarchy in Postcolonial Algeria

In this section I turn to postcolonial Algeria, to show how a Fanonian diagnostic approach allows the linkages between extractivism, heteropatriarchy, and the imaginary of sovereignty (as proprietorship) to come into view. I argue that this relation (in which sovereignty is understood in terms of mastery and ownership of both women and land) is integral to racist environments of colonial sovereignty, as well as the sense of sovereignty that has tended to animate anti- and post-colonial nationalisms. Taking this into consideration is crucial for grasping how postcolonial projects tend to reproduce the extractivism and heteropatriarchy of colonialism, albeit in modified form. As the case of Algeria shows, this understanding of sovereignty tends to backfire in various ways, as evidenced, for example, in the disastrous effects of climate change that are currently manifesting in the region, and the political instability, hierarchy, imperial control, and far reaching impacts on human health that
come with the environmental degradation of extractivism (El Zein and et al. 2014). We might also think of other examples such as Syria and Bolivia where the attempt to establish national sovereignty through extractivism has similarly backfired (Gürcan 2019; Andrade 2016). In sum, the general effect of this form of sovereignty is a “boomerang effect” where the very means that are used to establish (national) sovereignty erode it.

Fanon did not articulate a theory of sovereignty as such, although the concept peppers his work. In Fanon’s decolonial work sovereignty arguably has two senses - one critical and one affirmative. Understanding the relation and meaning of the two is crucial for grasping how Fanon’s understanding of decolonization as a process of “national liberation” (WE1/DT451) is meant to open onto a new humanism. What differentiates the two senses of sovereignty are the concepts of possession, or proprietorship, on the one hand, and appropriation on the other.

Fanon’s critiques of sovereignty are aimed at notions of that equate it with proprietorship. In this first sense, sovereignty is understood as ownership of land and property by members of the nation. The problem with this notion in which the formerly colonized “imagined he could switch straight from colonized subject to sovereign citizen of an independent nation” is that it fails to grasp the kind of transformations that would be needed for decolonization (WE88/DT532). Such transformations exceed the transfer of property and land into different hands or even their nationalization. On Ato Sekyi-Otu’s account, Fanon: “finds the nationalist understanding of the dialectic of alienation and appropriation woefully inadequate” (Sekyi-Otu 1997, 209). This is because like Marx, Fanon understands that “‘alienation’ is only superficially

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163 The coup of Bolivian president Morales soon after his announcement of the country’s lithium deposits is particularly interesting since lithium is used in many “green” technologies such as the batteries of electric cars made by companies such as Tesla.

164 Aimé Césaire first proposed this term in to capture the process by which “the colonizer, who in order to ease his conscience gets into the habit of seeing the other man as an animal accustoms himself to treating him like an animal, and tends objectively to transform himself into an animal.” This is “the boomerang effect of colonization” (Césaire 2001, 41).

165 In respect to this double sense of sovereignty my reading is indebted to Sekyi-Otu’s argument in the chapter “Political Judgement” (Sekyi-Otu 1997). However, our positions on the value and status of appropriation are importantly different (as becomes clear in the final part of this chapter).
an expression of the ownership and nonownership of the object and products; only in a symptomatic sense a function of the status of capitalist and worker as proprietor and nonproprietor” (Sekyi-Otu 1997, 209). A change in who occupies the role of “proprietor” would not overcome the alienation of the colonized world since “the fundamental fault resides in ‘the activity of alienation’ – that is to say, in the nonvoluntary, coercive, and dehumanizing nature of the worker’s work” (ibid.). Insofar as sovereignty is understood as mere ownership of land, resources, and property then it risks perpetuating the alienation and Manicheanism that had characterized the colonial world in a new guise. The affirmative sense of sovereignty that Fanon will explore is therefore distinct from concepts of rights or proprietorship.166

Fanon’s assessment of how the leadership of the postcolonial nation might be co-opted by a group whose interests entail a continuation of colonial sovereignty in new forms is particularly salient in the case of Algeria. On Fanon’s account, what he terms “the national bourgeoisie” lacks the dynamism of a true bourgeoisie (understood in terms of relations of production).167 Although they enthusiastically mime a “slogan of independence,” in fact “the national bourgeoisie replaces the former European settlers” (WE99,100/DT455,456). The sense of sovereignty that they parrot is essentially abstract and formal, since “its vocation is not to transform the nation but prosaically serve as a conveyer belt for capitalism, forced to camouflage itself behind the mask of neocolonialism” (WE100-101/DT546). Fanon suggests that this relation of hierarchical rule by members of the postcolonial nation who equate sovereignty with proprietorship, might apply to socialist as well as capitalist postcolonial

166The distinction between the two senses of sovereignty is evident in Fanon’s statement that: “this dignity has nothing to do with ‘human’ dignity. The colonized subject has never heard of such an ideal (…) The famous dictum which states that all men are equal will find its illustration in the colonies only when the colonized subject states he is equal to the colonist. Taking it a step further, he is determined to fight to be more than the colonist. In fact, he has already decided to take his place” (WE9/DT458).
167Fanon suggests that the national bourgeoisie is not really a class in a materialist sense, since “this economy has always developed outside their control. As for the present and potential resource of their country’s soil and subsoil, their knowledge is purely academic and approximate” (WE99/DT545). The national bourgeoisie is defined not by its productive activity, but rather by its psychological identification with the “Western bourgeoisie in its negative and decadent aspects,” which it mimics “without having accomplished the initial phases of exploration and invention that are the assets of the Western bourgeoisie whatever the circumstances” (WE101/DT546).
nations. The nationalization of the country’s assets is not a sufficient condition for decolonial sovereignty. According to Fanon it is not enough for anti-colonial struggles to uncritically assume that socialism is the only alternative to the living death of (colonial) capitalism: “The country finds itself under new management, but in actual fact everything has to be started over from scratch, everything has to be rethought. The colonial system, in fact, was only interested in certain riches, certain natural resources, to be exact those that fueled its industries” (ibid. emphasis added). Fanon’s critique of sovereignty as proprietorship and its links with extractivism and patriarchy helps to elucidate the postcolonial trajectory of Algeria.

Ravaged by colonialism and war, the nascent Algeria possessed little apart from its exceptionally rich land and resources. As Miriam R. Lowi notes in Oil Wealth and the Poverty of Politics, “the country has the eleventh largest oil reserves in the world, it is particularly rich in condensates and natural gas; indeed, it possesses the world’s fifth largest proven natural gas reserves” (Lowi 2009, 83). These resources, and their control, ownership, and exploitation appeared as the one source of strength and survival for a decolonized Algeria. The new nation was born in the wake of far reaching nuclear fallout and it was built on the revenues from its oil and gas reserves. The territorial and resource sovereignty of the new Algerian nation was enshrined in “the Evian Accords, a treaty signed in March 1962 in Evian-les-Bains (France) by the Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic and the French Fifth Republic” (Henni 2017, 32). Negotiated by an almost entirely male Algerian committee, it “granted France access to military test sites on the Algerian Saharan soil - among other privileges, including oil and gas extractions” (ibid.).

168“From February 1960 to February 1966, France thus detonated 17 nuclear bombs in the Algerian Sahara, spreading radioactive nuclear fallout across Algeria, Central and West Africa, and the Mediterranean (including Southern Europe): and causing irreversible contaminations among human, animal, vegetal, and the environment” (Henni 2017, 29). “Oil had been discovered in Algeria in 1957, and by the end of the 1960s it became the principal source of export income for the government. Between 1966 and 1971, the oil sector and all other foreign concerns were completely nationalized. Oil rents, transiting through state-owned enterprises (SOEs) that controlled close to 80 percent of all economic activity, were invested in rapid growth via far-reaching development projects” (Lowi, 2009, 83).
The “all-convincing image of strength and coherence” of the period of 1965-78 (Mehdid 1996, 81) was secured by “massive redistribution, made possible through the availability of oil revenues and abandoned colonial property” (Lowi 2009, 83). For a time, these “went a long way to purchasing social peace,” including the largely unquestioning support of women (ibid.). Yet, such redistribution created new forms of inequality even as it seemed to radically remedy them. It deferred questions of internal difference within the nation, most notably gender, ethnicity, race, language, and class, while intensifying the mass exodus of peasants from their land and urbanization that had begun in the colonial era (Lowi 2009, 84). This period of postcolonial Algeria’s history recalls Fanon’s cautions regarding state socialism that understands sovereignty as proprietorship of the nation’s land and resources.

The wealth and power that flowed with the extraction of the country’s natural resources was redistributed according to a hierarchical and patriarchal order, with preference given to those loyal to the men already in power: “external rents played an instrumental role in this process, egging on the already considerable patrimonial tendencies that characterized le système” (Lowi 2009, 82). On Fanon’s account, what remains despite the change of hands and the nationalization of property, is a relation in which the postcolonial citizenry is treated as objects. New leaders treat the people “like a herd” and the country continues to be managed and organized on the basis of the prerogatives of resource extraction (WE127DT570).

By contrast with sovereignty as proprietorship, Fanon suggests that properly decolonial sovereignty could come about through appropriation. In distinction to the “dehumanizing nature of the worker’s work,” through appropriation subjects establish a dialectic between self and world, subject and object, freedom and necessity. Sovereignty understood as appropriation means the capacity to create oneself and the nation anew. What is appropriated are the material and symbolic givens of the situation that might be selectively taken up and creatively affirmed.
through praxis.169 This is how Fanon describes: “the violence which governed the ordering of the colonial world (...) this same violence will be vindicated and appropriated when, taking history into their own hands, the colonized swarm into the forbidden cities” (WE6/DT455). In this moment the colonized transform the violence that had been a crushing force of their objectification and domination into the instrument that they wield to take “history into their own hands.” Similarly, land as central site of colonial power and interest will also be appropriated, “for a colonized people, the most essential value, because it is the most meaningful, is first and foremost the land: the land, which must provide bread and, naturally, dignity” (WE9/DT458). On Fanon’s account the significance of land is irreducible to possession, rather it is the ground of the transformative praxis of appropriation.

The change in the meanings of land, ownership, and labor come into view when we recall Fanon’s description of “a world compartmentalized, Manichaean and petrified, a world of statues: the statue of the general who led the conquest, the statue of the engineer who built the bridge. A world cocksure of itself, crushing with its stoniness the backbones of those scarred by the whip” (WE15/DT463). The dispossession of land, the expropriation of natural resources, and the imposition of the infrastructure necessary for this extractivism all worked to rob the colonized of their agency, to reduce them to a kind of “petrified” being akin to a stone.170 The “statue of the engineer who built the bridge” reinforces and reminds the colonized of the violent dehumanization of those people who were used as tools to build the bridge. The significance of the appropriation of land (as opposed to its formal ownership) is that it would provide the conditions for a different set of relations to flourish.

Sekyi-Otu outlines the implications of Fanon’s use of distinct notions of sovereignty: “although material and symbolic objects may, after independence, be owned and managed by...

169 See (Percy More 2011)
170 See (Ficek 2011) for a discussion of Fanon’s use of the concept of petrification in Sartrean terms.
Africans, even nationalized and controlled by the postcolonial state, a decolonization of human existence will hardly occur if the people are not autonomous agents in building them” (Sekyi-Otu 1997, 210). This sense of sovereignty as appropriation, that is as transformative activity and not as formal right, animates Fanon’s accounts of women’s revolutionary activity and involvement in the struggle for national liberation, as well as his cautions against the petrification of patriarchy in colonized culture.

Gender equality was formerly enshrined in the Algerian constitution, thus serving to legitimize the nation as a unified and progressive state. However, in practice women were increasingly corralled into what were understood to be traditional roles and excluded from social and political life (Helie-Lucas 1990). Through a Fanonian approach we can see that the formal recognition of women’s rights and equality in “the constitution,” is not the same as decolonization proper. Fanon warn that: “the underdeveloped country must take precautions not to perpetuate feudal traditions that give priority to men over women. Women shall be given equal importance to men, not in the articles of the constitution, but in daily life, at the factory, in the schools, and in assemblies” (WE142/DT582). Although women may legally own their bodies and property, the substitution of proprietorship with transformative and creative praxis may be a way of keeping the Manicheanism of the colonial world intact. Recall that in colonial environments the discourse of women’s equality was perfectly able to co-exist alongside heteropatriarchal-racial regimes premised on the possession of colonized women. In fact, on Fanon’s account the two complemented each other. Similarly, formal recognition of national sovereignty may be a ruse to defang and neutralize decolonial movements thereby keeping the

171 Fanon cautions against the continuation of extractivism in nominally postcolonial situations. He writes: “Independence does not bring a change of direction. The same old groundnut harvest, cocoa harvest, and olive harvest. Likewise the traffic of commodities goes unchanged. No industry is established in the country. We continue to ship raw materials, we continue to grow produce for Europe and pass for specialists of unfinished products” (WE99-100/DT545).
asymmetry and extractivism of colonialism alive. Decolonization (when understood as proprietorship) can easily be defanged and neutralized.172

In Algeria, as in many anti- and post-colonial nationalisms, national sovereignty was informed by the reaction to colonial sovereignty’s feminization of land and the equation of colonized women with it. This reaction tends to reproduce underlying relations of colonial environments: “the language used to articulate Algerian national identity and culture was and continues to be highly feminized. The land, ‘nation- state,’ culture, and the woman are merged, conflated. Culture and identity are imagined as uniquely transmitted through women” (Sharpley-Whiting 1998, 58). This view means that “the land, like the female body, must be policed, protected from rape, Western feminisms, and other intrusions” (ibid.).

This proprietorial relation to land and women can be seen in the sense of sovereignty at work in “this initial phase of post-colonial state formation”. It “relied on two principles forged by early nationalist ideology, an implicit principle of patriarchy as social organization and an explicit principle of a 'specific' socialism as economic model both principles claiming an authority derived from Arab Islamic doctrine” (Mehdid 1996, 82). These two principles came together in a strategy “of sectorally unbalanced growth with emphasis on industry over agriculture and investment over consumption”, that focused on “the promotion of big, capital-intensive industries, such as those in the hydrocarbon, mineral, chemical, and heavy machinery sectors” (Lowi 2009, 87). This plan was “financed through hydrocarbon reserves plus considerable borrowing from foreign sources” (ibid.). It was driven by an image of the nation state as modern and modernizing, where the latter was taken to be synonymous with industrialization and thus with the control and extraction of the country’s resources. On Lowi’s account “the rhetoric was one of total engagement, of both the state and society, in building

172 “In answer to the strategy of a Dien Bien Phu defined by the colonized, the colonizer replies with the strategy of containment-respecting the sovereignty of nations” (WE31/DT478).
the ‘new Algeria’: an Algeria that would extricate itself, once and for all, from backwardness and dependence and assume its proper place in the industrialized world” (Lowi 2009, 87). The “new Algeria” took the form of “a steel complex at Bône (Annaba) and oil refineries” as well as the “hospitals, factories, highways, dams, pipelines, and the like mushroomed across the country” (Lowi 2009, 86, 85).

Fanon’s discussion of the bridge as an example of decolonial appropriation acts as a prescient critique what would become the Algerian image of modernization as industrialization funded by the rents of the country’s nationalized fossil fuels. The following passage appears in “The Trials and Tribulations of National Consciousness,” in which Fanon contrasts the model of sovereignty as nationalization of possession with the sense of sovereignty as appropriation:

If the building of a bridge does not enrich the consciousness of those working on it, then don’t build the bridge, and let the citizens continue to swim across the river or use a ferry. The bridge must not be pitchforked or foisted upon the social landscape by a deus ex machina, but, on the contrary, must be the product of the citizens’ brains and muscles. And there is no doubt architects and engineers, foreigners for the most part, will probably be needed, but the local party leaders must see to it that the techniques seep into the desert of the citizen's brain so that the bridge in its entirety and in every detail can be integrated, redesigned, and reappropriated. The citizen must appropriate the bridge. Then, and only then, is everything possible. (WE141/DT582).

Appropriation is not the imposition of technology and modernizing development for its own sake, nor is it a racial, xenophobic, or petrified view of cultural authenticity. As Fanon says, “there is no doubt architects and engineers, foreigners for the most part, will probably be needed.” Rather it is a process in which the “citizen” transforms themselves from object to subject by making the givens of the world their own through creative acts of will. On Fanon’s account that there is a tendency in postcolonial socialism for “Men and women, young and old,
enthusiastically commit themselves to what amounts to forced labor” and/or for the assumption that grand modernizing and industrializing initiatives are necessary and themselves signs of sovereignty and progress (WE56/DT501).

Despite the appearance of unity that oil rents temporality created the internal contradictions of national sovereignty, which simultaneously sought to justify itself through an authentic, common precolonial past, and the modernizing drive of socialism, would resurface repeatedly. The resultant tensions and conflicts which the dogma of national unity sought to mask were managed at the cost of women’s place in the nation: “These ambiguities were yet again mediated by a discourse on the Family and the Nation, the former requiring the control of women and the latter the control of resources, national borders and projects of development” (Mehdid 1996, 81).

Extractivism, heteropatriarchy, and national sovereignty would resurface as a toxic triad in postcolonial Algeria, surviving the transitions from state socialism to state capitalism, and to an increasingly liberalized economy. It would be the case through the oil shock crises of the 70’s/80’s, in which once again, women were used to secure a heteropatriarchal and authoritarian regime of national sovereignty, and the precarious and unstable extractivism that grounded it. Sharpley-Whiting also identifies this link:

Algeria's economy is literally fueled by a dependence on its petrochemical exports. In the 1980s, the plummeting global price of oil seriously diminished its national revenues. The veil, as perceived by fundamentalist and conservative Islamist groups, symbolizes adherence to traditional values; it comforts and appeals to those weary and fearful of the rigors of modernity and female sexuality; and it signals a return to tradition as a cure to postmodern malaise. (Sharpley-Whiting 1998, 61).

173 “Socialism was unproblematically projected as a new modernizing force for both relations of production and social relations. At the same time, a phallocratic understanding of the cultural and religious heritage survived the revolutionary upheavals of colonial and post-colonial change” (Mehdid 1996, 82).
In addition there was a turn away from state socialism, to state capitalism, where neo-liberalism combined with a new right politics that abandoned all pretense of social justice and gender equality while instigating changes that dramatically worsened the material and social conditions of women. Although the reality of women’s lives had for a long time failed to deliver on the promises of decolonization, the formal equality of the constitution had at least survived. This was to change.

Extractivism and the rising inequality and hierarchical divisions it engendered continued on the condition that women’s freedom and their standing as full citizens was effectively revoked: “Through a regulation of relations inside the family and the promulgation of a Personal Status Code inspired by Shari’a state” that “stipulated, unabashedly and in unambiguous terms, the subordination and dependency of females in society and thus reclaimed, on behalf of men, a traditional patriarchal system and culture” (Mehdidi 1996, 85-6). This secretly drafted code “officially reinstated the principles of male domination and the patriarchal family in an attempt to alleviate a gathering economic crisis, its ensuing social costs for men and its potentially destabilizing danger for ruling elites” (Mehdidi 1996, 85-6).

Algerian women responded to this open attack with a wave of protests and activism, which “drew a parallel between the present subordinate status of women and colonial oppression” (Mehdidi 1996, 87). There was a proliferation of women’s groups and associations and an entry of women into the public and political spheres. They not only brought feminist issues to the fore, they also undermined and debated the authority and legitimacy of the single party state and national sovereignty.
The state responded by making more concessions to fundamentalist groups in the form of retrenched patriarchy. These concessions granted the groups enough power and legitimacy to topple the FLN. In 1991, the Islamic Salvation Front (ISF) appeared poised to win the first free election of independent Algeria, and the elections were annulled and the army deployed. The ISF responded with a prolonged, intense and brutal campaign of terrorism and guerilla war. Unsurprisingly, women were prime targets, particularly those who did not wear a veil or appeared independent, “modern,” educated, working, or politically engaged. They were subject to systematic violence and a campaign of terror that “included abduction, torture, rape, gang rape and killing, crimes which were common by mid-1995” (Mehdid 1996, 93-4). This intensification of the domination of women is arguably a continuation of the patriarchal vision of sovereignty that had distinguished Algerian nationalism from its beginning: “it has become evident that women are targeted primarily as women,” this “patriarchal aggression,” is “typical of a society that nurtured machismo, the fear of women, male pride and hostility to a great extent. (98 emphasis added).

While the period of the civil war was marked by fluctuating oil prices, its end coincided with their steady increase, the initial exploration of its shale reserves, and the presidency of Bouteflika, one of the “old guard” nationalists.” 177 Writing in 2009, Lowi notes that the country’s natural resource endowment, as well as the regime’s revenue base, are relatively impressive once again. Nonetheless, and despite what has been described as the most radical democratization process that the Middle East and North Africa have symbolic revolutionary parable of the woman as Mother or reproducer of the Nation, replacing it with a narrative of struggle, that of women as initiators of new political discourses and statehood” (Mehdid 1996, 100).

177 “Member of the war-time ‘Oujda clan’ and foreign minister under Boudedienne for more than a decade, he was closely associated with the creation of the independent state and its mythology. His re-emergence in the 1990s, after a long period of hibernation, and the re-integration of other ‘old guard’ nationalists into the highest echelons of government, testifies to a pattern of recycling the ‘dinosaurs:’ this is a political system that consistently reproduces itself while skillfully resisting reform” (Lowi 2009, 129).
known, there have not been significant changes to the distribution of power and resources in Algeria. (Lowi 2009, 127).

The future of Algeria is further complicated by the shift away from the nationalization of the hydrocarbon sector, which has been subject to “gradual liberalization since the 1990s.” The civil war “provided the opportunity to sign lucrative contracts with companies like BP and Total for thirty years” (Hamouchene 2019, 6). In addition, “an International Monetary Fund (IMF)-backed structural adjustment program, furthering efforts at economic liberalization, was also implemented” (Lowi 2009, 126). It is unclear how the resurgence of Algerian feminism, along with the other social movements that led to the ousting of Bouteflika, will fare and what will follow. However, the recent discovery of Algeria’s “shale gas reserves, which stand as the third largest in the world”, mean that this relation, in which fossil fuel dependency is the condition of national sovereignty, shows no sign of stopping soon (EJAtlas 2017). The extractivism and the gendered hierarchies of power it has been intertwined with remains a force to be reckoned with. I briefly return to contemporary struggles around extractivism in North Africa at the end of this chapter.

3. Appropriation, Land, and Decolonial Sovereignty

Fanon’s insight that the formal recognition of rights, cultural identity, and the transfer of ownership of land are often ruses that mask and perpetuate colonial domination has been influential for some Indigenous theorists of decolonization (Coulthard 2014, 31; Tuck and Yang 2012, 9). Fanon’s insistence on land, struggle, and freedom, as well as his critique of the extractivism of (neo) colonialism, seems to offer an alternative to civil-rights and distributive

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178 Lowi continues in terms that outline the risks of sovereignty-as-possession: “What persists is a patrimonial system of clan politics, elaborated by a military–bureaucratic oligarchy, that, along with its clients, are the principal beneficiaries. It is a vertically fashioned system (…) where the principal objective of all players is to increase their access to the rent and to power” (Lowi 2009, 127)
justice framings of the harms, stakes, and demands of decolonial land-based environmental struggles (Tuck and Yang 2012, 21). This point is particularly important given that: “the majority of natural resources are on Native land,” such that “Native peoples have been disproportionately burdened with the environmental impact of resource extraction. As many scholars have noted, Native peoples have been devastated by environmentally destructive policies, including nuclear testing, uranium mining, and toxic waste storage” (Nohelani Teves, Smith, and Raheja 2015a, 62). In addition, that Fanon offers resources for an alternative to “liberal multicultural discourses” is valuable because they tend to erase “Indigenous communities’ concerns,” which “are often not about achieving formal equality or civil rights within a nation-state, but instead achieving substantial independence from a Western nation-state — independence decided on their own terms” (Arvin, Tuck, and Morril 2013, 10). At first glance then, it seems as though Fanon offers a way to diagnose and to orient responses to colonial environments. However, I claim that when viewed through the lens of decolonial and Native feminist approaches to gender, sexuality, land, and sovereignty, some limitations with Fanon’s conceptualization of decolonial sovereignty as appropriation become apparent. Exploring these limitations, and the reasons for them, enables us to see that Fanon begins to undermine the insight into ecological freedom that otherwise distinguishes his thought. My critical and comparative reading is meant to open up ways in we might read Fanon against himself - so as to hold onto both ecological freedom and decolonial sovereignty.

Appropriation as Decolonial Sovereignty

In the conclusion of *Wretched* Fanon offers an eviscerating critique of Western humanism. Yet Fanon’s call “not to imitate Europe,” is motivated by the humanist ideals and
values proposed by “European thought” but perverted in actuality (WE237/DT675). Fanon is emphatic that this project cannot be fulfilled by mimicry of this pathological society “where dialectics has gradually turned into the logic of the status quo” (WE237/DT675). It can only emerge through its dialectical transcendence such that the wretched of the earth make this project and its ideals their own: “For Europe, for ourselves and for humanity, comrades, we must make a new start, develop a new way of thinking, and endeavor to create a new man” (WE239/DT676). For Sekyi-Otu this conclusion, and the dialectical movement of appropriation that permeates Fanon’s decolonial work, shows that: “Fanon’s critical theory is able to envisage an unsuspected possibility: the original appropriation by postcolonial humanity of a legacy which an invasive modernity has bequeathed” (Sekyi-Otu 1997, 198).

Fanon’s understanding of appropriation as the appropriation of the legacy of modernity is evident in the discussion of medicine, science, technology, gender, equality and land in A Dying Colonialism and Wretched. To be clear, Fanon did not advocate for the assumption of “modernization” for its own sake. As we have seen, Fanon was critical of this tendency, in part because it continues to treat things as having inherent meaning and authority. Decolonial appropriation would be the process in which (post)colonial subjects would cease to view the inherited world of things and meanings as a realm of crushing necessity. Instead, through praxis, they would be able to see the givens of their situation as the result of past praxis and thus as an occasion for freedom and self-making. Appropriation (and not the imitation of Europe) would be the realization of the values of equality, freedom, truth, and enlightened reason.

One question that this account of appropriation as decolonial sovereignty raises is: why does Fanon assume that the values of Western humanism should be revalued? A response to

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179 Fanon claims that “All the elements for a solution to the major problems of humanity existed at one time or another in European thought” (WE237/DT675).

180 This point is elucidated if we consider the influence of Sartre on Fanon and the concept of the “practico-inert” in Critique of Dialectical Reason (Bernasconi 2010; Ficek 2011; Sartre 2004; 2009).
this question can be found in Fanon’s account of the effects of colonization on pre-colonial history and culture (WE149/DT592). Fanon suggests that the deliberate severance of a living connection between a colonized people and their past is part of the process in which the colonizer fabricates the colonized. All that remains of a formerly dynamic and coherent culture is a petrified and hollow husk (WE148/DT591-2). Consequently, Sekyi-Otu argues that the significance of appropriation is that it offers a way to move forward without a foundation in the past and beyond the “anti-dialectics” of the colonized world:

Appropriation (...) would be the activity of coming into one’s own when there is no primal self to return to, no inviolate native essences to recapture; consequently, the enterprise of transforming into one’s own tradition of possibilities an imposed order of practices and thereby overcoming their violence. (Sekyi-Otu 1997, 184).

Sekyi-Otu’s claim begs the question: if the colonized can appropriate the values of enlightenment humanism in such a way as to transcend the history and legacy of violence and madness, then why would non-colonial culture have to meet the criterion of “no inviolate native essences” or “primal self” in order to ground alternatives to colonialism? In other words, why write off non-Western values on the basis of standards that the values of Western humanism are not held to?

This question leads Coulthard in Red Skin, White Masks to consider how the dialectics of appropriation and recognition that animate Fanon’s account of decolonization are themselves part of this tradition of Western humanism.181 Coulthard argues that despite the value of Fanon’s thought for critiques of colonialism: “it is on this point that we reach a limit to Fanon’s anti-colonial analysis” (Coulthard 2014, 153). Despite the fact that Fanon: “eschews an evolutionary anthropological theory of historical development in which societies are viewed

181 Although Coulthard is critical of Fanon’s dialectical approach to history (in regards to Indigenous culture) he does not reject the ontology of recognition but rather shows its import for contemporary settler colonialism, Indigenous peoples, and First Nations. This raises the question of whether Coulthard’s critique opens the way for a different Fanonian framework of decolonization or whether it amounts to a more fundamental challenge.
as developing along a linear path from primitive to civilized, he remains wedded to a *dialectical* conception of social transformation that privileges the ‘new’ over the ‘old” (Coulthard 2014, 153 original emphasis). In Fanon’s decolonial dialectics “culture” is “a transitional category of identification that colonized peoples must struggle to *transcend* as soon as they become conscious of its existence as a form of identification” (ibid. original emphasis). This dialectical approach to culture and history has implications that compromise Fanon’s conceptualization of decolonization, particularly (but not exclusively) in regards to Indigenous approaches to sovereignty. Although he arguably grossly underestimated them, this is not to say that Fanon totally ignored the value and presence of non-colonial culture and institutions.\(^{182}\) Coulthard argues that “Fanon saw the critical revaluation of Indigenous cultural forms as an important means of temporarily breaking the colonized free from the incapacitating effects of being exposed to structured patterns of colonial misrecognition,” however: “he was decidedly less willing to explore the role that these forms and practices might play in the construction of *alternatives* to the oppressive social relations that produce colonized subjects in the first place” (Coulthard 2014, 132 original emphasis). According to Coulthard, what Fanon overlooks is the “place-based foundation of Indigenous decolonial thought and practice (Coulthard 2014, 13). Coulthard understands this foundation as the ethical framework of:

*grounded normativity*, by which I mean the modalities of Indigenous land-connected practices and longstanding experiential knowledge that inform and structure our ethical engagements with the world and our relationships with human and nonhuman others over time. (Coulthard 2014, 13).

\(^{182}\) For instance, in “Disavowing Decolonization,” Neil Lazarus argues that “it is precisely here, ironically—and not with respect to any supposed trivialization of precolonial African culture on his part— that Fanon’s theorization is legitimately susceptible to criticism. For the plain fact is that, throughout Africa and elsewhere in the colonial world, precolonial social, cultural, and ideological forms survived the colonial era meaningfully. Indeed, they continue to survive meaningfully today, in the ‘postcolonial’ present” (Lazarus 1999, 171-2).
I will flesh out the concept and implications of “grounded normativity”, and argue that approaches informed by such place-based systems of ethics and epistemology, offer alternative senses of decolonial sovereignty. They bring to light some of the limitations with how Fanon conceives of decolonization as the appropriation of the values and project of humanism and modernity. I focus on how this plays out in the case of gender, sexuality, and land.

Decolonizing Land and Heteropatriarchy

Fanon breaks with the tendency of postcolonial nationalisms to either ignore patriarchy and women, or to consign them to traditional and stifling roles. However, his vision of decolonized gender relations is limited in some important ways that I suggest are symptomatic of the way he conceptualizes appropriation, and thus decolonial sovereignty.

A nation in which one half of its subjects remain possessions of the other would hardly be a new humanism. It would maintain the non-reciprocity and petrification characteristic of the Manicheanism of colonial environments. A nation in which the rights of women are formally recognized but has been imagined and implemented without their involvement would be essentially compromised. Recall that in the colonial era the ideal of the equality of women had been falsely championed and served the ends of patriarchal domination and colonial dispossession. On Fanon’s account, colonized society reacted with an ossification of gender relations, evidenced in the way that Algerian women had once again started wearing the veil. Fanon writes: “Behind these psychological reactions, beneath this immediate and almost unanimous response, we again see the overall attitude of rejection of the values of the occupier, even if these values objectively be worth choosing” (DC62-3/297 emphasis added). The arc of “Algeria Unveiled” and “The Algerian Family” suggests that through decolonial praxis Algerian women would change their relation to these values and eventually come to choose them. We can see this in Fanon’s account of how disruptions to the familial-social structure in
decolonial struggle were followed by family members choosing “modern forms of existence,” that “confers on the human person his maximum independence” (DC116/348). On Fanon’s account this change is not a mimicry of pathological Western gender norms since equality, freedom, and individuality will only be realized if Algerian women truly make these values their own.

“Algeria Unveiled” and “The Algerian Family,” dialectically move from the colonized’s petrified reactivity under colonial sovereignty, to their active appropriation of more equitable and liberated values for gender and sexuality. Through women’s praxis the meaning of the veil and gender relations undergo a series of transformations, and Algerian women appropriate the future nation for themselves. In contrast to the battles between colonizer’s and colonized men over Algerian women that centered on the veil, Fanon describes how the Algerian woman comes to appropriate the veil and thus herself in a creative act that sheds both of their former, ossified meanings that had been imposed from outside. He writes: “What had been used to block the psychological or political offensives of the occupier became a means, an instrument. The veil helped the Algerian woman to meet the new problems created by the struggle” (63/298).

Such transformations in the veil, and thus in women and the nation, began with the FLN’s decision to involve women in the struggle for national liberation out of necessity

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183 Dubey argues that this strange appeal to the nuclear family and citizen couple as model of gender equality is symptomatic of a more fundamental tension: “Fanon’s claim to the category of the nation can only proceed by invoking the principles of liberal humanism, but his appropriation of these principles is fraught with irresolution” (Dubey 1998)

184 Fanon summarizes the different moments of this dialectical movement: “There is thus a historic dynamism of the veil that is very concretely perceptible in the development of colonization in Algeria. In the beginning, the veil was a mechanism of resistance, but its value for the social group remained very strong. The veil was worn because tradition demanded a rigid separation of the sexes, but also because the occupier was bent on unveiling Algeria. In a second phase, the mutation occurred in connection with the Revolution and under special circumstances. The veil was abandoned in the course of revolutionary action. What had been used to block the psychological or political offensives of the occupier became a means, an instrument. The veil helped the Algerian woman to meet the new problems created by the struggle” (63/298).
In 1956, the FLN adopted a terrorist program in response to the “violence of the occupier, his ferocity, his delirious attachment to the national territory” (48/285). The veil then takes on a revolutionary significance in a new strategy in which unveiling became a revolutionary tactic. Disguised as assimilated women and thus above suspicion, Algerian women used the freedom of movement through the city that unveiling allowed them to transport messages, medicine, and so forth. As the male militants became increasingly known by the colonial authorities, the Algerian women began to transport bombs and arms throughout the city in their handbags (53-4/289). In this situation, unveiling sheds the petrified significance it previously had, since it now becomes a form of commitment to, rather than a betrayal of revolutionary national struggle.

Initially destabilizing and disorienting for the Algerian woman, this role prompts a transformation in her bodily comportment and consciousness: “each time she ventures into the European city, the Algerian woman must achieve a victory over herself, over her childish fears” (52/288-9). Rather than performing a straightforward reversal that amounts to a Manichean opposition in which a supposedly authentic Islamic Arab feminine culture is opposed to the European, on Fanon’s account she affirmatively revalues and thus recreates her identity as an Algerian woman. The subjectivity and identity of the Algerian woman becomes individuated, fluid, and dynamic, rather than fixed or determined by a particular custom or symbol: “She must consider the image of the occupier lodged somewhere in her mind and in her body, remodel it, initiate the essential work of eroding this image, making it inessential, taking away its shame, desacralizing it (la désacraliser)” (52/288-9). On Fanon’s account, the Algerian women will transform herself not through a reactive rejection of all things related to the occupier, but rather through a creative act in which she is able to “remodel” it and thus her own

185 On Fanon’s account, involvement was initially determined by their marital status and limited to auxiliary and caretaking roles. Eventually, however, leaders decided “to accept indiscriminately the support of all Algerian women” (51/287).
“mind” and “body.” Although (as Fanon notes) it became necessary to take up the wearing of the veil again, he insists that the veil at this point is a revolutionary “means;” it is no longer invested with petrified and reactive cultural significance. 186 As he explains, “the virtually taboo character assumed by the veil in the colonial situation disappeared almost entirely in the course of the liberating struggle” (61/296).

In the struggle for national liberation, the Algerian woman thus achieves “a victory” “over her childish fears,” over her former self: “this revolutionary activity has been carried on by the Algerian woman with exemplary constancy, self-mastery, and success” (54/290). 187 On Fanon’s account, this victory, and “the new woman” that emerges from it, responsible, free, and sovereign, were central to the liberation of the national territory and the exertion of meaningful sovereignty on it: “the unveiled Algerian woman assumed an increasingly important place in revolutionary action, developed her personality, discovered the exalting realm of responsibility. The freedom of the Algerian people from then on became identified with woman’s liberation, with her entry into history” (107/340). 188 Fanon continues his celebration of the heroism of “this woman who was writing the heroic pages of Algerian history was, in so doing, bursting the bounds of the narrow world in which she had lived without responsibility, and was at the same time participating in the destruction of colonialism and in the birth of a new woman” (ibid.). This “birth of a new woman” simultaneously has a ripple effect across Algerian culture, transforming it from an ossified husk into a living, dynamic, and unified nation:

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186 After the colonial forces deduced the first tactic of unveiling, the veil then works to conceal and transport concealed arms and goods. Then again it takes on a cultural meaning in response to colonial public unveiling, where the veil is a display of national solidarity and defiance although Fanon suggests this might be a “regression” (63/298).
187 “Despite the inherent, subjective difficulties and notwithstanding the sometimes violent incomprehension of a part of the family, the Algerian woman assumes all the tasks entrusted to her” (54/290).
188 “This woman who, in the avenues of Algiers or of Constantine, would carry the grenades or the submachine-gun chargers, this woman who tomorrow would be outraged, violated, tortured, could not put herself back into her former state of mind and relive her behavior of the past” (107/340).
The men's words were no longer law. The women were no longer silent. Algerian society in the fight for liberation (...) renewed itself and developed new values governing sexual relations. The woman ceased to be a complement for man. *She literally forged a new place for herself by her sheer strength.* (109/342 original emphasis).

In distinction to the former adherence to “tradition,” “new values governing sexual relations” blossomed. By virtue of their “sheer strength,” Algerian women thereby transformed themselves from possessions into responsible, sovereign subjects. This transformation is presented as an indispensable condition for national sovereignty. Decolonization proper would not be possible without women’s appropriation of themselves and the struggle. It is through the activity in which they “remodel” themselves and the world that the petrified heteropatriarchal relations that had sedimented under settler colonialism begin to thaw. I will suggest that while this account of decolonial sovereignty is promising, the way that Fanon conceptualizes appropriation limits the way that he envisions decolonial feminist sovereignty, and thus decolonization.

For instance, Fanon describes how a new unit of reciprocity emerges in the form of the citizen-couple: “*the mingling of fighting experience with conjugal life deepens the relations between husband and wife and cements their union. There is a simultaneous and effervescent emergence of the citizen, the patriot, and the modern spouse*” (114/346 original emphasis). Fanon’s vision of decolonized gender reproduces a heteronormative, nuclear family structure, focused on individual subjects and the reproduction of the state. In “The ‘True Lie’ of the Nation: Fanon and Feminism” Madhu Dubey argues that although Fanon rejects “nationalist ideologies that assign conservative traditional functions to women” it is by way of “recourse to a bourgeois liberal vocabulary that proclaims the simultaneous emergence of the
national citizen and the modern spouse configuring the modernized nuclear family as ‘the basic cell of the commonwealth, the fertile nucleus of the nation’” (Dubey 1998:15).

Although Fanon is attentive to patriarchy in colonial environments, he fails to consider how colonization has worked to institute (and sediment) a dimorphic and hierarchical regime of gender and compulsory heterosexuality (Lugones 2007; Oyewumi 1997). This regime targets non-patriarchal social and political formations. It is engendered through violence and dispossession, attacking communities and individuals that exceed the enforced narrow, binary forms of gender and sexuality. Although this process is different in the context of Algeria, and in the Americas, considering heteropatriarchy and “heteropaternalism” is significant since it allows us to see some of the limitations of Fanon’s appropriation of the ideals of gender equality and individual freedom.

It is not a coincidence that, “in many cases, the enforcement of “proper” gender roles is entangled in settler nations’ attempts to limit and manage Indigenous peoples’ claims to land” (Arvin, Tuck, and Morril 2013, 15). Unlike Fanon, decolonial and Native feminist theorists argue that these norms are in fact parochial norms. This insight is not only due to Indigenous and colonized women’s experience of gendered oppression. As the work of Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg), Kelsey Dayle John (Diné) and other Native feminist suggest, their ability to explore alternatives to Western feminism and dimorphic gender is enabled because they are drawing from a non-colonial source of “grounded normativity,” or “land as pedagogy” (Betasamosake Simpson 2017). Without being able to

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189 Andrea Smith summarizes the importance of this in relation to land and the colonial imaginary of nature: “Heteropatriarchy is the logic that makes social hierarchy seem natural (...) when colonists first came to this land, they saw the necessity of instilling patriarchy in Native communities, because they realized that indigenous peoples would not accept colonial domination if their own indigenous societies were not structured on the basis of social hierarchy. Patriarchy in turn rests on a binary gender system; hence it is not a coincidence that colonizers also targeted indigenous peoples who did not fit within this binary model” (Smith 2008, 312).

190 “The heteropaternal organization of citizens into nuclear families, each expressing a ‘proper,’ modern sexuality, has been a cornerstone in the production of a citizenry that will support and bolster the nation-state. Thus, as settler nations sought to disappear Indigenous peoples’ complex structures of government and kinship, the management of Indigenous peoples’ gender roles and sexuality was also key in remaking Indigenous peoples into settler state citizens” (Arvin, Tuck, and Morril 2013, 14-5).
fully engage with these theories of gender, sexuality and decolonial sovereignty here, the salient point to note is that land, understood as first mother and teacher, anchors forms of gender and sexuality distinct from those of the individuality of Fanon’s “new woman” and her equality with her citizen-spouse.191 These approaches to decolonial relations of gender and sexuality are therefore bound up with relations with land, where the latter is understood through a framework at once epistemological, ontological, ethical, and political that puts pressure on Fanonian decolonization.

_Land and Grounded Normativity_

The sense of land at work in the framework of “grounded normativity” is also in tension with Fanon’s conceptualization of the appropriation of land. Fanon’s critique of colonial extractivism and exploitative relations to land was grounded by the “the reality of man as a living, working, self-making being” (WE237/675).192 Under colonialism, labor is highly alienated and mostly reduced to non-productive extraction that effectively reduces the colonized to a tool. Anticipating some aspects of Green Marxism, Fanon suggests that decolonization would entail a more rational and harmonious dialectic between people and land. The two terms (of land and people) would be mediated by new, non-alienating forms of labor. Such new forms of labor would enable the colonized to overcome their former antipathy to work, and to thereby appropriate labor (as activity and value), their own powers, and the land.

191 Many Native and decolonial feminists would not object to the association of the earth with women and motherhood (where the latter is understood beyond biological reproduction), since (like mothers) the earth is understood as first teacher and provider. For instance, “The state’s medicalization of birth is where Indigenous peoples first experience the imposition of state sovereignty on their lives seconds after they are born. Katsi has been an important advocate for indigenous midwifery, homebirth, and the reclamation of indigenous medicines for maternal and newborn health, all work she places primarily in the realm of women’s sovereignty. Her work, though, necessarily extends out toward the land, because from this perspective we are the land. Our bodies are embedded in the ecologies and in our intimate relationships with the land. Katsi says, ‘Women are our first environment,’ and the link between a clean environment and a body free of contamination is paramount” (Betasamosake Simpson 2015, 20).

192 This “reality” arguably underlies Fanon’s concept of appropriation and therefore raises questions of whether Fanonian decolonization can be amended to address these issues.
for themselves. In Wretched, the appropriation of the values of land and work are exemplified in autogestion, or collective, worker self-management in Algeria, whose slogan was “the land belongs to those who work it” (WE133/DT576) and who occupied bien-vacants (abandoned colonial properties). Fanon saw autogestion as promising the future of decentralized and communal land use and transformed relations between laborer and land, that avoided the pitfalls both of capitalism and of state socialism.

While I understand Fanon’s attention to the relationship of land and freedom as valuable, his understanding of it is ultimately filtered through a vision of sovereignty and human freedom that remains limited by the inheritance of a Marxist-Hegelian tradition in which peoples’ maturity, responsibility, and self-consciousness is constituted through their appropriation of nature.

Jennifer Wenzel argues despite Fanon’s sensitivity to the significance of the category of nature for colonialism, the vision of decolonial sovereignty that he articulates “remains firmly enmeshed within a resource logic”: “in Fanon's vision of national liberation, nature remains (in one crucial sense) colonized: subject to epistemological capture as the Other of the human” (Wenzel 2017, 169). The problem is that “the postcolonial pursuit of resources is fundamentally an anthropocentric model, as land, water, air, animals, and plants are never able

193 “Algerian workers spontaneously and collectively occupied and began to manage farms and factories that had been abandoned by their European owners and managers. No sooner had the autogestion (workers’ self-management) movement gained momentum than Ben Bella quickly recognized it and adopted it as his own. For him, backing autogestion was meant to serve political ends: to both co-opt the relatively powerful labor movement, and gain workers’ support at a time (1963) when the political landscape was turbulent and divisive. During the Boumedienne era, however, the self-managed sector would fall into oblivion: it comprised no more than one-eighth of the rural population and was relegated to the ‘authority’ of the by then subdued UGTA, itself an appendage of the powerless FLN. By 1970, autogestion was completely overshadowed by the étatist development strategy” (Lowi 2009, 85).
194 Fanon distinguished appropriation from proprietorship, but (communal) ownership of land was the condition of the first. However, the fine line between the two senses of sovereignty is evident in Fanon’s description: “the Algerian people now know that they are the sole proprietor of their country’s soil and subsoil. And if some cannot understand the FLN’s relentless refusal to tolerate any infringement of this ownership and its fierce determination not to accept any compromise on principles, then everyone should remember that the Algerian people are now adult, responsible, and conscious. In short, the Algerian people are proprietors” (WE134/DT576).
195 Stephanie Clare captures this vision in a largely uncritical reading, “through transforming the earth, marking it with signs of themselves, and taking proprietorship over it, the colonized transform themselves, developing a new world, and with it a new human and a new nation” (Clare 2013, 7).
to become postcolonial; they remain objects to be exploited by the empowered postcolonial subject” (Tuck and Yang 2012, 19). I understand Fanon’s critique of notions of sovereignty-as-proprietorship as motivated by some insight into how the view of “land, water, air, animals, and plants” as “objects to exploited” is bound up with the reproduction of colonial environments. Yet, as Coulthard argues, what Fanon misses is what motivates many decolonial movements. On this account, Indigenous decolonization is a:

struggle primarily inspired by and oriented around the question of land – a struggle not only for land in the material sense, but also deeply informed by what the land as a system of reciprocal relations and obligations can teach us about living our lives in relation to one another, and the natural world in nondominating and nonexploitative terms (Coulthard 2014, 13 original emphasis).

Betasamosake Simpson outlines how struggle might be “oriented around the question of land” by articulating a sense of sovereignty as “Kina Gchi Anishinaabe-ogaming (…) the place where we all live and work together” (Betasamosake Simpson 2015, 18). Notably, this formulation echoes the notion of the environment popularized by the Environmental Justice movement, one which moved from a conservationist focus on wilderness to “where we live, work, and play.” However, I understand Betasamosake Simpson’s framing of as motivated by a set of concerns, relations, and demands that are ignored or poorly comprehended by both liberal environmental justice, and by Fanon. Betasamosake Simpson’s understanding of the “we” in question is not limited to human communities. Rather, it is constituted in relations with more-than-human beings and entities, themselves understood as persons, or as sovereign. This is “a description

196“Communal ownership of land has figured centrally in various movements for autonomous, self- determined communities. ‘The land belongs to those who work it,’ disturbingly parrots Lockean justifications for seizing Native land as property, ‘earned’ through one’s labor in clearing and cultivating ‘virgin’ land” (Tuck and Yang 2012, 30). Strangely Tuck and Yang repeatedly cite Fanon in the essay but do not make this critique in regards to Wretched.
of sovereignty and nationhood that is at its core about relationships – relationships with each other and with plant and animal nations, with our lands and with the spiritual world” (18). 197

The importance of resurgence and resilience, grounded in the idea of “land as pedagogy,” that Betasamosake Simpson and other Indigenous feminists affirm, offers a different sense of the temporality of sovereignty than that of many anti- and post-colonial nationalisms. In the latter, the horizon of sovereignty is the liberation of the national territory, and all other concerns were secondary. In 1962, as Algeria faced independence the options for survival and sovereignty were incredibly limited, such that extraction of natural resources appeared to be the only viable option. 198 Although Fanon anticipated this issue, he did not explore how non-colonial cultures and practices might serve as an alternative to the extractivism and patriarchy of colonial sovereignty. By contrast, Betasamosake Simpson suggests a sense of sovereignty that is not deferred until the “tabula rasa” or absolute rupture of decolonial futurity. Rather, this is a sense of sovereignty that is (re)created in the present by connecting with the past. On this view, the past is not understood as static and fixed, but as a dynamic source of power and knowledge. At the same time, such “grounded normativity” also entails commitment to a program of radical decolonization and resistance. 199 Resurgence and

197 In contrast to “authoritarian power or power-over style of governance,” this sense of sovereignty “begins from reciprocal relations and responsibilities in which sovereignty is understood as the ability to maintain and honor these relations and responsibilities with and between collectives of both human and more-than-human persons” (Simpson 2017, 19). Simpson continues, outlining a sense of sovereignty, rooted in: “good relationships, responsibilities, a deep respect for individual and collective self-determination, and honoring diversity (…) We use it to refer to the self-determination of our political cultures and nonhierarchical systems of governance, and we use it to mean the maintenance of these relationships through balance, care, and nurturing rather than coercion” (ibid.).

198 In 1962, “the challenges faced by the first government of independent Algeria were enormous (…) the country had just emerged from 130 years of foreign domination and 8 years of brutal war that had ravaged all aspects of life and culminated in a fratricidal struggle for power” (Lowi 2009, 76). Importantly, these challenges included the mass displacement, rapid urbanization, and semi-proletarianization of peasants who were ripped from their land and cultural frames of reference. 198 The settler population had “represented most of the private capital, as well as the professional, technical, and managerial expertise in the country. Algeria sorely lacked highly skilled labor, an entrepreneurial class, and technological know-how” (74). Among the Algerian population, “illiteracy hovered around 90 percent. Roughly 1,000 people had a university education; there were 400 Algerian students at university in Algeria, and only 4 Algerian engineers” (75).

199 “The effects of environmental degradation, urbanization, and settler encroachment make connecting to the land, conducting our ceremonies, living our lifeway difficult, but we do it anyway. The state attempts to regulate virtually every aspect of indigenous life— from our lands to our bodies and our minds, but my grandmothers have
sovereignty then do not translate into the preservation of cultural traditions for their own sake, but rather into reviving practices and strategies that have allowed peoples to live without the capitalist nation state and to be able to recreate other environments than those of colonial sovereignty (Coulthard 2014, 172).

Sovereignty might then mean something other than extractivism and industrialization. I briefly return to North Africa to illustrate the significance of this point and as a way to reflect on the strenghts and weaknesses of a Fanonian approach to land-based environmental struggles.

4. Grounding Extractivism and Resistance

In the 2019 report, “Extractivism and Resistance in North Africa”, Hamza Hamouchene, co-founder of the Algeria Solidarity Campaign, traces the emergence and continuation of extractivism as the dominant mode of production in the Maghreb, beginning with its roots in 19th century colonialism, through the postcolonial period, to the present. Hamouchene summarizes the legacy of this dependence:

the neo-colonial character of North African extractivism reflects the international division of labour and the international division of nature. It is revealed in large-scale oil and gas extraction in Algeria (…) this plays an important role in the ecological crisis in North Africa, which finds its clear expression in acute environmental degradation, land exhaustion and loss of soil fertility, water poverty, over-exploitation of natural resources, pollution and disease, as well as effects of global warming such as desertification, recurrent heat waves, droughts and rising sea levels. (Hamouchene 2019, 4).

taught me that we collectively now have four hundred years’ experience of living sovereign despite the imposition of the state” (Simpson 2017, 23).
In turn, extractivism and its ecological devastation creates “new forms of dependency and domination,” since it is “often accompanied by a loss of food sovereignty by relying on food imports, as in the case of Algeria” (ibid.). Hydraulic fracking has emerged as the new frontier of extractivism in Algeria, once again exposing the fault lines and unsustainable foundations of national sovereignty.

The water scarcity of Algeria means that the socio-ecological impact of fracking is even greater than it might be in other places. Hamouchene frames this new development as an iteration of a more sedimented logic and longer history: “The Algerian regime is once again perpetuating Algeria’s dependence on hydrocarbons, dangerously exposing the economy to the cyclical rise and fall of oil and gas prices” (Hamouchene 2019, 9).

Hamouchene’s case study of the struggles at Ouargla (Southern Algeria) that erupted from 2013 around oil and shale gas, aims to connect it to other struggles across North Africa (such as the one at Imider, Morocco). In adopting the lens of anti-imperialist class struggle, Hamouchene aims to unite and politicize these fragmented movements, and ultimately “to forge the class consciousness necessary to overthrow capitalism and build a sustainable alternative in its place” (18).

It is noteworthy that Hamouchene briefly invokes Fanon’s discussion of “The Trials and Tribulations of National Consciousness” in The Wretched of The Earth. Particularly relevant to Hamouchene’s account is Fanon’s analysis of how former colonies could become tourist hotspots for elites from the Western world, as well as the more general pattern of neo-colonial hierarchy, uneven geographies, and the “underdevelopment” of postcolonial nations that are reliant on the extraction and exportation of fossil fuels and other natural resources.

200 “In early 2018, the CEO of Algeria’s state energy firm Sonatrach announced that oil majors Anadarko, Total, ENI and Statoil have expressed interest in helping Algeria start off shore drilling and, on 30 October 2018, Sonatrach signed the first contract with British BP and Norwegian Equinor (former Statoil) to exploit ‘unconventional hydrocarbons’, including shale gas and oil” (Hamouchene 2019, 9).

201 “This shift to a more destructive form of extractivism can be explained, on one hand, by the desire to maintain the flow of foreign exchange into national coffers in order to meet the shortfalls in income levels caused by the decrease in oil prices and, on the other hand, by the EU’s aggressive attempts to grab and appropriate more Algerian gas” (Hamouchene 2019, 9).
Hamouchene’s linkage to Fanon’s critique of sovereignty as proprietorship illustrates how a Fanonian diagnostic approach can be used to elucidate the reproduction of racist environments of colonial sovereignty. However, what Hamouchene misses, is the linkage between extractivism and patriarchy. Through the Fanonian approach that I have developed we can see that any attempt to understand extractivism in post-settler- and neo-colonial environments without attending to patriarchy or the position of women will ultimately be self-defeating.

In this report, a photograph is the only mark of the existence of women in North Africa. Its caption reads: “Amazigh women of Imider protesting against the silver mine that has drained their water reserves for decades and devastated their agricultural community” (15). The Amazigh (more commonly known by their colonial name of Berbers) have been consistently marginalized in the construction of the Algerian nation as Arabic and Islamic, and while concentrated in the Aurès mountains, they have also practiced largely nomadic lifeways in the Sahara. The Amazigh have also long been excluded and in conflict with Morocco, where the Imider silver mine is located. Hamouchene’s analysis leaves us wondering about the specificity of the women’s struggle, the ground of their commitments and agency, the gendered politics of the movement, and the alternative visions of sovereignty that they might articulate.

Although this report is an occasion to reflect on the important additional dimensions that a Fanonian diagnostic approach brings, I suggest that it is also symptomatic of the weaknesses of Fanon’s affirmative account of decolonial sovereignty. What these two accounts

202 On Fanon’s account, decolonization risks turning into a neo-colonialism, in which exploitation is “intensified and justified” and former colonies are turned into “holiday resorts and playgrounds” for “Western bourgeoisies who happen to be tourists enamored of exoticism, hunting and casinos” (WE101/DT546). Such tourism hubs in North Africa and beyond, have detrimental ecological, political and social effects (Hamouchene 2019, 5).

203 “In the context of Algeria, my native country, the status of the Imazighen has changed very little over time – whether it was under French colonial rule, which lasted more than a century until 1962, or even thereafter. The independent government simply refused to grant the community official recognition, which caused frequent volatile deadlocks. For the regime, particularly in the 1970s and 80s, it was convenient for the authorities to pigeonhole Algerian history as Arabo-Islamic and exclude all other layers of national identity” (Cheref 2020). See also (Lowi 2009). “One of the earliest slogans of nationalism in Algeria was promoted by the ulama, ‘Arabic is our language. Islam is our religion. Algeria is our country’” (Helie-Lucas 1990, 108).
share is a dismissal of Indigenous and non-colonial culture as grounding alternatives to (neo) colonialism, instead presenting it as a stage that must be passed over. That this approach constitutes what Neil Lazarus (in regards to Fanon) calls “a decisive liability” is evident since it underestimates “the resilience and vitality of inherited cultural forms and practices,” but also is “incapable of understanding exactly what is at stake for the subaltern classes in their involvement in anticolonial nationalism” (Lazarus 1999, 174). For instance, Hamouchene notes that for the various movements of unemployed youth:

> the objective of their mobilization is not revolution or radical transformation but insertion into the capitalist system through jobs, no matter how precarious (...) it is making it very hard for capital to accumulate, while begging for some crumbs from the pie. (17).

Because of these objectives, “when those crumbs are provided, the movements often disintegrate and disappear” (ibid.). Hamouchene argues that although “the cases presented here feature a strong ecological element, this is always secondary to more pressing issues of socio-economic rights such as jobs, development of urban and rural infrastructure, distribution of wealth, and democratization of decision-making” (16). While sympathetic to the conditions that mean ecological consciousness and demands are secondary for these movements, Hamouchene ultimately seeks to shift the agenda beyond demands for the few lucrative jobs in extractive industries. However, in his report there are two exceptions to this tendency. These cases exhibit:

> some longevity and sustainability of struggle, albeit with serious limitations and contradictions. These two exceptions share a strong attachment to land: Jemna (Tunisia) as its rural landless people managed to enforce popular management and access to land within the framework of a social solidarity economy; and Imider (Morocco), rooted in
its culture and land while gaining national and international solidarity, strengthening their resolve to continue fighting (17).

Hamouchene acknowledges some value and commitment in what he describes as the movements of “the near-landless peasants/ agro-pastoralists” (14). However, these cultural and political movements are not seriously considered as a source of radical, ecological consciousness and alternatives to extractivism. Rather, these land-based identities are presented as a barrier that must be overcome. For example, Hamouchene claims that: “the movement is not homogenous and witnesses some culturalist tendencies that like to portray the struggle as mainly an identarian one (...) creating further dividing lines that hinder effective solidarity” (15). The failure to seriously consider how land, land-based struggle, gender, indigeneity, and the agency and vision of Indigenous women in particular, might be related is especially surprising, given Hamouchene’s conclusion. It ends with a paraphrase of Mexican feminist Anna Esther Ceceña, claiming that “emancipatory experience (...) will necessitate profound cultural change that will instill non-capitalist visions of the world where ‘Mother Nature once again becomes the subject of history’” (20). As Ceceña indicates in the article, one way to start doing this and to forge a more radical ecological consciousness is to turn to the particular values and commitments of the groups that Hamouchene and Fanon suggest are identitarian barriers to real change.

**Conclusion**

Fanonian and Marxian analyses, such as Hamouchene’s, that seek to challenge the construction of nature by colonial-capital and to radicalize the demands of movements for climate justice beyond better and more jobs (“green” or otherwise) or more “crumbs,” not only

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204 Women, along with questions of gender, sexuality, and their impact on land-based movements, disappear into the more global frames of workers and peasants.

205 (Ceceña 2013)
need to begin by considering the imbrication of colonialism, extractivism and heteropatriarchy, but also by turning to decolonial and Native feminisms that valorize “Mother earth as subject of history.” This turn gives us another way to approach land-based and other environmental struggles that do not repeat the errors of colonial sovereignty, whilst also clarifying the differences and affinities between them.

One objection to my turn to grounded normativity in this chapter may be that this frame is limited to Indigenous peoples. What does it mean for dispossessed, proletarianized or other (formerly) colonized and racialized women? I suggest that these approaches to sovereignty might provide a way of opening up coalitions – feminist and otherwise--that do not begin with the presupposed legitimacy of heteropatriarchy, the nation state, capitalism and extractivism. As Andrea Smith argues, “in opposition to nation-states, which are based on control over territory, these visions of indigenous nationhood are based on care and responsibility for land that all can share” (Smith 2008, 311). Consequently, Smith argues that “we can understand Native feminism as rooted in the colonial condition of Native women who put squarely on the table the importance of thinking beyond the heteropatriarchal nation-state in our vision of liberation not just for Native peoples, but for everyone” (315). I return to this promising and challenging claim in the context of Black Feminist approaches to racist environments in the final chapter.

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206 “Settler colonialism fuels imperialism all around the globe. Oil is the motor and motive for war and so was salt, so will be water. Settler sovereignty over these very pieces of earth, air, and water is what makes possible these imperialisms” (Tuck and Yang 2012, 3). They continue: “Breaking the settler colonial triad, in direct terms, means repatriating land to sovereign Native tribes and nations, abolition of slavery in its contemporary forms, and the dismantling of the imperial metropole. Decolonization ‘here’ is intimately connected to anti-imperialism elsewhere” (31).

207 While the term and value of sovereignty continues to be debated within Indigenous thought and communities, the value of it as a framework is that it highlights a different set of commitments than those that can be encompassed and satisfied by the nation state or hegemonic frames of global justice.
Chapter Four: Black Feminist Practices of Ecological Freedom

The bodies are in motion. The gestures disclose what is at stake – the matter of life returns as an open question. The collective movement points toward what awaits us, what has yet to come into view, what they anticipate – the time and place better than here; a glimpse of the earth not owned by anyone. So everyone depends on them and not the hero occupying center stage, preening and sovereign. Inside the circle it is clear that every song is really the same song, but crooned in infinite variety, every story unaltered and unchanging: How can I live? I want to be free. Hold on. (Hartman 2019, 349).

Introduction

In this chapter I turn to the work of Saidiya Hartman and Hortense Spillers and focus on the concepts that have inspired a wave of recent scholarship which explores “blackness as a means of organizing both human and nonhuman life” (Bennett 2018, 103). I begin with a discussion of Spiller’s essay “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” because it lays the groundwork for the concepts of fungibility, practice, and freedom in Hartman’s work. I show that these concepts can be used to develop an approach to the nexus of race, ecology, and freedom that deepens our understanding of the diagnostic, normative, and anthropocentric problems with liberal frames of environmental and climate justice. The chapter is organized into three parts: 1. diagnosis, 2. norms and normativity, and 3. anthropocentrism. In each part I consider the resources that Hartman (in particular) offers to address and overcome the problem in question, while offering a brief comparison with Wynter and Fanon. My claim is that out of the three figures, the approach that can be developed from Hartman’s work is the strongest, since unlike Wynter’s and Fanon’s, it does not entail variants of the normative problem and the problem of
anthropocentrism. I end with a discussion of ecological freedom and the challenges of grounding a coalitional and comparative approach to race, ecology, and freedom that does not appeal to universal frames of justice.

1. Diagnosis

I understand the diagnostic problem with liberal frames of environmental and climate justice as an inability to interrogate the underlying causes of the unequal distribution of environmental burdens. A diagnosis of environmental racism would need to adopt a broadly materialist analysis that considers land ownership and use, hierarchies of power, modes of production and consumption (such as capitalism and extractivism). In addition, it would need to be able to “examine the epistemological framings and categorizations that produce the material and discursive world building,” that produces the environmental burdens and racialized groups in question (Yussof 2018, 7).

I begin by introducing a diagnostic approach to racist environments informed by Spillers and Hartman. I show that fungibility is an analytic that centers racialized heteropatriarchy and provides a means to diagnose the underlying order and foundations of antiblack racist environments. At its most general level, fungibility names the interchangeability or exchangeability of an object or asset. As in Marx’s understanding of the commodity, this interchangeability is produced by stripping the object or asset in question of the material, social, and ecological relations that formed it. This will be one sense in which Hartman uses the term fungibility, that is, to name the processes and order of exchangeability that become ascendant with the rise of global capital. However, Hartman uses fungibility in a more precise sense, to name the “the elasticity of blackness and its capacious affects,” formed through the paradoxical condition of the enslaved as both subject and object, person and property (Hartman 1997, 19, 7). Hartman describes this second sense in which “the fungibility
of the commodity, specifically its abstractness and immateriality” is interwoven with the occupation of the black body “as the imaginative surface upon which the master and the nation came to understand themselves” (Hartman 1997, 19, 7). On this account, the fungibility of blackness is foundational for the order of the self-possessed and property-owning subject, and the material and affective economy of relations that would transform all beings and entities into exchangeable property. Consequently, although it is important to note that Hartman initially uses the concept of fungibility in the context of chattel slavery in the United States, she will also explore how it temporally and spatially extends beyond this context in “the afterlife of slavery” (Hartman 2008a, 6).

Fungibility is, among other things, bound up with the construction of black gender and sexuality (as inhuman) in an onto-epistemic grammar in which heteropatriarchy, racism, and anthropocentrism are interwoven. My analysis therefore develops the claims of the previous chapter, namely, that gender and sexuality cannot be side issues for diagnoses of racist environments, but rather must be at their heart. My discussion of fungibility in this chapter allows me to augment these claims, since it focuses on the positionality of black women and therefore allows me to attend to the distinct forms of racialization that emerge in tandem with particular configurations of gender, sexuality, and categorizations of the more-than-human. In this section I begin with a discussion of the concepts of the “flesh” and fungibility. I then develop Kathryn Yussof’s claim that these concepts offer a way to: “open up the imbrication

\[\text{\textsuperscript{208}}\text{C. B. Macpherson most famously captured the relationship between market forces and the constitution of modern political subjectivity in his theory of possessive individualism. Analyzing theories of ownership as postulated by Locke, Macpherson explores how the emergence in the seventeenth century of a market society inaugurated a concept of the subject who was defined primarily through his self-possession, his capacity to alienate his labor in the marketplace, and his ostensible freedom from reliance on others. Those who could not alienate their labor in this way of course fell outside the bounds of the self-possessed, proper subject” (Bhandar 2018, 163). I suggest that although both Wynter and Fanon offer similar critiques of this figure as a norm for human life, in different ways their affirmative visions of autonomy and sovereignty echo its underlying structure.}\text{\textsuperscript{209}}\text{I am not, however, suggesting that what Christina Sharpe calls “a pervasive climate of anti—blackness” (Sharpe 2016, 107) exists in a vacuum, separated from settler colonialism, or for that matter imperialism and other forms of racism. See for example (Day 2015). The question of how to think the relationality of different racist environments (and their categorization) is one that I will pursue in future work.}\]

172
of inhuman materials and relations of extraction that go beyond a place-based configuration of environmental racism as a spatial organization of exposure to environmental harm” (Yussof 2018, 6).

*Matter and Black Maternity in the New World Order*

Hortense Spillers’ seminal essay “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” explores the ways in which the categories of black womanhood, matter, and property are interwoven in an “American Grammar.” On Spillers’ account, this grammar or *episteme* is inaugurated in chattel slavery, but continues to act as the conditions of possibility of the present. Spillers argues that the distinction between the “flesh” and the “body,” is foundational for “the socio-political order of the New World,” a world divided “between captive and liberated subject-positions” (Spillers 1987, 67). Captives are produced as flesh, stripped of cultural differentiations, names, and kinship ties, they are understood as things outside of the social order of the properly human. Exceeding “this patrifocal, patrilineal, and patriarchal order,” the flesh of the enslaved undergoes a process of “ungendering” (Spillers 1987, 74, 72). This does not mean that gender will not matter in the case of black embodiment, but rather that it assumes a distinct configuration outside of the dominant economy of gender and sexuality. Spillers’ claim that “before the ‘body’ there is the flesh,” is an attempt to show how in this order of things the flesh is made to appear as “natural,” as the *raw matter* that is logically prior to “the body” (Spillers 1987, 67). Spillers explains that in actuality flesh is

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210"Even though the captive flesh/body has been "liberated," and no one need pretend that even the quotation marks do not matter, dominant symbolic activity, the ruling episteme that releases the dynamics of naming and valuation, remains grounded in the originating metaphors of captivity and mutilation”(Spillers 1987, 68).

211 “Gendering” takes place within the confines of the domestic, an essential metaphor that then spreads its tentacles for male and female subject over a wider ground of human and social purposes. Domesticity appears to gain its power by way of a common origin of cultural fictions that are grounded in the specificity of proper names, more exactly, a patronymic, which, in turn, situates those persons it ‘covers’ in a particular place. Contrarily, the cargo of a ship might not be regarded as elements of the domestic (…) The human cargo of a slave vessel in the fundamental effacement and remission of African family and proper names offers a counter-narrative to notions of the domestic” (Spillers 1987, 72).
constituted by a sophisticated apparatus of corporeal technologies, legal documents, representations, and libidinal investments.

Flesh is a “gathering of social realities as well as a metaphor for value” (Spillers 1987, 68 original emphasis). It is fabricated as a type of property, one that is particularly valuable because of its perceived absence of fixed properties. Consequently, flesh can be invested with the properties of “an irresistible, destructive sensuality,” and “in stunning contradiction (…) a thing, becoming being-for the captor” (Spillers 1987, 67). Flesh is the referent of “a physical and biological expression of ‘otherness,’” and an embodiment of “sheer physical powerlessness that slides into a more general ‘powerlessness,’ resonating through various centers of human and social meaning” (ibid.). On Spillers’ account, flesh is fabricated as raw, exchangeable matter, that can be used, divided or molded as needed:

This profitable ‘atomizing’ of the captive body provides another angle on the divided flesh: we lose any hint or suggestion of a dimension of ethics, of relatedness between human personality and its anatomical features, between one human personality and another, between human personality and cultural institutions. To that extent, the procedures adopted for the captive flesh demarcate a total objectification, as the entire captive community becomes a living laboratory. (Spillers 1987, 67).

While Spillers’ focus here is on the extraction of humans from worlds of social meaning and the resultant denial of ethical relations and recognition through a “total objectification,” she also suggests that the fabrication of the enslaved as “flesh” is foundational for a more general institution of non-reciprocity in a capitalist order of property and possession. As powerless “thing,” supposedly without will, the exteriority of flesh is the ontological break that allows the free, property-owning and self-possessed subject to distinguish himself from mere inhuman matter, or property (Hartman 1997, 62)
Spillers’ inquiry into the “flesh” is in part a response to the Moynihan report that on her account misreads black social structures as essentially matriarchal and thus as pathological (Spillers 1987, 65). In response Spillers counters that the label of matriarchy is a misnaming, since blackness is constituted through the denial of the black mother and her capacities to name (Spillers 1987, 80). Tracing a line of continuity between the present and the past of chattel slavery, Spillers claims that:

If we can account for an originary narrative and judicial principle that might have engendered a ‘Moynihan Report,’ many years into the twentieth century, we cannot do much better than look at (...) the *partus sequitur ventrem*: the condition of the slave mother is ‘forever entailed on all her remotest posterity.’ (Spillers 1987, 79).

In *The American Slave Coast*, Ned and Constance Sublette explain that “In 1662 the *partus sequitur ventrem* passed to Virginia children the free or enslaved legal status of the mother, thus extending slavery to all future matrilineal generations, in perpetuity” (Subtlette and Constance 2016, 135). It meant that the child automatically became the property of the master, simultaneously divorcing enslaved women’s reproductive functions from kinship and mothering. As historian Jennifer Morgan notes *partus* is distinctive because “laws concerning slavery in the English Atlantic were not transposed from England but were an amalgam of legal borrowing and commonly held assumptions about who would be enslaveable and from whence the legal right to property in persons originated” (Morgan 2018, 2-3). One aspect of this amalgam was the evocation of a legal precedent rooted in the language of property and livestock (Morgan 2018, 5). By presenting *partus* as the “originary narrative

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212 “In effect, under conditions of captivity, the offspring of the female does not “belong” to the Mother, nor is s/he "related" to the "owner," though the latter "possesses" it, and in the African-American instance, often fathered it, *and*, as often, without whatever benefit of patrimony” (Spillers 1987, 74).

213 “The thirteenth-century Spanish *Siete Partidas* stipulated, “Slaves are considered more as commercial items than as people; hence property rights are acquired in the same way as they are with objects … Thus, ‘he who is born of a slave mother is also a slave, even if his father is free, . . . So the mother’s owner also owns her child, just as the sheep’s owner also owns her lamb.’ This is the language that echoes in the 1662 Act, the language that evokes animal husbandry and property rights rooted in maternal descent through the bodies of African women."
and judicial principle” of the Moynihan report, Spillers suggests that its implications exceed the state of Virginia and the period of chattel slavery. On her account partus is the legal residue of a symbolic order in which the lack of patrilineal descent is understood as a “fundamental degradation, supposing descent and identity through the female line as comparable to brute animality” (Spillers 1987, 79).

Morgan argues that despite its legal peculiarity, the order of racialized gender and sexuality that partus legitimated is not exceptional: “Legislators in Virginia put into code the assumptions about racial inheritance that prevailed throughout the Atlantic, even as those elsewhere simply acted on those assumptions” (Morgan 2018, 2-3). However, one consequence of this formalization was that “there was now a clear distinction between slave and indentured servant (…) It was the profitability of owning slaves as capital, added to their capacity for labor, that made slavery foundational to Virginia’s economy” (Subtlette and Constance 2016, 135). The value of the enslaved exceeded their “use-value,” and the wombs of enslaved women became a source of speculation and profit. Partus bound the marketization and exchangeability of the commodity with the coerced breeding of human life.

For Spillers, as for Hartman, “human community” in this order of patriarchal racial capitalism, is founded on the negation which produces blackness whose properties, as a kind of animate matter without fixed qualities or social relations, make it synonymous with property. It means that “‘kinship’ loses its meaning, since it can be invaded at any given and arbitrary moment by the property relations” (Spillers 1987, 74 original emphasis). Spillers argues that this “enforced state of breach” is the ground against which concepts of freedom, personhood, and humanity in the New World are defined:

This is the slippage between the Southern European insistence on connecting slavery to animal husbandry and the discursive rhythms of seventeenth-century English legislators’ commitment to doing the same” (Morgan 2018, 4).
‘Family,’ as we practice and understand it ‘in the West’ - vertical transfer of bloodline, of a patronymic, of titles and entitlements, of real estate and the prerogatives of ‘cold cash,’ from fathers to sons and in the supposedly free exchange of affectional ties between a male and a female of his choice - becomes the mythically revered privilege of a free and freed community. (Spillers 1987, 74. original emphasis).

Through this racialized heteropatriarchal order, black skin is made synonymous with the lack of the patronymic. It becomes marked by the mother, and thus equated with property. Consequently, Spillers argues that: “we can only conclude that the provisions of patriarchy, here exacerbated by the preponderant powers of an enslaving class, declare mother right, by definition, a negating feature of human community” (Spillers 1987, 80). The construction of black womanhood and sexuality as inhuman was therefore essential to the construction of blackness as fungible raw matter that could be possessed, appropriated and exchanged as property. Moreover, this construction was itself tied to the emergence of a classificatory order that treated all “chattel” and “things” in a similar (yet irreducible) manner.

In the legal codes of Louisiana and South Carolina, Spillers discerns an “American Grammar,” which underlies this order of things, in which: “‘Slave’ appears in the same context with beasts of burden, all and any animal(s), various livestock, and a virtually endless profusion of domestic content from the culinary item to the book” (Spillers 1987, 79 original emphasis). The existences of humans, animals, and tools, appear through this grammar as calculable and exchangeable, registered only in the common language of number and value. It is precisely this point that Hartman develops with the concept of fungibility.

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214 Personal property included: “specific articles, such as slaves, working beasts, animals of any kind, stock, furniture, plates, books” etc (Spillers 1987, 79).
Fungibility

Fungibility provides an important analytic for understanding how racist environments are organized, highlighting a set of relations that are distinct from but related to those of colonial sovereignty (that I analyzed in chapters Two and Three). Moreover, fungibility shows how anti-Black racism and heteropatriarchy are interwoven and written into environments. My claim is that fungibility begins to establish why a response to racist environments that is informed by Spillers and Hartman will not take the form of sovereignty, whether this be “ontological” (as in Wynter’s vision of new humanism) or national (as in the case of Fanon).

Developing Spillers’ analysis, Hartman proposes the analytic of “fungibility,” which captures “the joy made possible by virtue of the replaceability and interchangeability endemic to the commodity – and by the extensive capacities of property – that is, the augmentation of the master subject through his embodiment in external objects and persons” (Hartman 1997, 21). What is crucial here is the way in which the fungibility of the enslaved grounds the interiority of the master subject: “the fungibility of commodity makes the captive body an abstract and empty vessel vulnerable to the projection of others’ feelings, ideas, desires, and values” (ibid.). This interiority is constituted through a relation of appropriation of the exterior world, both figuratively and materially enabled through the possession of black flesh, a relation that was enabled by the “the dual existence of the slave as property and person” (Hartman 1997, 90). It is through this possession and control that the master knows himself to be free and sovereign. Hartman claims that: “as property, the dispossessed body of the enslaved is a surrogate for the master’s body since it guarantees his disembodied universality and acts as the sign of his power and dominion” (Hartman 1997, 21).215 In the case of enslaved women, gender

215 “Thus, while the beaten and mutilated body presumably establishes the brute materiality of existence, the materiality of suffering regularly eludes (re)cognition by virtue of the body’s being replaced by other signs of value, as well as other bodies” (Hartman 1997, 21).
and sexuality served the ends of “the strategies of domination, and the constituent features of slavery as a mode of production – the fungibility of life, the ownership of labor, and the value of the slave as both a direct producer and a commodity” (Hartman 1997, 100). The domination and sexual violence that constituted the lives and gender of enslaved women was an expression and confirmation of the master’s power and will, one that relied on the simultaneous denial of the status of black women as persons, and the projection of a sexual appetite and desire that seemingly acknowledged their sentience, while dissembling violence in an imagined reciprocity. At the same time, the forced reproductive labors of enslaved women confirmed their own status as property, while literally increasing the master’s property:

Sexuality formed the nexus in which black, female, and chattel were inextricably bound and acted to intensify the constraints of slave status by subjecting the body to another order of violations and whims. The despotic ravages of power made violence indistinguishable from the full enjoyment of the thing. (Hartman 1997, 87).

The irreparable injury of sexual violence and domination against black women did not register as a crime or as an ethical quandary because it was understood as legitimate and right - “indistinguishable from the full enjoyment of the thing.” I will suggest that Hartman’s response to the fungibility of blackness, constructed through a racialized regime of gender and sexuality, will simultaneously challenge the status and category of “the thing” as such. Hartman orients us to the ways in which “the fungibility of life” has ramifications that extend beyond species lines (Hartman 1997, 100). Exploring these connections shows how fungibility can operate as an analytic to diagnose the roots of “anti-Black climates” that centers the racialized construction of black gender and sexuality.

Tiffany Lethabo King highlights one aspect of the connection between fungibility and racist environments, and argues that the fungibility of black women’s bodies played a crucial role in colonial expansion and the creation of the spatial-ecological formations of the plantation
economy. On her account, the value of the frame of fungibility is that it illuminates the role of black bodies that are irreducible to “tool” or laborers (Lethabo King 2019, 120). King argues that the plasticity of black bodies, understood as an “open and porous state” of possibility meant that they could function as symbols of “expansion and spatial possibility” in the settler “spatial imagination” (ibid.). King complements Jennifer Morgan’s analysis in Laboring Women with her own reading of a plantation cartouche and argues that they illustrate how “colonial conceptions of Blackness mediated the ways in which the natural world could be imagined as malleable and an open landscape of flux” (Lethabo King 2019, 120). The shift from the analytic of labor to fungibility therefore brings into view the significance of the construction of blackness in the imaginary and material creation of the environments of the “New World”.

King highlights how the commodification, enclosure, and radical transformation of the natural world were conceivable on the basis of a metaphorical and material capture of black flesh as fungible. In addition, King argues that fungibility allows us to theorize “Black bodies as forms of flux or space in process rather than as human producers, stewards, and occupiers of space” (Lethabo King 2019, 119). As analytic, fungibility thereby “enables at least a momentary reflection on the other kinds of (and often forgotten) relationships that Black bodies have to plants, objects, and nonhuman lifeforms” (ibid.). I will return to this point, since it will be significant for my claims regarding the normative problem and anthropocentrism in relation to Hartman’s work. Before I do so, I explore some ways fungibility allows us to consider “the relationships that Black bodies have to plants, objects, and nonhuman lifeforms.”

In the conversation “The Black Outdoors,” Hartman suggests one way to understand these relationships. Referencing the work of feminist Anthropologist Anna Tsing, Hartman notes how in the technologies of power that emerged in this episteme, “seeds, plants, humans were all cultivated in similar ways” (Moten & Hartman 2016). Anna Tsing shows in the essay, “Unruly Edges: Mushrooms as Companion Species,” the social, ecological and spatial form of
the plantation was foundational in the formation of global modernity. The racial-reproductive technologies of selection and breeding definitive of chattel slavery were a crucial aspect of strategies of commodification, control, and capture that worked across species lines. This process was twinned with the massive dispossession and enclosure of Indigenous land and its transformation into largely monocrop agriculture. Tsing argues that modern categories of racism emerged to dehumanize the enslaved and indentured populations forced to work on plantations. But she also highlights how the transformation of intrahuman relationships was coeval with a transformation in interspecies relations:

in forging a new antagonism to plantation plants, humans changed the very nature of species being. Elites entrenched their sense of autonomy from other species; they were masters not lovers of nonhuman beings, the species Others who came to define human self-making. But for planters this was only possible to the extent that human subspecies were formulated and enforced. (Tsing 2012, 149).

Tsing highlights how the liberal subject and ontology of the human emerged through specific socio-ecological relationships. What is distinctive about this subject is that it would disavow these ties and define itself as “self-making.” Moreover, its autonomy from “nonhuman beings” and mastery “was only possible” through the categorization of humans as in/ subhuman. As Spillers and Hartman indicate, understanding this process requires that we consider the racialized regime of gender and sexuality that underwrote the fungibility of the black body.

216 “Plantations were the engine of European expansion. Plantations produced the wealth— and the modus operandi—that allowed Europeans to take over the world. We usually hear about superior technologies and resources; but it was the plantation system that made navies, science, and eventually industrialization possible” (Tsing 2012, 148).

217 “’Human’ and ‘nonhuman’ are ideological designations by which forms of being that are deemed moral and thus worthy of protection are distinguished from forms of being (including object being or ‘nonlife’) that are deemed morally negligible and therefore expendable. As a designation of moral value, the human floats free of the speciological body, trailing a hierarchy of privilege that insinuates divisions both within and among species— dividing citizens from slaves and pets from pests, while conversely conflating human chattel with cattle, the poor with the feral, racial others with beasts. The human, in short, is an ideology masquerading as a species” (Ellis 2018, 144).
It is important to note that for Tsing, Spillers, and Hartman, these shifts and the order they inaugurated are not confined to the past, but rather continue to define our present. In Lose Your Mother, Hartman introduces the concept of “the afterlife of slavery” to indicate how the “racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago” continues to structure the world (Hartman 2008a, 6). Hartman suggests that the desacralization of the earth, its transformation into “dead matter,” was part of the same process in which “slavery annulled lives, transforming men and women into dead matter, and then resuscitated them for servitude” (Hartman 2008a, 68). The linkage between the fabrication of humans as fungible commodities and the transformation of the more-than-human world into “dead matter,” is evident in Hartman’s description of the cowrie shells that the slaves were exchanged for on the African continent. Once the mollusks had been killed in their native Maldives Islands, and the shells cleaned and dried, they were transported and exchanged. Hartman attends to how both the enslaved and the shells that they were exchanged for were subject to similar (if irreducible) technologies and processes: “The Dutch transported cowrie shells from the Indian Ocean via Ceylon to Amsterdam (…) and the English via the Bay of Bengal to London, and then shipped them to Africa as ballast in slave ships” (Hartman 2008a, 207). Eventually, the shell currency was buried, soon to become worthless “and the savanna became crypts for dead tissue” (Hartman 2008a, 206).

Emphasizing the centrality of slavery for the primitive accumulation that spawned global capital, Hartman illuminates both the prior condition of such massive theft and the processes of dispossession and objectification that were required to transform beings and

218 “The interior of the dungeon exposed an open wound of earth, and the roughly hewn walls perspired, making the chamber dank. The cells were hollowed out of the rocky deposit of a hillside, which had been a sacred shrine devoted to the local pantheon of gods. Nana Taabiri watched over all the creatures on earth and in the sea. When the fort was built, the shrine was displaced and the gods exiled” (Hartman 2008, 112).

219 This attention anticipates Haraway’s understanding of the “plantationocene” as an ongoing process of “moving material semiotic generativity around the world for capital accumulation and profit—the rapid displacement and reformulation of germ plasm, genomes, cuttings, and all other names and forms of part organisms and of deracinated plants, animals, and people—is one defining operation of the Plantationocene, Capitalocene, and Anthropocene taken together” (Haraway 2016, 206).
entities into “property.”

This allows us to analyze how fungibility and disposability work together: “the miracle of the slave trade was that it resuscitated useless lives and transformed waste into capital” (Hartman 2008a, 111). I understand Hartman as claiming that the transformation of “men and women” into fungible commodities was part of a more general transformation of beings and entities into expendable “dead matter” whose value only lies in the particular properties or value that can be extracted from them.

This relation of “dead matter,” profit and energy is one that will be repeated in the capitalist processes of extractivism, fossil fuel dependency, and dispossession that organize our world. The similarity (of the extraction of value from fossil fuels and from the enslaved once they had been made into fungible commodities) becomes explicable when we consider the point that “scholars have long understood that the slave plantation system was the model and motor for the carbon-greedy machine-based factory system that is often cited as an inflection point for the Anthropocene” (Haraway 2016, 206).

My concern here is less with the periodization and naming of the Anthropocene as such and more with how, as Kathryn Yussof argues, Spillers and Hartman offer insight into “the categorization of matter as property and properties,” in which:

both spatial dispossession of land (for extraction) and dispossessions of persons (as another form of spatial extraction) are enacted. The slave in this formulation is rendered as matter, recognized through an inhuman property relation - what Saidiya Hartman

220 See (Nichols 2017)
221 “A transmutation of matter occurs within that signification that renders matter as property, that makes a delineation between agency and inertness, which stabilizes the cut of property and enacts the removal of matter from its constitutive relations as both subject and mineral embedded in sociological and ecological fields” (Yussof 2018, 4).
222 “From the transformation of the mineralogy of the earth in the extraction of gold, silver, salt and copper to the massive transformation of ecologies in the movement of people, plants, and animals across territories, coupled with the intensive implantation of monocultures of indigo, sugar, tobacco, cotton, and other ‘alien’ ecologies in the New World. The complex histories of those afterlives of slavery continued in the chain gangs that laid the railroad and worked the coal mines through to the establishment of new forms of energy” (Yussof 2018, 6).
223 See (McDermott Hughes 2017)
calls fungibility - as a commodity with properties, but without subjective will or agency
(or ‘flesh’ as Hortense Spillers has it). (Yussof 2018, 6).

We can then understand fungibility as a mode of world organization that divided properly
human subjects from the “dead matter” that will be resuscitated as property. We can see this
understanding of fungibility in Hartman’s claim, that:

the dungeon was a womb in which the slave was born. The harvest of raw material and
the manufacture of goods defined the prison’s function. The British didn’t call it a
womb; they called it a factory, which has its first usage in the trading forts of West
Africa. (The very word “factory” documents the indissoluble link between England’s

The concepts of “raw material” and “the manufacture of goods” that make possible the
industrial revolution and the ascendancy of global capitalism are developed in the laboratory
of the dungeon, the ship, slave pen, and auction block. The transformation of humans into
fungible commodities is foundational for a general transformation of socio-ecological worlds
into “raw material” that might be extracted, processed, and exchanged on an unprecedented
scale. I understand Hartman to be claiming that the fungibility of “human commodities” is the
condition of possibility of this process in a double sense: first, by serving as the seemingly
infinite energy source that powers extraction, and secondly, in acting as the ground against
which the putatively human heteropatriarchal order of property and possession will define
itself.

In this section I argued that the import of fungibility is that it illuminates the specificity
and significance of the creation of racist environments and relations to matter initiated in the
“racial calculus” of slavery. Hartman’s analytic of fungibility and her genealogy of slavery and

224 On Hartman’s account, the horrors of the slave trade cannot be dissociated from racial capitalism, or what she
terms racial slavery, a term that is meant to point to this disavowed origin and thus to the continuity of the present
with the seemingly distant and barbaric past.
its afterlives offers a way of thinking racism and ecology as co-constitutive rather than only incidentally linked. Fungibility names a categorization of matter tied to regimes of extraction and the global transformation of ecologies. Fungibility locates the causes of what we might think of as environmental racism in the onto-epistemic order inaugurated in racial slavery in which heteropatriarchy was intertwined with racism. It thereby breaks with the narrow senses of racism as individual intent as well as with the periodization of injuries and harms as discrete events. In the next two sections I show that although the implications of fungibility extend beyond the physical space of the plantation or the formal period of slavery, as an analytic it nonetheless remains focused on the positionality of black people, particularly black women.

The diagnosis of racist environments that I have outlined in this section is similar to Wynter’s and Fanon’s in a number of respects. In brief, Wynter, Fanon, and Hartman all begin with a radical critique of liberal humanism, understanding the dominant mode of world inhabitation as essentially racist and racialized, and characterized by a fundamentally divided consciousness that in turn divides the world. For all three, the division between human and nonhuman is crucial for this structure of consciousness. All cohere on the point that this species divide is connected to racial hierarchy but has effects that extend beyond human life.

In the next section, I will trace the relationship between fungibility and Hartman’s focus on practice rather than labor, appropriation, or praxis. I show that the frames of fungibility and practice bring into relief the differences between an approach to the normative problem informed by Hartman in contrast to those of Fanon and Wynter.

S2. Norms and Normativity

In this section I focus on the concept of practice in Hartman’s work and show how it is linked to the analytic of fungibility and the positionality of black women. I demonstrate that Hartman’s attention to praxis offers important resources to identify and deepen our sense of
the normative problem with liberal frames of environmental justice. It also brings some of the differences between Hartman, Fanon, and Wynter into relief.

Recall that the normative problem with liberal frames of environmental and climate justice is that they often posit as universal and value-neutral what are in fact partial and problematic norms. The diagnoses of racist environments that Wynter, Fanon, and Hartman offer will all locate the source of the problem in the norms and system of justice that are meant to remedy it. For Wynter, this took the form of showing that what we understand as universal, or as the human itself, is an “overrepresentation” of a particular genre, or way of being human, which she termed Man. Wynter argued that our biocentric episteme and neo-Malthusian capitalist imperatives of growth are therefore also not universal. Similarly, Fanon sought to show that the Manichean division of the world, and the constitution of the white subject as the human are not normal, healthy, or universal, but rather signs of a social pathology that has been allowed to assume global dimensions through slavery and colonialism. For Wynter, Fanon, and Hartman, the issue is not only that these norms are not universal, but that their claims to universality are part of the violence and harm in question. Moreover, all three explore the ways that these norms entail the reproduction of racist and ecological violence.

However, when we compare Hartman’s use of practice, on the one hand, and Wynter and Fanon’s uses of praxis, then we can begin to see how their positions diverge. Wynter and Fanon hold to the concepts of praxis and appropriation. Their use of these concepts commits them to a theory of the human as self-making, exceptional, and defined in contradistinction to matter. These concepts play an important role in their responses to liberal humanism. I argue that the ways that they resolve (what I understand as) the normative problem, also entail some normative problems and anthropocentrism. I show that Hartman’s use of the concept of practice avoids such problems. This is one of the key differences between Wynter and Fanon, on the one hand, and Hartman on the other.
The black ecological ethics that I read in Hartman’s discussions of practice raises the question of its relation to the frameworks of grounded normativity that I turned to in Chapter Three. The worry is that Hartman imports a set of ethical and political values which function similarly to the universal claims of the liberal ethics and politics that she critiques, values that are at odds with Indigenous sovereignty. If this is the case, then this move arguably reproduces the normative problem in another form. I show that although Hartman risks this move, she ultimately has resources to address this issue.

What is Practice?

Up to this point, I have focused on how blackness is constituted through a racist and heteropatriarchal order that constructs blackness as fungible inhuman matter. Yet, for both Spillers and Hartman, this violence and domination is only one side of things. Rather than attempting to be included in the dominant regime of gender and personhood, Spillers and Hartman are interested in what other forms of gender, sexuality, politics, and social life can unfold on its underside. In reference to the denied black mother, Spillers claims that “this problematizing of gender places her, in my view, out of the traditional symbolics of female gender, and it is our task to make a place for this different social subject. In doing so, we are less interested in joining the ranks of gendered femaleness then gaining the insurgent ground as female social subject” (Spillers 1987, 80 original emphasis). With the concept of practice, Hartman explores how black women gain “the insurgent ground” through the production of space, where the space that is produced is not that of a territory, property, or home, but rather, is the space of an “infrapolitics”, “without a proper locus” (Hartman 1997, 51).

Hartman adopts the concept of practice form Michel de Certeau – who in The Practice of Everyday Life, had studied the everyday “‘ways of operating’ or doing things” (Certeau

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225 Hartman adopts the term “infrapolitics” from anarchist Agrarian James C Scott. Scott is an important point of reference for Hartman. See “The Infrapolitics of Subordinate Groups” in (Scott 1990).
In Hartman’s work, practice will include ways of “doing things” such as dances, spiritual and magical rituals, petit-marronnage, riots, as well as coerced displays of submission, affection, and obedience entailed by captivity. de Certeau’s theory of practice is significant for Hartman because it aims to show how everyday practices take place in and remake dominant space. In her attention to practice, Hartman thus offers another way to see how racism is always situated, shaping and being shaped by particular environments and, at the same time, to bring into view forms of placemaking on the margins of or under the radar of dominant forms of space, such as the plantation and the state. Additionally, de Certeau’s attempt to counter an atomistic view of individual subjects is important for understanding how Hartman’s focus on black practice supports her critique of the liberal subject (Certeau 1984, xi). De Certeau suggests that the shift away from the atomistic, rational subject to a concern with “modes of operation or schemata of action” allows us to attend to forms of survival and life that are not exclusive to the human. He writes:

the question at hand concerns modes of operation or schemata of action, and not directly the subjects (or persons) who are their authors or vehicles. It concerns an operational logic whose models may go as far back as the age-old ruses of fishes and insects that disguise or transform themselves in order to survive, and which has in any case been

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226 “the struggle waged in everyday practices, from the appropriation of space in local and pedestrian acts, holding a praise meeting in the woods, meeting a lover in the canebrake, or throwing a surreptitious dance in the quarters to the contestation of one’s status as transactable object or the vehicle of another’s rights, was about the creation of a social space in which the assertion of needs, desires, and counterclaims could be collectively aired, thereby granting property a social life and an arena or shared identification with other slaves. Like de Certeau’s walker who challenges the disciplinary apparatus of the urban system with his idle footsteps, these practices also create possibilities within the space of domination, transgress the policed space of subordination through unlicensed travel and collective assembly across the privatized lines of plantation households, and disrupt boundaries between the public and the private in the articulation of insurgent claims” (Hartman 1997, 69-70). See (Certeau 1984).

227 In her attention to the ways in which the practices of “black performance” create and contest space, Hartman thus anticipates an analysis of “black performance geographies” (Stanley Niaah 2007) which draws on Nigel Thrift’s theory of performance geographies. The latter begins to explore the ecological entanglement suggested by a shift to the non-representational theory that Thrift also traces back to Benjamin and de Certeau (Certeau 1984; Thrift 2009).
concealed by the form of rationality currently dominant in Western culture. (Certeau 1984, xi).

The turn to modes of ecological relationality, survival, and resistance that take place under the radar of the liberal human subject is one that I understand Hartman as developing in her discussions of black practice.

Hartman outlines “the key features of practice,” as “the nonautonomy of the field of action; provisional ways of operating within the dominant space; local, multiple, and dispersed sites of resistance that have not been strategically codified or integrated; and the nonautonomy and pained constitution of the slave as person” (Hartman 1997, 62). Hartman’s attempt to unearth forms of resistance that issue from the “nonautonomy” of the field and from the enslaved indicates how her attention to practice will also undermine the presuppositions of liberal notions of individual personhood and autonomy, since “the bourgeois individual, the unencumbered self, and the featureless person that gives meaning to the term ‘political’ in its conventional usage, with all the attendant assumptions about the relation of the subject and the state, cannot incorporate the enslaved” (ibid.).

Hartman outlines the stakes of her focus, “these pedestrian practices illuminate inchoate and utopian expressions of freedom that are not and perhaps cannot be actualized elsewhere” (Hartman 1997, 13). These “expression of freedom” are occluded when viewed through the dominant grid of political rationality: “the desires and longings that exceed the frame of civil rights and political emancipation find expression in quotidian acts (…) they express an understanding or imagination of freedom quite at odds with bourgeois expectations” (Hartman 1997, 13). I will show that the understanding or “imagination of freedom” that Hartman

Footnotes:

228 Practice will continue to be Hartman’s focus in contexts other than the period of formal slavery, although it has a particular significance in this context.
229 Hartman’s focus on practice (rather than more familiar forms of the political) is motivated by her insight that: “too often the interventions and challenges of the dominated have been obscured when measured against traditional notions of the political and its central features” (Hartman 1997, 62).
illuminates in her discussions of practice undermines the purported universality and neutrality of liberal frames of environmental and climate justice, and articulates a sense of ecological freedom and a set of emergent black ecological ethical values.

**The Differences between Practice and Appropriation**

Recall that the interiority, individuality, and liberty of the master subject are constituted through the possession and appropriation of the external world through labor, or appropriation. On Hartman’s account, the fungibility of black flesh enabled the Lockean self-possessed and property-owning subject to possess and project their desires onto the enslaved; where the enslaved were imagined as part of the external world, as a kind of matter that could be molded to express the master’s desires and power. The role that the enslaved play in the appropriation and transformation of the external world does not challenge this property relation and accreditation of value, since “even labor is not considered agency because it is the property of another, extracted by coercive means, and part of the bestial capacities of the black; it simply personifies the power and dominion of the owner” (Hartman 1997, 62).

In sum, the properties and property of the Lockean subject are constituted through this relation of interiority and exteriority, such that self-possession is formed through the appropriation of the external, material world. The fungibility of blackness means that it occupies an important liminal place in this dynamic.

Hartman’s description of practice as “the appropriation of dominant space” raises the question of the difference of practice from the concept of appropriation that characterizes the liberal subject (Hartman 1997, 66). Her description of the practices of the enslaved in terms of “appropriation” is meant to challenge the assumptions regarding property, personhood, and

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230 “The slave is indisputably outside the normative terms of individuality to such a degree that the very existence of agency is seen as a contravention of another’s unlimited rights to the object” (Hartman 1997, 62).
value that undergird this concept. These “itinerant acts of defiance” contest “the spatial confinement and surveillance of slave life and, ironically, reconsiders the meaning of property, theft, and agency” (ibid.). For example, Hartman claims that the practices of “stealing away,” of flight and sociality, in which the enslaved “stole themselves,” question the relation between interiority and exteriority, (self) possession and property that ground the concept of appropriation. Hartman argues that “implicit within the appropriation of the object of property was an insistence that flew in the face of the law: liberty defined by inalienable rights of property was theft (…) the disruptive assertions, necessarily a part of stealing away, ultimately transgressed the law of property” (Hartman 1997, 69).

The laboring and property-owning subject constituted himself through his alienation from nature – such that it thereby reflected and served his intentions and will. By contrast, one of the distinctive characteristics of black practice is in its transience, that is in its relative indiscernibility from the material and natural world. The difference between appropriation and practice, and by extension between labor and fungibility, becomes clearer in Hartman’s discussion of the sacralization of the land:

not only is the dominant space pilfered and manipulated in giving voice to need and in making counterclaims about freedom, humanity, and the self (a reconstructed self that negates the dominant terms of identity and existence), but also this space becomes ineffably produced as a sacralized and ancestral landscape. These sacralized and

231 “Despite the range of activities encompassed under this rubric, what these events shared was the vehicle for the redemptive figuration of dispossessed individual and community, reconstituting kin relations, contravening the object status of chattel, transforming pleasure, and investing in the body as a site of sensual activity, sociality, and possibility, and last, redressing the pained body” (Hartman 1997, 66).

232 Hartman explains that “the importance of the concept of practice is that it enables us to recognize the agency of the dominated and the limited and transient nature of that agency” (Hartman 1997, 62). The term transience names the conditions of black life, the need for stealth, fugitivity, and the lack of ownership or natal land, that Hartman suggests give rise to an ethos that emerges in and from this enforced transience. To understand the significance of transience further in Hartman’s thought and its relation to the concepts of redress, redemption, and waste it is necessary to explore her engagement with Walter Benjamin. For discussions of transience in Benjamin’s work see (Butler 2016; Pensky 2004; Thiem 2016). I briefly return to the connection with Benjamin later in this section.
ancestral elements are created, imagined, and remembered in the use of prayer trees and inverted pots, performed in the shout, and called up in sacred gatherings. (Hartman 1997, 72 emphasis added).

As we have seen, the constitution of blackness as landlessness and the de-sacralization of the earth, its transformation into mere “matter,” are bound together in fungibility.233 Engaging with the landscape, so as to express an “insurgent nostalgia (…) and transform the space of captivity into one inhabited by the revenants of a dismembered past,” is less an attempt to appropriate it as property then a contestation of the forms of “freedom, humanity, and the self” that are founded on the construction of both blackness and land as appropriable and exchangeable matter. I will now turn to Hartman’s discussion of practices of subsistence in the Postbellum South to support and develop my claim that her account helps to deepen the normative problems with liberal frames of environmental and climate justice. I suggest that these practices articulate a sense of black ecological freedom that puts in question aspects of both Wynter’s and Fanon’s responses to racist environments.234

Transient Practices of Subsistence and Flight

The Emancipation Proclamation had initially granted tracts of land in the South to former slaves (Finney 2014, 36). However, “on February 5, 1866, in response to their request, Congress defeated that portion of the Freedmen’s Bureau Act that gave it the authority to assign land to former slaves, and President Johnson ordered all land titles rescinded” (37). Black people were also denied the possibility of settling (Indigenous) land in the West that was granted to whites by the Homestead Act (1862). At the same time, a flurry of new legislation

233 See (Sexton 2016; Wilderson III. 2010) for this claim.
234 In developing this claim, I support and build on Cervenak and Carter’s argument that “black performance studies is never not a question of ecological possibility, of being black outside in the wake of self-possession’s overdetermined white particularity. Such questions foreground Scenes’ second half” (Cervenak and Carter 2017, 45).
such as the Black Codes and Vagrancy Laws worked to force black people back onto the plantation and into the forced labor that was the punishment for race specific infractions. Hartman reads this legislation alongside the handbooks of the Freedman’s Bureau and suggests that the criminality and debt that came with the legal recognition of the freed’s personhood and will, was one side of a disciplinary strategy, which also included the implantation of aspirational and unattainable norms of respectable domesticity, “free” labor, property, and land ownership, that focused on freed blacks to constrict the meaning and possibilities of freedom. Hartman describes this period as ‘the nonevent of emancipation” which was “insinuated by the perpetuation of the plantation system and the reconfiguration of subjection” (Hartman 1997, 116). This “reconfiguration of subjection” was enabled by “the stipulation of abstract equality” (ibid.). The myth that “Chattel becomes man through the ascension to the hallowed realm of the self-possessed” worked as a new sophisticated form of bondage and servitude, as “self-possession effectively yielded modern forms of bonded labor” (Hartman 1997, 123, 120).

The patent inequality of this period is well known – evidenced in the denial of settler privileges or land ownership to black people, and the double standards of the law manifest in the “Black Codes.” What is distinctive about Hartman’s approach is that her interest is less in the inequality and exclusion of black people from the property- and land-owning body politic.

235 For example: “Vagrancy laws facilitated the convict- and bonded – labor system in that any person not in possession of a contract was declared a vagrant. This person was fined and, if unable to pay the fine, hired out to planters or put to work on public roads for a period as long as a year” (Hartman 1997, 145). The convict lease system is another link between extractivism and racist environments. Angela Davis notes that “It is extremely unsettling to think of modern, industrialized urban areas as having been originally produced under the racist labor conditions of penal servitude that are often described by historians as even worse than slavery” (Davis 2003, 35). However, this is what we are forced to confront if we track convict leasing. She writes: “I grew up in the city of Birmingham, Alabama. Because of its mines-coal and iron ore-and its steel mills that remained active until the deindustrialization process of the 1980s, it was widely known as ‘the Pittsburgh of the South.’ The fathers of many of my friends worked in these mines and mills. It is only recently that I have learned that the black miners and steelworkers I knew during my childhood inherited their place in Birmingham’s industrial development from black convicts forced to do this work under the lease system” (ibid.).

236 “These techniques were supplanted by the liberty of contract that spawned debt-peonage, the bestowal of right that engendered indebtedness and obligation and licensed naked forms of domination and coercion, and the cultivation of a work ethic that promoted self-discipline and induced internal forms of policing. Spectacular displays of white terror and violence supplemented these techniques” (Hartman 1997, 120).
In other words, the issue is not only in the incomplete realization of black inclusion into the order of free laborer, property owner, and heteronormative nuclear family. The issue is with the norms themselves and the ways that they work to constrict alternative freedom dreams and forms of life.

Motivated by the “the problem of idleness and the necessity of setting the freed to work,” the state responded with a strategy of criminalization, enclosure, and containment. Hartman claims that: “A variety of everyday activities that enabled a measure of subsistence or autonomy were considered “troublesome” assertions of freedom and hence were criminalized” (Hartman 1997, 146). For black women domesticity and marriage was upheld as the boundary marker between freedom, on the one hand, and criminality and servitude, on the other. These norms and disciplinary interventions worked to police and subjugate black women as guilty and indebted subjects: “like the difference between grubbing and rooting and working for a living, domesticity was the sign of civilization, settlement, and rational desire, as contrasted with the itinerancy and subsistence of those eluding the contract system” (Hartman 1997, 157).

Freedom of movement and “subsistence” without labor contracts or property were considered threatening since they contested the new means of captivity and the foundational assumptions of the liberal order about the nature of freedom. Consequently, the state’s legal and social strategies criminalized and proscribed the movement, comportment, and lifeways of the freed, particularly in relation to animals and land. Hartman describes how:

These activities ranged from moving about to hunting and fishing to styles of comportment. In addition to vagrancy laws, new laws requiring the fencing of animals, 237

237 “The utility of the family as a mechanism in the transition to a free labor system is evidenced in the importance attached to the home” (Hartman 1997, 157).
hunting and fishing laws, the privatization of public lands, et cetera, made subsistence living increasingly difficult and largely illegal. (Hartman 1997, 146).

The criminalization of subsistence living and flight indicates how the legal enclosure, settlement, and containment of the environment, as well as the restriction of “‘troublesome’ assertions of freedom,” were part of the same process. A new wave of the “the privatization of public lands,” happens at the same time as black people enter the public sphere and are also forced back into the regime of private property. This process is detailed in one of the sources that Hartman cites: Steven Hahn’s essay “Hunting, Fishing, and Foraging: Common Rights and Class Relations in the Postbellum South” (Hartman 1997, 239).

In the antebellum South, “Unimproved, and thus unenclosed, land, which constituted most of the acreage on Southern farms, won sanction as common property for hunting, fishing, and grazing” (Hahn 1982, 39). This would shift in the wake of emancipation. Hahn tracks shifts to laws and local regulations, regarding trespass, “enclosures, stock and game laws” (37) that quickly made the enclosure of land, crops and animals mandatory (ibid.). On Hahn’s assessment the “fists of coercion and repression came down in efforts to restrict the freedmen’s mobility, alternative employment opportunities, and access to the means of production and subsistence, tying them to the land as a propertyless work force” (38). Hahn notes that one of the targets of these measures was a black preference and capacity for subsistence living – one which links the postbellum South to the “plantation grounds of the Caribbean.” It was known that “Freedmen in the South evinced similar proclivities: They seemed ready to spurn wage and share cropping incentives in favor of a rude subsistence on game and raised foodstuffs rather than cotton when able to farm on their own account” (44).

238 Hahn writes of the planters concerns based on the fact that “The travail of the plantation system in much of the post-emancipation Caribbean, they were well aware, stemmed largely from the success of ex-slaves in taking up former provision grounds and other uninhabited land that proved unsuited to staple crops” (Hahn 1982, 44).
Black land ownership and “sedentary independence apparently promised little better.” For instance, “Alabama’s Clark County *Journal* warned they ‘will raise their corn, squashes, pigs, and chickens, and work no more.’” Similarly, a planter complained about “the freedmen’s “disposition is to be content with the most precarious subsistence’” (44). On Hartman’s reading these practices suggest a general disinterest in wage labor, settlement, and property ownership and “an alternate imagination of freedom and resistance to the imposition of a new order of constraint” (Hartman 1997, 127).

The ostensible recognition of black individual personhood and “free will,” by law and state (if only through the categories of criminality and responsibility), served as a means of capture, a capture both of black people and, at the same time, what we might call the natural commons.239 Carolyn Finney notes that “while Pinchot and Muir” (the pioneers of conservationism):

explored, articulated, and disseminated conservation and preservation ideologies, legislation was being enacted to limit both movement and accessibility for African Americans, as well as American Indians, Chinese, and other nonwhite peoples in the United States. This included the California Land Claims Act of 1851, the Black Codes (1861–65), the Dawes Act (1887), and the Curtis Act (1898). During the same period, there were numerous race-related massacres of African Americans: two hundred in Louisiana in 1868; nine in North Carolina in 1898; and seventy in Colfax, Louisiana, in 1873. (Finney 2014, 37).

The creation of “public parks” and conservationist areas, as well as the conceptualization of the environment as “pristine nature,” were part of a more general enclosure of land that controlled non-white movement and forms of life. In this period there was an increasing

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239 The idea of the enclosure of the commons is suggested by Hartman’s reference to E P Thomas’s “Custom Law and Common Right” in *Customs in Common: Studies in Traditional Popular Culture*. (Hartman 1997, 239).
awareness of the finitude of natural resources, land, and the agricultural and ecological devastation of settler-plantation life. The enclosure of land and the criminalization of black practices of subsistence and flight from the plantation were justified in part by the emerging discourse of conservationism (Hahn 1982, 45-7). Black practices of subsistence and “vagrancy” were presented as the sources of this environmental degradation. Black people (and what we might now think of as black ecological practices) were positioned and treated as an environmental threat.

This double enclosure of black people and the land thus strictly delineated the field of action and forms of life for the freed and worked with the explicit intent to force black people into wage labor, or more commonly debt peonage or convict labor, the enclosure often fixing them to the very plantations where they or their parents had labored as slaves. As a result of this criminalization of non-capitalist and non-appropriative relations to the land, the freed’s relations with the latter, with themselves, and with each other were constricted and thereby implanted the bourgeoise property owner and subject as the aspirational norm. Part of the violence of this order is in its imposition of property relations, and the heteropatriarchal, self-possessed and property-owning subject, as the only form of acceptable social life.240

Hartman’s genealogy of the “nonevent of emancipation” puts approaches to environmental racism modelled on civil rights and liberal frames of justice into question. For example, in “Decision Making,” Robert Bullard repeatedly invokes abolition as a precedent that can be used to push environmental justice legislation forward. He writes:

The civil rights and environmental laws of the land must be enforced even if means the loss of a few jobs. This argument was a sound one in the 1860’s, when the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which freed the slaves in the United States, was passed

240 “At the same time, planter spokesmen, citing the ‘depredations’ of ‘wandering’ freedmen, began to press for stricter definitions of and stronger safeguards for private property. ‘Negroes have a notorious propensity to appropriate what belongs to another’” (Hahn 1982, 44-5).
over the opposition of proslavery advocates who posited that the new law would create unemployment (…) drive up wages, and inflict undue hardship on the plantation economy. (Bullard 1995, 12).

Yet, specters of slavery and its afterlives recur throughout Bullard’s discussion of cases of environmental racism in the South. Town’s founded by freed slaves were repeatedly targeted as sites of dumps, toxic waste, chemical plants and nuclear facilities (Bullard 1995, 16, 19, 22). Often these siting decisions make forms of subsistence living or relative autonomy from wage labor unviable since they pollute the waterways, animals, and land.241 The effects on human health mean that communities are displaced and dispossessed, often being bought out for little in “sealed” legal decisions that further evidence how the law can serve as a means of subjection and not redress.242 Hartman’s attention to practice suggests that we should not only consider the discrimination and inequality evidenced in these decisions, but also the socio-ecological relationships and distinct values that they disrupt.

In sum, a strategy and imaginary of response to anti-Black climates modelled on the legal precedent and formal freedom of emancipation becomes questionable through Hartman’s lens. I understand Hartman to argue that the removal of people from their environments and the repeated destructive transformation of them, as well as the constriction of peoples’ socio-ecological relations are in fact an integral part of the irreparable violence. The harm of the creation of such racist environments goes beyond exclusion or differential distribution. Such

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241 For example see the case of DDT poisoning of the Black community of Triana, Alabama (Taylor 2014, 6-13). Or J. T. Roane’s analysis in “Plotting the Black Commons”: “Although the story of the Anacostia’s toxification is foremost one of exposure and vulnerability, within the cultural practices that lead Black residents in Southeast Washington, DC to fish and boat the waters is the seed of a new era beyond the toxic Chesapeake and the age of oil. These communities continue to self-fashion as individuals and as collectives through the practice of hybrid leisure cultures that incorporate elements and practices associated with rurality in the heart of the nation’s capital” (Roane 2018, 241).

242“Many of the community buyout settlements are sealed. The secret nature of the agreements limits public scrutiny, community comparisons, and disclosure of harm or potential harm. Few of the recent settlement agreements allow for health monitoring or surveillance of affected residents once they are dispersed. Some settlements have even required the ‘victims’ to sign waivers that preclude them from bringing any further lawsuits against the polluting industry” (Bullard 1995, 22).
an environmental management and commodifying relation to more-than-human beings works as a strategy of surveillance and capture that simultaneously constricts the modes of world inhabitation available to the captured and surveilled. Further, liberal frames of (social) justice and rights risk masking the nature of the harms in question, namely, the constriction and attempted annihilation of freedom dreams and forms of life that exceed or threaten the heteropatriarchal racial-capitalist order.

**Practice and Fungibility as the Refusal of Appropriation and Human Praxis**

The difference between practice and appropriation that I outlined earlier takes us back to the distinction Hartman makes between the enslaved as fungible commodity and laborer. We have seen how Hartman takes aim at the Lockean subject and the relation of property, self-possession, and appropriation proper to it. In “The Belly of the World: A Note on Black Women’s Labors,” Hartman will also distinguish her project from Marxian conceptualizations of freedom, appropriation, and revolutionary praxis. In this essay, Hartman claims that the fungibility of black women, and their biologically and socially reproductive labors (both under chattel slavery and in nominal freedom) trouble the Marxian, labor-centric frames that are assumed by the male dominated Black Radical Tradition.

*Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* eschews a Marxist frame, and turns to black women’s anarchist practices that are a “refusal of fungible life” (Hartman 2019, 231). The book traces practices of leisure, sociality, and pleasure that refuse the dignity and value of labor, and at the same time, put into question the dialectic of appropriation and matter that the valorization

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243 “The inflated assessment of the will, the exalting of liberty, and the idealization of choice masked the violence of exchange” (Hartman 1997, 140).

244 “It has proven difficult, if not impossible, to assimilate black women’s domestic labors and reproductive capacities within narratives of the black worker, slave rebellion, marronnage, or black radicalism, even as this labor was critical to the creation of value, the realization of profit and the accumulation of capital. It has been no less complicated to imagine the future produced by such labors as anything other than monstrous” (Hartman 2016, 167).
This refusal is born from the specific history and positionality of black women and their labors, by virtue of which their bodies were rendered fungible commodities. As we saw earlier, Tiffany Lethabo King understands the significance of this shift in terms that highlight its significance for Black ecologies:

Considering black fungibility instead of labor as an analytical frame creates an opportunity to reflect on other kinds of cosmologies - more specifically, Indigenous and Black ones - that radically reimagine the body’s relationship to life forms that have been taxonomized as plants or nonhuman. (Lethabo King 2019, 199).

This reimagining of the “body’s relationship to” other “life forms” is entailed in part by the fact that this analytic “does not assume or center a laboring figure that works itself into humanity through alienation - that is, by separating itself from other lifeforms that it must denigrate, such as land, water, and animals” (ibid.) In sum, rather than repeating the relation of appropriation that characterizes the laboring subject and its objectifying, extractive relations with what it understands as the external world, the frames of practice and fungibility illuminate what Édouard Glissant calls “an ecological vision of Relation” that challenges this model of the human (Glissant 1997, 146).

Hartman’s attention to practice registers the pervasive intensity of domination but allows us to see how blackness is irreducible to the conditions of domination that found it. It also allows us to consider the alternative forms of relation (other than property and self-possession) that emerge from practices that “affirmatively negate” this order. By focusing on non-

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245 For example (Hartman 1997, 127). The refusal of labor and Marxian frames of insurgency, and the turn to Black women’s anarchist practices are a central concern of Wayward Lives.

246 I return to this point in my discussion of the problem of anthropocentrism.

247 On Hartman’s account, blackness is made through collective practices that remember, rework and “affirmatively negate,” but do not transcend, the constitutive features of social death (Hartman 1997, 72). Blackness is (re)constituted through collective practices that attempt to “negate” “the very constraints that create commonality” (Hartman 1997, 59). These constraints are the pained body, object-status, the ambivalence of pleasure, and natal alienation (Hartman 1997, 51) but they are also the order of property and the self-possessed subject, which as we have seen, transforms black people and more-than-human beings and entities into “dead matter.”
representational acts that knot together matter and meaning, the concept of practice prompts us to look beyond the rational and self-possessed human and instead attend to webs of socio-ecological relationality. By pairing the analytic of fungibility with practice, Hartman brings black forms of life and place making into view other than ownership, labor, or settlement. Consequently, I suggest that pairing these concepts enables us to reframe anti-Black racist environments in terms of Black ecologies. The significance of this shift from racist environments to Black ecologies is that it highlights the double-sided dimension of blackness, and by extension, the nexus of race, ecology and freedom. I will argue that Hartman focuses on practices that show a reworked sense of freedom that emerges from within entangled sites of meaning and matter.

The sense of freedom that I read in Hartman’s pairing of fungibility and practice also bring into view what I argue is a key difference between Hartman, and Wynter and Fanon. Recall that the concept of praxis played a significant role in Wynter and Fanon’s responses to racist environments. Fanon’s response to the racist environments of colonial sovereignty remains focused on praxis and understands decolonial sovereignty to emerge through appropriation. On Fanon’s account, the conditions of colonization mean that the labor of the colonized is closer to a slave or domesticated animal than a worker (WE135/577).

My sense of Black ecologies is informed by the approach proposed by J. T. Roane and Justin Hosbey. They explain that “On the one hand, this idea provides a way of historicizing and analyzing the ongoing reality that Black communities in the US South and in the wider African Diaspora are most susceptible to the effects of climate change, including rising sea levels, subsidence, sinking land, as well as the ongoing effects of toxic stewardship. On the other hand, Black ecologies names the corpus of insurgent knowledge produced by these same communities, which we hold to have bearing on how we should historicize the current crisis and how we conceive of futures outside of destruction” (Roane and Hosbey 2019). See also (Willie Jamaal Wright 2018).

On Hartman’s account, blackness is made through collective practices that remember, rework and “affirmatively negate,” but do not transcend, the constitutive features of social death (Hartman 1997, 72). Blackness is (re)constituted through collective practices that attempt to “negate” “the very constraints that create commonality” (Hartman 1997, 59). These constraints are the pained body, object-status, the ambivalence of pleasure, and natal alienation (Hartman 1997, 51) but they are also the order of property and the self-possessed subject, which as we have seen, transforms black people and more-than-human beings and entities into “dead matter.”

For a discussion of some of the links between Sartre’s Critique of Dialectical Reason see (Bernasconi 2010). Bernasconi also explores how this linkage might be used for an ecologically informed approach to racism (Bernasconi 2018).
Consequently, violence will be the first revolutionary form of praxis: “for the colonized this violence is invested with positive, formative features because it constitutes their only work” (WE50/DT495). It is “totalizing,” because it is the “the perfect mediation” (médiation royale) through which the people transcend their objectification and reduction to the natural world creating a new, higher unity, that of the nation through which people are not only nominally free but also develop into conscious, responsible, and mature beings (WE50, 44/DT495, 489). In this respect, land, or territorial and resource sovereignty take on a new significance in Fanon’s account of decolonization. Not only in the sense of providing the material conditions for forms of production other than neo-colonial extractivism, but also in the sense that once land has been regained it serves as the ground of another kind of praxis which is a condition for the development of national consciousness and ultimately a new humanism. I understand this as the appropriation of the external world through labor. We can see this in Fanon’s claim that:

the land belongs to those who work it. This is a principle which (…) has become a fundamental law of the Algerian revolution (…) they very quickly realized that work is not a simple notion, that slavery is the opposite of work, and that work presupposes freedom, responsibility, and consciousness. (WE133/DT576).

In sum, Fanon remains indebted to a Marxist-Hegelian figuration of human freedom which is realized through the appropriation of nature. Through Hartman’s lens, we can see that Fanon’s valorization of praxis and appropriation is a problem because it reinscribes as universal what is in fact a limited vision of the human, one that has proved a ruse rather than a remedy. Consequently, Fanon’s response to racist environments seems to repeat a variant of the normative problem. We can see the difference and stakes of it in Hartman’s statement that:

The equation of man and laborer conflates self-cultivation with the extensive capacities of the laboring body; that is, it establishes the isomorphism of making the self and
making objects by likening distinct forms of production and notably, by effacing the presence of women within this discourse of freedom, thereby restricting the act of making to masculinity. This emphasis on the creative capacity of making and self-making identified freedom as work. (Hartman 1997, 152).

Hartman will reject this figuration of freedom, and a vision of sovereignty formed through the appropriation of what it understands as the external world of things. In contrast with appropriation and praxis, the practices that Hartman focuses on refuse both labor and the state, and as I will suggest, affirm an alternative form of relation with matter than appropriation and sovereignty.

To what extent does Hartman’s concept of practice differ from the concept of praxis that played an important role in Wynter’s response to racist environments? In Scenes, practice is related to another concept, performance, which names particular kinds of ritualized and repeated practices that constitute identity (Hartman 1997, 54). Hartman’s use of performance is adapted from Judith Butler’s notion of performativity (Hartman 1997, 217). Similarly, Wynter frames her use of praxis in relation to Butler (Wynter 2015b, 33). Considering Hartman and Wynter’s respective uses of the concept of performativity is instructive for grasping what is at stake in the difference between practice and praxis; it is also helpful for understanding their responses to racist environments. Hartman’s comments on the difference of her own use of the term Black performance and Butler’s use of performativity emphasize that in the case of the repeated practices that constitute blackness - Butler’s original attention to intentional subversion and resistance is inappropriate. In other words, Hartman’s treatment of

251 Hartman cites Bodies that Matter. See Gender Trouble for the original use of the term performativity (Butler 2011a, 2011b).
252 “The interchangeable use of performance and performativity is intended to be inclusive of displays of power, the punitive and theatrical embodiment of racial norms, the discursive re-elaboration of blackness, and the affirmative deployment and negation of blackness in the focus of redress. I have opted to use the term “performing blackness” as a way of illuminating the entanglements of dominant and subordinate enunciations of blackness and the difficulty of distinguishing between contending enactments of blackness based on form, authenticity, or even intention” (Hartman 1997, 57).
performance and practice is a more radical suspension of the subject, “the doer behind the deed,” that calls into question the exceptionality of human agency and freedom. For Hartman, the frames of practice and performance therefore allow for a shift to non-representational acts that do not presume a human agent or individual will behind them. Instead, these terms register how blackness is constituted from fragments of embodied, historical, collective memory and from the repetition of practices that (as we have seen) are themselves knots of matter and memory. Although Hartman is focused on black subjects and practices, her concepts of practice and performance suggest a more general attention to the performativity of matter and the materiality of meaning making.253

By contrast, Wynter’s reading of Butlerian performativity veers in the other direction, since on her account performativity is evidence of human *praxis*, that is, human agency. Wynter states:

> We know of this brilliant concept of the performative enactment of gender from Judith Butler (…) Butler’s illuminating redefinition of gender as a praxis rather than a noun, therefore, set off bells ringing everywhere! Why not, then, the performative enactment of *all our roles*, of all our *role allocations* (…) All as praxes, therefore, rather than *nouns*. (Wynter 2015b, 33).

Insight into praxis, which performativity is meant to have unveiled, is on Wynter’s account the means by which humans might become transparent to themselves, such that humans can freely recreate themselves, unhampered by the limitations which (she argues) have hitherto characterized all life. Recall that on Wynter’s account, with the sociogenic principle “you have the idea that with being human *everything is praxis*” (Wynter 2015b, 33-4 original emphasis). *Praxis* is a way of identifying the human agency inscribed in the social or sociogenic codes,

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253 See for example Karen Barad (Barad 1995). Zakiyyah Jackson has explored some links between Barad and black feminist approaches to matter and maternity. See (Jackson 2016).
which at the same time, have served to “keep our collective agency opaque, therefore, to ourselves” (Wynter 2015, 243 original emphasis). Praxis is meant to show that “we are not purely biological beings!” (Wynter 2015b, 34). Taken as evidence of human exceptionalism from the limits common to all other biological beings, praxis will ground Wynter’s solution to the planetary destruction wrought by Man, since this exceptionalism is meant to provide the basis for the “autonomy of human agency and extra-territoriality of human cognition” (Wynter 2015, 187). Wynter claims that human autonomy is the key to “ontological sovereignty (Scott and Wynter 2000, 38) because it would allow us to recreate ourselves in “from the perspective of the species, and with reference to the interests of its well-being, rather than from the partial perspectives” (Wynter 1995, 8). In sum, Wynter uses praxis to secure her claims of human exceptionality and her vision of autonomy (understood as freedom-from constraints and entanglements). By contrast, Hartman’s use of the concepts of practice and performance, and the examples that she illuminates suggest that this conceptualization of freedom and the relation to matter that it implies is precisely what needs to be contested.

Through Hartman’s lens, the way in which both Fanon and Wynter envision sovereignty and human freedom arguably repeats a variant of the normative problem that dogs liberal frames of environmental justice. The issue with this is that: i. the norms they present as universal are in fact partial and parochial norms, and that ii. their responses to the casting of black and colonized subjects as inhuman risks repeating the mode of relationality between human and inhuman matter, interiority and exteriority, freedom and constraint, that on Hartman’s account is grounded on black subjection and the “thingification” of the world (Césaire 2001, 42).
I argue that in respect to their critiques of liberalism and the norms they endorse the difference between Wynter and Hartman is quite stark. I understood Wynter’s critique of enlightenment humanism as essentially an immanent one that critiqued it because it did not fulfil its promises of universality, reason, and autonomy, and had as its goal realizing these ideals more fully. Wynter’s new humanism remained invested in these norms and its project. On the other hand, I understand Hartman as beginning with the refusal of these norms in order to explore the possibilities that this refusal opens up. Yet, what is arguably common to both Wynter and Hartman is the elevation of the “submarine roots” of the black diaspora over conceptions of belonging and community defined by territorial sovereignty and the rootedness of Indigeneity.

Hartman’s claim that black practices are informed by “subterranean histories” establishes an important link with Édouard Glissant (Hartman 1997, 75-6). The connection with Glissant is significant since it brings the ecological dimension of practice into view, while also grounding her critique of territorial sovereignty. For Glissant “subterranean” is itself an ecological figure of thought based on the idea of “Submarine roots: that is floating free, not fixed in one position in some primordial spot, but extending in all directions in our world through its network of branches” (Glissant 1999, 67). This figure of history is meant to reflect the specificity of the black diaspora; it is a history that begins with the sea and the lack of patrilineal, genealogical trees entailed by natal alienation, foreclosure of claims to land as territory, and consignment to “nonhistory” (Glissant 1999, 65).

On Glissant’s account, Glissant explains that “because the Caribbean notion of time was fixed in the void of an imposed nonhistory, the writer must contribute to re-constituting its tormented chronology” (Glissant 1999, 65). “The poet and historian Brathwaite, in his recapitulation in the magazine Savacou of the work done in the Caribbean on our history (our present-day and obviously overlapping histories), summarizes the third and last section of his study with the single phrase: ‘The unity is submarine.’ To my mind, this expression can only evoke all those Africans weighed down with ball and chain and thrown overboard whenever a slave ship was pursued by enemy vessels and felt too weak to fight. They sowed in the depths the seeds of an invisible presence. And so transversality, and not the universal transcendence of the sublime, has come to light. It took us a long time to learn this. We are the roots of cross-cultural relationship” (Glissant 1999, 66-7 original emphasis).
grappling with the resultant “tormented chronology,” requires that we “reveal the creative energy of a dialectic reestablished between nature and culture in the Caribbean” (ibid.). This process requires a turn to the sea, to the land, and to specific ecologies as sites of “subterranean histories,” embedded in “our landscape,” which Glissant claims, “is its own monument: its meaning can only be traced on the underside. It is all history” (Glissant 1999, 11). In focusing on practice, Hartman follows Glissant by turning from the written archive towards “base matter” and landscapes as repositories of “subterranean histories.” This turn is entailed by the very nature of practice, since, as we have seen, it is an embodied production of space, and names the interweaving of matter and meaning.

Hartman aims to “clear a space for considerations of memory that focus on rupture, breach, discontinuity and crisis” (Hartman 1997, 75). This is in contrast to accounts that would present these subterranean histories as “the eternal recurrence of essentialist particularisms within folksy and pastoral milieux de memoire” (ibid.) Hartman is here responding to “evolutionary and anthropological notion of historical progress and development,” in which place (lieu) is imagined as the site of history and thus modernity, and memory is cast in terms of “pre-history” in a “proto-peasant environment” (Hartman 1997, 223). Practice undermines this teleological narrative of memory to history, and from environment to place, since “(Counter) memory disrupts the narrative of progress from ethnohistory or prehistory to history, or from milieux to lieu” (Hartman 1997, 75). Instead of viewing socio-ecological memory as static and unchanging, Hartman excavates fragments of experiments in living formed in the midst of upheaval and dispossession, and within the enabling constraints of environments (milieux).

The linkage between practice, ecology and Glissant’s concept of “subterranean history” is evident in Lose Your Mother. It deciphers what initially appears as mere waste, decay, and matter, as fragments of experiments in living otherwise than the self-possessed and property-owning subject, and as a way of countering what Hartman sees as the disavowal of the memory
of slavery and kinship with the enslaved in contemporary West Africa. Hartman turns to the Sisala and other communities whose lives leave a barely discernible trace. She writes: “it is said that when you spot a cluster of baobab trees it’s the sign a village once existed in that spot (...) all the other signs of life had perished. These islands of baobab, shea butter, locust bean, and fig trees preserved the history of the stateless; they were the archive of the defeated” (Hartman 2008, 219). The earth cult of the Sisala, which Hartman deciphers in clusters of trees and remnants of earth shrines, testifies to another way of being with each other and the earth, one that is equally borne from the constraints of the situation (the avoidance of capture) and a sacred connection to the earth: “this relation between earth and dwelling, between land and house, is at the heart of the Sisala cosmology. The land is revered and ‘conceived as a personal being, capable of feelings and also able to enter into relationship.’”

Like many fugitive and stateless communities, such as maroons, the Sisala learnt to live with remote and apparently uninhabitable places and used the givens of environments to escape capture and build community. Hartman’s engagement with socio-political and sacred ecological practices in this text reflects Glissant’s claim that, “the relationship with the land, one that is even more threatened because the community is alienated from the land, becomes so fundamental,” that it [the land] “emerges as a full character (...) the individual, the community, the land are inextricable in the process of creating history” (Glissant 1999, 105).

This relationship with the land is evident in Hartman’s discussion of fugitive and stateless communities. On Hartman’s account: “To remember what they had lost and what they became, what had been torn apart and what had come together, the fugitives and refugees and multitudes

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255 In this important endnote (Hartman 2008, 257) Hartman quotes (Tengan 1991, 38).
256 “Shelters were built under rocks, hidden in caves and caverns that were large enough to store food and cattle, nestled in impassable mountain ranges, or floated in lakes on stilts. Fences made of thorny trees and poisonous plants provided another level of defense” (Hartman 2008, 221). Similarly, in her description of the Sisala and other stateless and fugitive communities, Hartman suggests that relative indiscernibility from a milieu may be the condition of practices of freedom and community beyond the state, sovereignty, lineage, and patronymic: “Those on the run sought asylum in out-of-the-way places that offered suitable defense like rocky hillsides (...) or they hid in caves or they relocated to lagoons or mountainous terrain” (Hartman 2008, 226).
in flight were called the Sisala, which means ‘to come together, to be together, to weave together’” (Hartman 2008, 225). This description also manifests another debt to Glissant and his concept of subterranean history, namely, his critique of sovereignty and territoriality. The problem with territoriality and its history for Glissant is not simply that the peoples of the Black diaspora have been excluded from it. The problem is that it expresses a form of relation which he terms “root identity.” Root identity is characterized by ties to the past and the “violence of filiation,” and is “ratified by a claim to legitimacy that allows a community to proclaim its entitlement to the possession of a land, which thus becomes a territory” (Glissant 1997, 143). On Glissant’s account it is the form of relation that has marked the violence of conquest. He argues that: “It is an exclusionary and oppositional form of relation of transcendence” (Glissant 1997, 142). By contrast, in the “relation identity” that Glissant discerns in the Caribbean, one “does not think of a land as a territory from which to project toward other territories but as a place where one gives-on-and-with rather than grasps” (Glissant 1997, 144). Similarly, through practice, Hartman attends to the interweaving of meaning and matter, of people and place, and of sociality and ecology, to explore forms of relation that do not presume patrilineal descent, territory, or state. In sum, these three aspects of Glissant’s thought: the critique of sovereignty, territoriality and transcendence; the affirmation of subterranean history; and “an ecological vision of Relation” inform both Hartman’s engagement with practice and my claim that it orients us towards Black ecologies (Glissant 1997, 146).

In “Black Nature,” Brit Rusert argues that the refusal of sovereignty, of territorial belonging, ownership, and statehood is what is promising for “a different kind of engagement,

257 Although Hartman doesn’t cite James Scott in Lose Your Mother, her description of the Sisala as a heterogenous community that refused the state through the stealthy inhabitation of seeming “uninhabitable” environments strongly echoes Scott’s history of the Zomia and other stateless and maroon communities in (Scott 2010).
258 “isolated gestures insinuate the divergent lines of descent but refuse definitive classification. Mnemic traces of past practices cannot be followed to one site of origin” (Hartman 1997, 76).
one that proceeds from blackness itself,” which “might ultimately move accounts of race and
environment beyond the horizon of identity politics” (Rusert 2010, 161). Similarly, Clyde
Woods and Katherine McKittrick echo this point by arguing that in this respect the geographies
of the black diaspora offer a generative way to begin to uncouple from the logic of conquest:
“Inserting black geographies into our worldview and our understanding of spatial liberation
and other emancipatory strategies can perhaps move us away from territoriality, the normative
practice of staking a claim to place” (McKittrick and Woods 2007, 5).259

Hartman begins to explore how the refusal of sovereignty, territory and patrilineal
descent and identity might open onto a rethinking of ecology. For instance, she writes that: “I
was the stranger in the village, a wandering seed bereft of the possibility of taking root. Behind
my back people whispered, dua ho mmire: a mushroom that grows on the tree has no deep soil”
(Hartman 2008, 4). Hartman offers a way of thinking of the affinity with the mushroom that is
not simply a tragedy or outrage to be righted through proof of lineage and humanity.260 Tsing
reminds us that in contrast with the trees of genealogy: “mushrooms are still good reminders
of the pleasures of variety beyond the domestic” (Tsing 2012, 151). The mushroom reminds
us of the subsistence practices that Hartman illuminates such as foraging, and it is also a figure
of a way to live in a relationship of symbiotic mutualism. While mycorrhizal fungi may seem
to be without roots, once we learn to attend to subterrestrial histories, we see that in fact the
mycelium sustains itself and other forms of life by networks that tend to be both very far
ranging and immensely complex. In this respect, mushrooms are especially significant. Tsing,
asks: “What can manage to flourish in the contamination of mines? Many mycorrhizal

259 “Within and against the grain of dominant modes of power, knowledge, and space, these black geographic
narratives and lived experiences need to be taken seriously because they reconfigure classificatory spatial
practices. Because we live in and through social systems that reward us for consuming, claiming, and owning
things - and in terms of geography this means that we are rewarded for wanting and demarcating “our place” in
the same ways that those in power do (often through displacement of others) - we need to step back and consider
how these geographic desires might be bound up in conquest” (McKittrick and Woods 2007, 5).
260 For another description of humans as mushrooms see (Hartman 2008, 33).
mushrooms (…) accumulate heavy metals, protecting their forest partners, the plants, from contamination” and nuclear radioactivity (Tsing 2012, 151). The mushroom as figure of both kin and marker of natal alienation registers the irreparable breach of slavery, while orienting us to, “the importance of learning from the routes and roots of the presumably rootless, the geographies of those presumed ungeographic, and the genealogies of those presumed kinless” (Tuck, Guess, and Sultan 2014, 6).

The potential normative issues with this black ecological ethics come into view when we consider Hartman’s celebration of transience and rootlessness from the vantage point of “the grounded normativity” that I ended the previous chapter with. The worry is that this approach risks erasing and dismissing Indigenous sovereignty; a move is arguably the case in Glissant’s claims in Poetics of Relation, in which he presents the “extermination of the Pre-Colombians” as total. The form of ontological and ethical relation that Glissant contrasts and elevates over “root identity” and the fixation on territory, is made possible because of “the massacre of the Indians (…) Once that had happened, Antillean soil could not become a territory, but rather, a rhizome land” (Glissant 1997, 147). In brief, like Wynter, Glissant presents Indigeneity as a stage that must be passed over (and was transascended through the transformation of the Caribbean in slavery) in order for a new form of universality to bloom. Glissant’s presentation of the extermination of Indigenous peoples as a fait accompli is (even within the Caribbean) a problematic myth complicit with settler narratives. This point also raises the question most relevant for the normative question: whether in their critiques of the false and violent

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261 The relative lack of traces of such lives, and thus the inability to trace connections to them through lines of descent or biological identity, are rethought as the basis of alternative forms of kinship, both with unknowable, unnamable ancestors, often enslaved since they were considered kinless “strangers” when they “christened me a stranger, they called me by ancestors’ name” (Hartman 2008, 8). And kinship with more-than-human beings and entities, such as the mushroom and the rain: “in Ghana, it is said that a stranger is like water running over the ground after a rainstorm: it soon dries up and leaves behind no traces” (Hartman 2008, 8).

262 Claiming that this “extermination” and “importation of new populations (…) is precisely what forms the basis for a new relationship with the land: not the absolute ontological possession regarded as sacred but the complicity of relation” (Glissant 1997, 147).

263 See Shona Jackson’s Creole Indigeneity (Jackson 2012).
universality of liberal humanism these thinkers import a new set of ethical values that also remain partial and ungrounded, if arguably less destructive.

Mark Rifkin also notes that Hartman “raise(s) questions about the ultimate desirability of the kind of belonging that can be narrated as ‘sovereignty’” (Rifkin 2019, 45). Rifkin goes on to articulate the worry regarding sovereignty in his discussion of Lose Your Mother. He shares my concern that Hartman’s vision of fugitive, transnational movement of Blackness and the valorization of statelessness might be at odds with Indigenous sovereignty, since:

When engaging articulations of Indigenous peoplehood (…) such formulations often translate the topos of sovereignty as if it necessarily is indicative of a reactionary attachment to the state form (or forms of possession that proliferate through liberal governance). (Rifkin 2019, 49-50).

As I argued in Chapter Three, it is troublesome to equate all forms of Indigenous nationhood and concepts of sovereignty with the state and what Glissant suggests is a violent investment in “root identity.” Although Hartman does not discuss Indigeneity or Indigenous sovereignty explicitly, at times her rejection of territoriality and biological kinship comes worryingly close to a settler narrative in which otherwise empty or common land serves as the basis for new forms of community.264 Particularly in the context of the settler colonies of North America, this narrative, in which an inclusive and internally heterogeneous new people is formed by putting “down their roots in foreign soil,” becomes problematic. It risks forgetting that Blackness is “constructed as landless on stolen Indigenous land,” and / that this “land [is] epistemology and ontology for Indigenous peoples” (Tuck, Guess, and Sultan 2014, 6).

264 “Newcomers were welcome. It didn’t matter that they weren’t kin or that they spoke a different language, because genealogy didn’t matter (…) building a community did. If the willingness to receive new arrivals and foreigners was what it took to make a world different from the one they had left, then so be it. So they put down their roots in foreign soil and adopted strangers as their kin and intermarried with other migrants and runaways, and shared their gods and totems, and blended their histories. ‘We’ was the collectivity they built from the ground up, not one they had inherited, not one that others had imposed” (Hartman 2008, 225).
Hartman comes close to suggesting that the forms of community and understandings of identity that are formed from heterogeneous communities of “migrants and runaways” (Hartman 2008, 225) are ethically preferable not only to nation states, but to all other land-based conceptions of identity. If this is the case, then it would repeat a variant of the normative problem; as in Glissant and Wynter’s narratives) it would assume a teleological vision of world history and development which progresses from the particular to the universal. I argue that there are resources in Hartman’s thought that guard against this move even if she does not explicitly utilize them in regards to this question. I briefly outline them below.

The first is that her thought does not assume the kind of teleological or progressive philosophy of history that I see in Glissant and Wynter. Rather, the influence of Walter Benjamin and Michel Foucault on Hartman’s philosophy of history works against this move. There is much to be said here, but the essential point to grasp is that for Benjamin writing “history against the grain” means breaking with progressive histories that treat time as a succession of moments. This approach is animated by a messianic temporality and ethical anarchism that illuminates fragments of the past and affirms transience, not universality. Similarly, Foucauldian genealogy is attuned to rupture, discontinuity and the “subjugated knowledges” that are concealed by the appearance of progressive and teleological histories.

265 “It wasn’t the dream of a White House, even if it was in Harlem, but of a free territory. It was a dream of autonomy rather than nationhood” (Hartman 2008, 234).
266 The closing line of Scenes of Subjection’s introduction is taken from Walter Benjamin’s “Theses on the Philosophy of History” Hartman returns to Benjamin in her discussion of redress, memory and performance (73). And in Lose Your Mother. For a discussion of the links between Benjamin and Hartman see (Glick 2017).
267 The historical materialist, “grasps the constellation which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one. Thus, he establishes a conception of the present as the “time of the now” which is shot through with chips of Messianic time.” This notion of messianic time is not a quietism which accepts the past as sacrifice for the present, instead, is “a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past” (Benjamin 2007, 263).
268 See for example (Benjamin 1996)
269 Hartman’s genealogical approach in Scenes is in many ways a dialogue with Foucault. For her use of “subjugated knowledges” see (Hartman 1997, 223). In Society Must be Defended Foucault outlines genealogy as oriented to “the memory of combats, the very memory that had until then been confined to the margins. And so we have the outline of what might be called a genealogy, or of multiple genealogical investigations. We have both a meticulous rediscovery of struggles and the raw memory of fights. These genealogies are a combination of erudite knowledge and what people know. They would not have been possible – they could not even have been attempted – were it not for one thing: the removal of the tyranny of overall discourses, with their hierarchies and all the privileges enjoyed by theoretical vanguards. If you like, we can give the name “genealogy” to this coupling
In other words, through this lens Indigeneity and the ties to land that ground it do not appear as forms of “reactionary attachment,” or moments of particularity that will inevitably be subsumed in the movement of history towards increasing universality.270

The second aspect of Hartman’s thought that could be used to avoid the dismissal of Indigenous sovereignty is the turn to the land and “matter” as sites of “subterranean history.” It could be used to illuminate how the unsettled condition of the Black diaspora is always interlaced with ongoing indigenous dispossession.271 As Kristie Dotson argues, black feminist might then be “on the way to settler decolonization,” since it would refuse “settler futurity” premised on the erasure of Indigenous presence on the land, as well as its settlement via slavery (Dotson 2018). Although as Glissant’s work shows this turn to the earth as a site of counter-memory does not necessary entail an awareness of Indigenous relations to land and continued presence. However, this aspect of Hartman’s thought could be used for this purpose.

The third aspect of Hartman’s thought that is useful in this regard is her use of the analytic of fungibility and a focus on practices of subsistence and fugitivity rather than labor and appropriation. As Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang claim in “Decolonization is Not a Metaphor,” this view of Blackness and its relation to the land, suggests a way in which “contingent and difficult coalitions,” might be formed between the incommensurable positions of Blackness and Indigeneity. The possibility of coalition is due to Tuck and Wang’s understanding of dispossession, permanent fugitivity, and “the refusal of acquiring property and of being property,” as being “in contrast to the settler labor of occupying the commons, homesteading, and possession” (Tuck and Yang 2012, 28). In sum, fungibility does not entail the same

together of scholarly erudition and local memories, which allows us to constitute a historical knowledge of struggles and to make use of that knowledge in contemporary tactics” (Foucault 2003, 8). See also (Foucault 1998). Although Wynter names Foucault as central to her project I suggest that she departs from many of the fundamental aspects of genealogy and Foucault’s thought in general.

270 Although these philosophies of history may sound close to Glissant, I suggest that he accords the Caribbean and blackness a teleological world-historical role.

271 See for example (Vimalassery 2016; Lethabo King 2019) who think these histories as interwoven by attending to the land. Both are informed by Hartman.
possession, appropriation, and understanding of land as that of settler colonialism, and consequently is not necessarily antithetical to Indigenous sovereignty.

In the previous chapter I discussed Indigenous (feminist) approaches to sovereignty that focused on “grounded normativity,” that is the ethical framework “informed by what land as a mode of reciprocal relationship (which is itself informed by place-based practices and associated forms of knowledge) ought to teach us about living our lives in relation to one another and our surroundings in a respectful, nondominating and nonexploitative way” (Coulthard 2014, 13). Considering this framework in relation to Hartman raises the question of whether the relationships to land that constitute Indigenous forms of “grounded normativity” are foreclosed to Blackness by virtue of the extraction, displacement and transience of black life. If this is the case, then how might black approaches to race, ecology, and freedom ground themselves without appealing to universal frames of justice or normative visions of the human? This is the question that Jodi Byrd, Alyosha Goldstein, Jodi Melamed and Chandan Reddy ask in “Predatory Value: Economies of Dispossession and Disturbed Relationality”. They ask:

What would it be, then, to think and work for a grounded relationality, at once addressed to Black placemaking, geographies, and other racialized diasporas, as well as to proprietary violences incommensurate to yet not altogether separate from Indigenous land and sovereignty? (Byrd et al. 2018, 14) 273

The problem of normativity opens up a set of important and difficult questions that I will pursue in further work. Questions such as: how to ground an approach to race, ecology, and freedom

272 “the loss of land is not just a loss of property, territoriality, power, nation, or sovereignty; it is the loss of those philosophies that derive from the relationships the land itself activates, fosters, and nourishes” (Byrd et al. 2018, 14). See (Sexton 2016) for a discussion of this position and what it might mean for thinking decolonization and abolition together.

273 “What would it mean to consider the land itself as a site of an agentive fungibility that has been conscripted into the proprietary spatialities of colonial possessiveness and constrained into geographies of exploitation that no longer serve the relationalities of presence and care that have for so long been its domain as a common for all?” (Byrd et al. 2018, 14)
in the absence of universal frames of justice, normative visions of the human, or “grounded normativity”? And: what possibilities are there for approaches suited to coalitional and comparative thinking and collaboration? The authors of “Predatory Value” do not answer this question conclusively. However, they do claim that “alternative frameworks for building capacities for grounded relationality” would begin with a rethinking of land and more-than-humans “in ways that exceed liberal conceptions of the human” (Byrd et al. 2018, 11). It is to this final point and the potential that Hartman’s work holds for it that I now turn. My claim is that Hartman’s reconceptualization of the earth and inhuman “matter” offers ways to overcome the problem of anthropocentrism and to approach the normative problem differently.

3. Anthropocentrism

The problem of anthropocentrism might also be understood as an implicit divide between the concerns of environmental and ecological justice. There is a tendency to view the interests and well-being of humans and of more-than-human nature as conflicting, if not contradictory. In addition, this problem brings another dimension of the normative problem with liberal frames of environmental justice to light. The criteria of neutrality and impartiality prevent a concern with ecological justice, since “the basic idea of the ‘preservation’ of nature is a good,” consequently integrating this value into justice frames would violate the criteria of

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274 “Grounded normativity, as Coulthard and Simpson explain, provides an ethical way of knowing and being that is more expansive than those ontologies that prioritize the human as exceptional, and it is a placement that extends memory through vast kinship networks that assume life, vibrancy, and agency beyond the limits of enlightenment notions of self, liberty, and property” (Byrd et al. 2018, 13-4).

275 “By grounded we mean quite literally situated in relation to and from the land but without precluding movement, multiplicity, multidirectionality, transversals, and other elementary or material currents of water and air. This is a being grounded and living relationalities in which the nonhuman world and the materiality of land and other elements have agential significance in ways that exceed liberal conceptions of the human. If the grounded relationalities of Indigenous philosophies might tell us anything, then, they remind us that knowledge must always remain grounded as the land calls to us and for us to find our place within the ongoing acts of interconnectivity that surround us” (Byrd et al. 2018, 11).
impartiality (Schlosberg 2007, 106). At the same time, the anthropocentrism of liberal frames of justice can easily be shown to violate its own criteria of value neutrality and impartiality. David Scholsberg makes the obvious point that market capitalism and state form (and the resultant relation to nonhuman nature) that liberalism tends to assume are themselves partial and value-laden (Schlosberg 2007, 107). In addition, there is a more fundamental concern regarding the relation of justice, personhood, and ethical standing in the liberal tradition:

it is not just states that violate impartiality; partiality is evident even in supposedly impartial liberal theories of justice (…) classic liberal justice theorists such as Rawls or Barry would not include nature as a subject of, or partner in, justice. But note the lack of impartiality here: some cultures and cosmologies assume sentience, a soul, and consciousness to nature – both individual critters and the larger landscapes. Any theory of justice that excludes parts of the world from consideration that some cultures would include begins under a very partial cultural bias. (Schlosberg 2007, 108).

Consequently, this problem strikes at some of the key assumptions of liberal justice, namely: autonomy, universality, and value neutrality, problematic notions of personhood, citizenship, and ethical standing, capitalism and the state. As Scholsberg suggests, attempts to bridge environmental and ecological justice by merely extending or modifying existing frames of justice will ultimately flounder. This point is illustrated by Christin Ellis’s critique in Antebellum Posthumanism, of “posthumanism,” which “sets itself up in opposition to liberal humanism’s transcendental subject,” yet:

this opposition does not extend to a rejection of the liberal political institutions that were organized to honor and accommodate the liberal humanist subject. On the

276 Scholsberg explains, “‘Ecological justice’, then, is a taboo oxymoron within the context of universal and impartial notions and procedures for justice (…) neutrality on notions of the good life supposedly precludes a state focus on sustainability” (Schlosberg 2007, 106).
contrary, posthumanists regularly gloss the mutuality of being that their ontology
discovers as an invitation to a pluralistic expansion of democratic politics. (Ellis 2018,
150).

On Ellis’s account, this is a serious problem because there is “no way to navigate between the
ontology of being-with and the unit-based calculus of liberal politics and ethics (...) there is no
way to effect this translation that does not simply betray the mutuality of being that
posthumanism champions” (Ellis 2018, 153). In addition, the question of whether one can
apply the same conceptions of justice to “environmental risks in human populations and the
relationship between human communities and nonhuman nature” (Schlosberg 2007, 6) is
further complicated when we consider how attempts to overcome anthropocentrism and respect
nonhuman beings and entities have often served to retrench social hierarchies, or at the very
least to mask them. Moreover, consider the many communities who have been used to offset
the costs of supposedly “green” policies or initiatives. The “protection’ of nonhuman nature by
whitestream environmentalists has often led to further destruction. One of many examples is
the massive socio-ecological devastation of the Palm Oil boom centered in Indonesia, a boom
that was triggered by the move to biofuels as a way to meet the “green” targets of the EU (and
in the 90’s the U.S.) (Pye 2010). Communities and nations who have systematically been
dispossessed and displaced by whitestream environmentalism’s attempts to “conserve”
nonhuman nature are rightly concerned about their interests and lifeways being subsumed in
an approach that integrates environmental and ecological justice.

277 For example, new materialism has been critiqued for the way in which its celebration of the agency of objects
does not consider the domination of racialized humans deemed part of nonhuman nature (Frazier 2016; López
2018; Todd 2016).
278 “Social justice–minded critics thus point out the inequity implicit in environmentalist policies that, premised
on the notion that “we humans” are responsible for engendering a possible sixth mass extinction event, have, for
instance, moved to criminalize indigenous hunting practice. Or even more commonly, where such traditional ways
of life have been irrevocably interrupted by imperial and economic expansion, indigenous and postcolonial
peoples have often come to rely on extractive industries that are now the target of environmental restrictions.”
(Ellis 2018, 143) For the links between conservationism and settler colonialism see (Griffiths and Robin 1997).
These factors have contributed to a blind spot in approaches to environmental justice that tends to reinforce the problem of anthropocentrism. David Pellow understands this as a failure to link racism and speciesism:

the key social category species remains, at best, at the margins of the field of EJ Studies, despite the fact that, generally, when and where humans suffer from environmental inequalities, so does the more-than-human world (and vice versa) and often as a result of ideological frameworks that link marginalized humans to ‘nature.’ (Pellow 2016, 3).

This failure to problematize speciesism and the linkages between environmental and political violence is especially relevant for approaches focused on anti-black environmental racism. Pellow suggests that this shortcoming is in part due to the “racial discourse of animality,” in which black people are categorized “as animals.” As I showed in my discussion of “pests” and pesticides in Chapter 2, this linkage offers insight into how racialized populations are treated as less-than or non-human, and how the nonhuman that they are compared to is viewed. The default response is to attempt to establish the humanity of the group or individual in question on the basis of an ontological and ethical divide between them and the more-than-human world. This response is understandable given the ways in which objectification and the racial discourse of animality are tied to forms of violence, death, and domination that are hard to conceive.

In this dissertation, I have shown that the significance of Wynter and Fanon in regards to this problem is that they question species categories in order to explore how “marginalized humans” are linked to colonial constructions of nature. Their work therefore seemed to address the problem of anthropocentrism. However, despite their insights into the links between racism, 

279 This is less the case for Indigenous approaches to environmental racism. As I discussed in the Introduction, the 1991 Declaration of the Principles of Environmental Justice clearly articulates a strong ecological ethic and non-anthropocentric view of nature. Not coincidentally, Indigenous sovereignty was also central to these principles. However, these two aspects of the original vision increasingly became side-lined, especially in approaches to environmental racism that focused on non-Indigenous communities.
speciesism, and the objectification of nature, I have demonstrated that the solutions to racist environments that their work offered ultimately hinged on reanimating the divide between humans and more-than-humans; an issue manifest in their respective framings of freedom and sovereignty. By contrast, the sense of black ecological freedom that I develop in my reading of Hartman offers a way out of this trap. My claim is that out of the three figures of this dissertation, Hartman’s thought is best equipped to address the problem of anthropocentrism. This is because it allows us to conceptualize the relationship between race, ecology, and freedom in a way that does not rely on the false universalism and purported value neutrality of liberal frames of justice, its negative notions of freedom, or assumptions regarding individual personhood and human exceptionality. Unlike many attempts to transcend anthropocentrism, Harman’s approach shows that we can neither understand nor effectively challenge the ideological construction and destruction of “nonhuman nature,” if we do not consider the racist-heteropatriarchal-order of property and personhood, fungibility, and Black ecologies.

Black Ecological Freedom and Ethics

If fungibility names “a being maternal that is indistinguishable from a being material” (Moten 2003, 16 original emphasis) then “actually claiming the monstrosity (of a female with the potential to “name”)” (Spillers 1987, 80. original emphasis) suggests forms of socio-ecological relation that are not premised on the separation of the human from matter. Instead, it might open onto the black feminist ecological vision that Moten describes as, “that continually rewound and remade claim upon our monstrosity,” which, “as Spillers shows—is black feminism, the animaterial ecology of black and thoughtful stolen life as it steals away” (Moten 2017, xiii original emphasis).

280“the estrangement of natality is maternal operation-in-exhabitation of diffusion and entanglement, marking the displacement of being and singularity, is blackness” (Moten 2017, xiii).
Moten points to the specificity of black gender and sexuality, that is, to how the negation of the black mother “an/mater” from human community, and the forced intimacy with matter that this has engendered, leads to forms of relationality that are not premised on the transcendence of what in the “American Grammar” is understood as inhuman matter. At the same time, the movement of “stolen life as it steals away,” reminds us that the alternative is not simply to conflate black life and black women (in particular) with what we tend to think of as inhuman matter and the natural world. In the cases of “stealing away” (that Hartman discusses in Scenes) which Moten alludes to; the enslaved contested their object-status, articulating specific needs, desires, and forms of sociality, while at the same time putting into question the grammar of object and subject, property and possession.

My claim is that the sense of ecological freedom I develop from Hartman’s work does not reproduce the problem of anthropocentrism in the same way as Wynter or Fanon, that is, by conceptualizing freedom as liberation-from material constraint and entanglement. I contend that Hartman’s account might be used to explore the kinds of grounded relationality I suggested might help to navigate the normative problem.

Hartman offers a situated critique of fungibility and disposability as forms of world organization. This critique begins from the positionality of black women, and at the same time offers important insight into how the commodification and destruction of both human and more-than-human life are interwoven. Hartman writes:

*If their past taught them anything, it was that the attempt to own life destroyed it, brutalized the earth,* and ran roughshod over everything on God’s creation for a dollar. As items of cargo, they had experienced first-hand the ugliness and violence of the world as seen through the ledger and double-entry bookkeeping. *They had endured the*

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281 Ecological knowledge and relationship, were often the conditions of forms of subterfuge, flight, sociality and politics (Haymes 2018; Wright 2019)
282 See (Jackson 2016, 25).
life of the commodity. They had been propagated and harvested like any other crop, 
treated no differently from the tools and the animals owned by massa. (Hartman 2019, 271-2. emphasis added).

This passage brings together a number of points which run throughout Hartman’s work that are relevant and valuable for addressing the problem of anthropocentrism. Firstly, this approach does not present ecological concerns as antithetical to those of black people. Rather, it shows how they are interwoven, and how race, racism, and ecology are not initially distinct. Secondly, Hartman’s statement: “they had endured the life of the commodity,” challenges the subject/object divide and order of possession founded on the transformation of people and “animals” into “dead matter.” Hartman’s critique of the commodification of black people does not rely on establishing an ontological and ethical split between humans and “things.” Rather, it puts this split into question. So, that while as Hartman shows, the nature of the injury and violence done to black subjects is singular and irreducible, her critique of this violence is less based on their absolute difference from “crops” and “animals,” but rather by the insight that “the attempt to own life destroyed it, brutalized the earth.” Finally, this approach avoids the flattening of black experience and anti-Black racism into a more general analysis of the commodification of nature that would overlook the significance of heteropatriarchal racism, and risk reimporting political categories and norms into nature, that on Hartman’s account are at the root of the problem.

The approach to Black ecologies that I see Hartman as developing leads to an ethics and vision that I understand in terms of ecological freedom, namely, one that is not reliant on “liberation” from matter through (self) possession. I understand Hartman’s critique of “the attempt to own life” as motivated by the positionality and history of blackness as property.283

283 “Owning things, land, and people had never secured their place in the world. They didn’t need others beneath their feet to establish their value (…) But black folks had been owned, and being an object of property, they were radically disenchanted with the idea of property” (Hartman 2019, 271).
and by the sense that the dream of ownership does not amount to freedom but tends to possess those who chase it: “for white folks - settlers and masters and owners and bosses - property and possession were the tenets of their faith. To be white was to own the earth forever and ever. It defined who they were and what they valued; it shaped their vision of the future” (Hartman 2019, 271).

As scholars such as Katherine McKittrick, Kathryn Yussof, and Tiffany Lethabo King have either shown or intimated – in this situated critique of earth ownership there is a strong resonance between Hartman’s thought and Wynter’s early essays. For example, in “Jonkonnu in Jamaica,” Wynter focuses on the contemporary Jonkonnu and spiritual cults in terms of their roots in African ontology, and shows that what are dismissed as nonsense or “mere antics” in contemporary Jamaica, are actually a rich repository of knowledge that unsettles the hegemonic notion of earth as property. In this essay, Wynter notes that in the culture of the enslaved:

The concept of the Earth was general. To the African the Earth is not property or land. The Earth is the base of the community, and is concerned with the common good. Cultivation plots of individuals are but parcels of land cut from the limitless earth (…) The aim of all ritual measures is to preserve the benevolence of the Earth to the community. The forces of the Earth are part of the vital universal force, the concept of which is central to African philosophy. (Wynter 1970, 37).

As evidenced in the passage above, Wynter’s early essays share Hartman’s concern to situate black diasporic practices and the earth ethics that they articulate. However, there is a tendency

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284 See for example (McKittrick 2013; Lethabo King 2019; Yussof 2018, 33-6).
285 Wynter will explain the survival and adaptation of a social order grounded in the value of the earth by turning to the material conditions of the provision grounds. While the history of the Caribbean has largely been told through the dominant history of plantations and their crops, Wynter claims that in the cultural practices which sprang from the provision grounds and the plants they cultivated there, that we can decipher another “secret” history, one characterized by adaptation and stealth, nurtured by the affirmation of the earth as sacred, and thus resistance to earth-as-property (Wynter, 1970, 60).
in the scholarship to understate the transformations that Wynter’s thought undergoes; transformations that are particularly significant in regards to freedom and the relationship between people and the earth. Consequently, the important tensions between Wynter’s mature work and Hartman’s have largely been ignored. One of the contributions of this chapter, and the dissertation as a whole, is to explore these tensions.

We can appreciate the difference between Wynter’s mature project (roughly from 1984 onwards) and Hartman’s in respect to the problem of anthropocentrism if we compare the ways in which Wynter thinks poiesis and Hartman uses the term poesis. In Wynter’s response to the dehumanization of racialized groups, the meaning of poiesis was almost the reverse from the sense in which Hartman thinks poesis. Recall that on Wynter’s account, the “sociogenic principle,” evidenced human’s powers of autopoiesis, that is self-making, which Wynter understood as establishing human exceptionality. Insight into humans unique autopoiesis was meant to make our agency transparent to ourselves in order to establish universal moral worth amongst humans.

By contrast, Hartman takes aim at the way freedom has been conceptualized in the liberal tradition, and explores senses of freedom that are not defined in contradistinction to constraint. The difference between them on this question is evident in the concluding sentences of “The Belly of the World.” Hartman write: “the forms of care, intimacy, and sustenance exploited by racial capitalism, most importantly, are not reducible to or exhausted by it,” Hartman continues, “this care, which is coerced and freely given, is the black heart of our social poesis, of making and relation” (Hartman 2016, 172). Poesis as a careful “making and relation,” recalls Glissant’s sense of the “poetics of Relation” as “giving-on-and-with” where this giving is with the earth as much as it with other humans (Glissant 1997, 144).

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286 See Chapter 1 of this dissertation.
287 “The longstanding and intimate affiliation of liberty and bondage made it impossible to envision freedom independent of constraint or personhood and autonomy separate from the sanctity of property and proprietal notions of the self” (Hartman 1997, 115).
aim is not sovereign control and the self-transparency of reason but rather the value of “opacity” (Glissant 1997, 189). Poiesis here names a collective force and relationality that emerges from within the knots of constraint, responsibility, care, alterity and intimacy. Rather than escape from constraint and entanglement, poiesis is a way of thinking freedom as “the dance within the enclosure” (Hartman 2019, 347).

In contrast to the sense of autopoiesis central to Wynter’s mature work, Hartman explores a relational notion of freedom where entanglement with and relative indiscernibility from more-than-human worlds can be the condition of freedom and community. These ideas also animate Hartman and Fred Moten’s conversation in the series ”The Black Outdoors: Humanities Futures after Property and Possession.” They ask, “What does it mean to have to live without leaving a trace of human habitation?” “What does it mean to want to live without leaving a trace of human habitation?” These questions are in the context of petit-marronnage, of fugitive slaves who lived on the margins of plantations, and in this case, had to learn to live in trees without detection. For Hartman, this is an example of the experiments in living that unfold in situations of terror and constraint. This case and the other forms of practice that I have discussed express an understanding of freedom that is not premised on (self) possession, and forms of inhabitation other than settlement, appropriation and enclosure. It conflicts with liberal notions of personhood and freedom since this fugitive freedom is enabled by the entanglement of the trees, individuals, and transient communities formed in them.

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288 This sense of poiesis is also at work in Hartman’s exploration of “the chorus” in Wayward Lives. (Moten & Hartman, 2016)


290 There an increasing body of work that articulates similar ideas about personhood, fugitivity, and ecology. See Monique Allewart in “Swamp Sublime”. See also Carolyn Finney in Black Faces, White Spaces, on “The Great Dismal Swamp” (Allewaert 2008; Finney 2014).
Hartman offers a distinctive understanding of black ecological freedom as she thinks of freedom in terms of situated, grounded practices, cosmologies, and political communities, that are formed in relation with both human and more-than-human beings. Such an understanding of freedom contests some of the basic presuppositions of the liberal tradition, namely, the inalienable individual person, the negative understanding of freedom (freedom-from outside influence or constraint), and an objectifying view of matter as property. Consequently, this focus on the entanglement of race, ecology and freedom takes on a particular significance in the context of Hartman’s critique of liberalism, fungibility and the afterlives of slavery.

Conclusion

Ecological freedom is an invitation to approach the convergences of forms of intra-human domination and domination of the more-than-human differently. Although I was critical of Fanon and Wynter’s projects in regards to the normative problem and problems of anthropocentrism, the sense of ecological freedom that I sketch below is informed by their work read in a constellation with Hartman’s. Ecological freedom is meant to capture four, linked points, informed by the central figures of this dissertation and the work of scholars who are also engaged in the project of exploring race, ecology, and freedom otherwise than liberal frames of environmental justice. Through the lens of ecological freedom: (i) intra-human and more-than-human domination are essentially two sides of the same coin, therefore human freedom requires the creation of different ways of being with “nature”, or environments, (ii) in contrast to negative ideas of freedom, or freedom-from, ecological freedom is meant to suggest that practices of freedom are always situated and bound up with milieus, such that ecological and climactic givens are not automatically seen as constraints to be managed, controlled, and overcome, but as enabling conditions of experiments in living. Consequently, (iii) ecological
freedom suggests different notions of freedom and the self than the property-owning and self-
possessed individual liberal subject, or what Fanon diagnoses as the Manichean form of
colonial consciousness. Ecological freedom insists on thinking freedom and selves relationally,
as nothing before or without constitutive webs of relations with human and more-than-human
others. Finally, (iv) rather than focusing on equity, for example, “the right to equal emissions”
in the climate justice literature, ecological freedom orients us to the value of both continuing
in and experimenting with ways of life inassimilable to the mode of inhabiting the world
prescribed by the liberal state and world order, its model subject, and the narrow and ineffective
channels for redress it proscribes.

Hartman’s approach raises fundamental questions about my linkage of ecology and
freedom in the concept of ecological freedom, and of how to ground (and negotiate)
incommensurable freedom projects in the absence of universal frames of justice, a normative
vision of the human, or a shared “grounded normativity.” I will pursue these important
questions in future work. One of the aims of my comparative reading of Fanon, Wynter, and
Hartman, is to have made the stakes and difficulty of these questions clear.
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