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Questions of Silence: On the Emancipatory Limits of Voice and the Coloniality of Silence

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Abstract

This article begins at a (historical) crossroads; it straddles the difficult ground between the recent public outcry against sexual violence (a protest that, as championed by the #MeToo movement, seeks to break the "culture of silence" surrounding sexual violence) and concerns about the coloniality of voice made visible by the recent decolonial turn within feminist theory (Ruiz 2006; Lugones 2007; Lugones 2010; Veronelli 2016). Wary of concepts such as "visibility" or "transparency"—principles that continue to inform the call to "break the silence" by "speaking up" central to Western liberatory movements—in this article, I return to silence, laying the groundwork for the exploration of what a revised concept of silence could mean for the development of practices of cross-cultural communication that do not play into coloniality.

> The Decolonial Turn is about making visible the invisible and analyzing the mechanisms that produce such invisibility or distorted visibility in light of a large stock of ideas that must necessarily include the critical reflections of the "invisible" people themselves.
>
> —Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "On the Coloniality of Being"

> We must, however, take a moratorium on naming too soon, if we manage to penetrate there. There is no other way for you and me to penetrate there.
>
> —Gayatri C. Spivak, in conversation with Jenny Sharp

In a *New York Times* article, American author and long-distance swimmer Diana Nyad recounts her experiences of sexual assault, perpetrated in 1964 by her swimming coach, who, it turned out, was a serial sexual predator (Nyad 2017). Like many testimonies before and after hers, Nyad's places great emphasis on finding one's voice, on speaking up vis-à-vis sexual violence as a means to regain power in the wake of shame and humiliation. "We need to prepare coming generations to speak up in the moment, rather than being coerced into years of mute helplessness," she states. As the #MeToo campaign forefronts, *speaking up* "takes something that women had long kept quiet about and transforms it into a movement" aimed at revealing the pervasiveness and systemic nature of sexual

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violence while building solidarity through empathy (Gilbert 2017). In this vein, Nyad concludes the article with a plea: "Tell your story. Let us never again be silenced."

Testimonials like Nyad's bring attention to the two interrelated assumptions operative in much Western feminist theorizing about oppression and emancipation. First, they affirm that coming to voice or speaking up about one's own experience of, for example, sexual violence is an empowering practice that breaks the silence to which harmful practices like sexual violence and the shame associated with it have relegated its victims. Second, they attest that being silenced is "a punishment equal to the molestation" (Nyad 2017); the silence induced by fear and shame associated with sexual violence within a patriarchal culture further oppresses survivors. In this sense, Nyad's testimonial brings to focus the logic structuring emancipatory narratives according to which "voice" is associated with empowerment and is juxtaposed to silence, which comes to be equated with the silencing of oppression. As Aimee Carrillo Rowe and Sheena Malhotra point out in the introduction to *Silence, Feminism, Power*, the binary logic of speech versus silence and the almost commonsensical equation of silence with powerlessness and oppression in the Western tradition from Aristotle to Audre Lorde presumes a political imperative: for an individual or group to gain power and "to resist and transform the conditions of their oppression," they "must activate their *voice*" (Carillo Rowe and Malhotra 2013, 1, order of quotes rearranged). "Speaking up" and "breaking the silence" are thus unequivocally appealed to as the imperatives necessary to counter displacement, oppression, and marginalization.[1] After all, as Adrienne Rich puts it, "in a world where language and naming are power, silence is oppression, is violence" (Rich 1979, 204).[2]

Given the harm entailed in these exclusions (the harm of being silenced) and the fact that speaking up is lived as liberatory by many—as the aforementioned account indicates—"speaking up" seems hard to argue against. And yet, I suggest, "voice" is too broad a term; it is not nuanced enough to prevent its own deployment as an instrument of oppression rather than liberation. In fact, when voice becomes the ubiquitous appeal of liberatory movements, it abstracts from the concrete situations and lived experiences of those who inhabit silences, transcending the concrete violences entailed by the normative power of voice. Consider a memory from Ernesto Martínez's childhood: His older cousin Felipe, after having initiated sexual contact, grabs his throat, pushes him on the bed, and repeatedly asks "¿Te gusta? ¿Te gusta?" (Martínez 2014, 239), all the while Martínez remembers remaining still, silent. Within the dominant binary framework of voice versus silence, silences like Martínez's are eviscerated of their complexity and ambiguity, read as instances of complacency or submission to oppression. In his silence, Martínez did not comply with the "no te dejes" imperative (roughly translated as "don't let them do that to you" or "fight back")—a demand that, similar to "speak up!," has purchase on the subjected, not the aggressors—and his silence or lack of struggle was read over and against the positive, overtly explicit imperatives of voicing one's dissent or physically rejecting the aggression. Within this framework, his silence and passivity are read as indexing oppression and, specifically, as failures or absences of sorts, as complacency. After all, why would Martínez remain silent in the face of aggression?

Yet, Martínez remembers, there was *more* in his passivity and silence than silencing, than either complacency or forced submission. He recalls living that silence as an expression of what he calls "joto passivity," that is, "the seeming nonresponsiveness of queer Chicanos in the face of violence" (238), which, *contra* (colonial) common sense, was also felt as resistant behavior; his silence was also a practice of "radical meaning making" from which he could envision and bring about radically different gendered practices of resistance like nonmisogynist and nonhomophobic ways of performing

masculinity (239, 241). To be precise, Martínez states that his "joto passivity" was not a liberatory solution that removed violence from his life. Nonetheless, it was an "embodied negotiation" that enabled him to "account for the contradictions" of his situation, and that reminded Martínez that, as a queer man of color, he was "not consumed by violence" (239, 245).

Dwelling, for a moment longer, in Martínez's experience, more precisely, in the mishearing or misreading of his silence, raises the following questions: If it is the case that silence, as Martínez indicates, can be lived differently than as the mark of exclusion from the subject position, inferiority, or oppression, why is Martínez's embodied response immediately read as submission? What are the structures and operations of the dominant logic such that inhabiting Martínez's silence otherwise is foreclosed? And what would make reading and/or inhabiting Martínez's silences otherwise possible? Informed by Martínez's experience, in this article I seek to make visible the mechanisms that make invisible the depth and complexity of the phenomenon of silence—what I refer to as *deep silence*—within a colonial context.[3]

The case for deep silence is, at least in part, a case for the limits of voice as a liberatory concept. In the first section of this article, I draw from recent decolonial literature to problematize the uncritical appeal to voice as emancipatory, an appeal that continues to guide much of feminist theorizing reaching well beyond academia. (It suffices to think of the recent public outcry about racial and sexual violence, in which the #MeToo and #TimesUp campaigns are loud examples of movements that express the necessity to "speak up" about and "break the culture of silence" surrounding one's own experience of racialized, sexualized, and gendered violence).[4] By bringing into dialogue Jacques Derrida with decolonial insights from the modern/colonial research project (MC henceforth), I seek to make explicit the ways in which the onto-epistemology reproduced by coloniality is, in fact, a racialized metaphysics of presence within which *logos* and the field of presence are exclusive domains of the colonizer. Specifically, I suggest that uncritical appeals to "speak up" or "come to voice" foreclose questions about the normativity of voice, ultimately upholding modern categories of thought and being (*logocentrism*, to be precise) that reify the oppressive colonial apparatus they seek to resist.

In section II, I develop and problematize what I call the *coloniality of silence*, that is, operations of power that eviscerate deep silences of their depth and complexity, flattening them to a transparent, mono-dimensional phenomenon indexing ontological absence—what Frantz Fanon calls the "zone of non-being" (Fanon 2012, xii)—and epistemic non-sense. This analytical tool, I argue, reveals that the evisceration of silence is not accidental to coloniality. Rather, the specific historical formation of coloniality relies upon and actively promotes the flattening of deep silence for its perpetration and legitimization—an operation of flattening that is actively concealed through the naturalization of epistemic and ontological inferiority. The apprehension of the complexity and multiplicity of deep silence and its being an inherent component of sense, thinking, and being would undermine the epistemic, ontological, and temporal presuppositions of coloniality.

I. The Coloniality of Voice

Initially informed by Derrida's powerful critique of "voice" as the appeal of a metaphysics of presence (Derrida 2011; 2015) and subsequently by postcolonial and decolonial critiques of modernity, over the past two decades scholars have challenged the logocentrism of the West, bringing attention to the dangers of advancing liberatory *discourses*

not rooted in and attentive to the cultural specificity of the phenomenon one strives to account for. Building on the Subaltern Studies Group, scholars like Trinh Minh-ha, Gayatri Spivak, Cheryl Glenn, and Krista Ratcliffe have suggested that the role of academic left scholars (but also of those who hold power and public access to voice) is to "learn to listen and to decode subaltern inscriptions" (Carrillo Rowe and Malhotra 2013, 8; see Trinh 1989; Spivak 1999; Glenn 2004; and Ratcliffe 2006).[5] While acknowledging that silence "has been a tool of marginalization and exclusion," the contributors to *Silence, Feminism, Power*, for instance, strive to "free silence from domination's grip" (Keating 2013, 32, 33), reclaiming it as a powerful site of resistance that allows "the freedom of not having to exist constantly in reaction to what is said" (Carrillo Rowe and Malhotra 2013, 2).[6]

Steeped in this tradition, this section strives to make visible and problematize the assumption operative within liberal discourse that voice (*logos* broadly construed) is key to emancipation, alerting us to the emancipatory limits of voice and shifting the conversation toward deep silence. Specifically, I show how appeals to dialogical communication reify, by uncritically deploying logocentric tools such as "voice" as means of liberation, oppressive colonial power structures that have predicated the exclusion and oppression of those same people who seek emancipation through voice. I contend that "voice" remains a vehicle of Eurocentric colonization because, within a colonial context, voice—and, in turn, presence/being—is limited to the voice of the Eurocentered subject of modernity.

On Coloniality and the Normativity of Voice

The first step toward understanding the ways in which uncritical appeals to voice reify colonial structures is to take a step back—or, better yet, outward—to contextualize the current critique of voice within the bounds of the specific historical formation of coloniality. Thinking through voice in light of coloniality raises important questions about the normativity of voice that would otherwise be foreclosed. In fact, coloniality is such that the rejoinder to Spivak's infamous question, "can the subaltern speak?" (Spivak 1999), is *no*: Within a colonial context, "speech" requires conformity to Eurocentric standards that exclude subaltern communicative practices and being. As such, the demand to speak places the subaltern in an untenable position. Were the subaltern to speak in their native languages, their speech (and their demands for normative treatment) would lack uptake. But were they to speak in a way that was intelligible to the colonizer, they would, on the one hand, subscribe to and be rewritten by a conceptual and linguistic framework that inscribes their culture, language, and being as inferior, while also, on the other hand, sacrificing their cultural specificity. As Trinh puts it in *Woman, Native, Other*, this constitutes a "double mischief":

> unspoken and unable to speak, woman in exile with herself. Stolen language will always remain that other's language. Say it obliquely, use trickery, cheat, or fake, for if I tell you now what I would like to hear myself tell you, I will miss it. Words thoroughly invested with realities that turn out to be not-quite-not-yet-mines are radically deceptive. Whenever I *try my best* to say, I never fail to utter the wrong words; I weasel, telling you "hen" when I mean something close to "duck." (Trinh 1989, 20)

As this passage makes concrete, by deploying the language of the colonizer, subalterns would cease being subalterns because the dominant group would not be hearing the

subaltern in its idiosyncrasies, but, rather, a mere reflection of its own message and image. "Stolen language will always remain that other's language."

Note that this *no* should not be taken to suggest (as critics too often have taken it to indicate) a communicative or political paralysis. Rather, the *no* points to a fundamental paradox at the heart of intelligibility. (As we will see in what follows, the paradox arises when the desideratum of intelligibility is epistemic transparency). Given the seeming impossibility of making sense of subaltern experiences without assimilating or distorting their differences into familiar meanings, how are we to approach these differences? Can this difference be addressed by engaging in dialogical exchanges that seek to minimize the incommensurability by providing as much meaning as possible into the plus or translatable side of the exchange? Or are these communicative barriers the outcome of historically and geographically specific patterns of power that displace the racialized and colonized "other" from the subject position and locus of enunciation?

Decolonial thinker Gabriela Veronelli seems to think the latter, arguing that voice and, more broadly, dialogical exchanges play into what she calls "the *coloniality of language and speech*" (CLS henceforth) (Veronelli 2016, 408). Veronelli defines CLS as the process of racialization of the colonized *as communicative agents* that began in the sixteenth century, whereby the colonized are reduced to nonhuman status and their language and ways of knowing are dismissed as expressions of their natural inferiority. That is, by presenting the colonized as incapable of expressing themselves rationally, their putative inferiority is naturalized discursively (409). Thus, CLS forecloses the possibility of any dialogical relationship between colonized and colonizers (but also between colonized subjects) by erecting what are perceived as "natural barriers" to intelligibility and communication; that is, coloniality vacates the colonized's speech of the possibility of being heard by making the colonized's modalities of communication and existence invisible to the colonizers. Pivotal to CLS is the joint operation of the two axes of power, "coloniality of power" and "modernity," structuring and sustaining what Aníbal Quijano calls the "Eurocentered capitalist colonial/modern world power" (Quijano 2000, 218). Attending to these patterns of power reveals as naïve any abstract appeal to voice as liberatory and points to the imbrication of coloniality and voice, more precisely, to how coloniality undermines the conditions of possibility of emancipatory dialogues.[7]

According to Quijano, the axis of the "coloniality of power" refers to that "specific basic element of the new pattern of world power that was based on the idea of 'race' and in the 'racial' social classification of world population" (218). The invention and deployment of the category of "race" from the sixteenth century onward are pivotal in reframing the discourse surrounding the inferiority of the non-European "other" from one tied to conquest, war, and domination to one that casts inferiority as natural and ahistorical. Thus presented, "race" and racial discourse come to legitimize the domination of the "Indians," "Blacks," and "Mestizos" by the "Spanish" and "Portuguese" (all of which are newly produced social historical identities) on natural grounds (216). Take the distribution of gender identity, for instance. As María Lugones points out, racial discrimination regulated the ascription of gendered identities, distinguishing between "women" and "females" and extending the status of women so described in the West only to *white* women, while understanding colonized females "to be animals … in the deep sense of 'without gender,' sexually marked as female, but without the characteristics of femininity" (Lugones 2007, 202–03). Even when colonized females were turned from animals into similes of bourgeois white women, "there was no extension of the status of white women to colonized women" (203).

The second axis of power, "modernity," refers to the systematic elaboration, carried out by modern, Western Europe, of a new intersubjective universe based on a new knowledge perspective compatible with the cognitive needs of capitalism (Quijano 2000, 221). This knowledge perspective is labeled as "rational" and conforms to strict epistemic criteria such as neutrality, objective validity, and transparency (Collins 2000, 274).[8] The cognitive needs of capitalism include the carving up, quantifying, and measuring of what is knowable so as to exert control over resources, others, and reality for the sake of commerce and exchange. Although Eurocentered, this way of knowing was/is imposed upon the capitalist world as the only valid rationality and as emblematic of the progress of modernity.

Importantly, the axes of power instituted through and instituting of "coloniality" not only outlive formal colonialism, remaining integrated in the succeeding social orders, but also are constitutive of modern identity, of the modern *ethos*. In "Purity, Impurity, and Separation," Lugones describes this modern subject as the outcome of a fiction, of an abstraction from the ambiguity and multiplicity constitutive of concrete subjects and realities aimed at exerting control and imparting order upon that *mestizaje*. That is, this modern subject deploys a logic of purity that prunes, eliminates, forbids, and purges; it frames complex realities in the fictional terms of a unified reality and a unified subject that can be split-separated, that is "internally separable, divisible into what makes it one and the remainder" (Lugones 2003, 128). This modern subject is one-dimensional and occupies an ahistorical and acultural "vantage point from which unified wholes, totalities, can be captured" (128). Not surprisingly, internally split-separated into "sense/emotion/reason," "reason, including its normative aspect, is the unified subject" (129).

Attending to the joint operations of these axes of power reveals, as the guiding logic of coloniality and CLS in particular, an epistemic production that, by demanding conformity to purportedly universal (but in fact modern and Eurocentered) epistemic standards, relies upon and produces at least a double erasure. First, it erases the colonized's communicative practices and knowledge-validation processes, which come to be regarded as primitive and lacking the sophistication, clarity, and accuracy necessary to produce knowledge. Not only, as women of color feminists have argued, is uptake differentially distributed across gender, ethnic, and racial lines (think, for example, of the differential treatment received by Anita Hill's testimony compared to that of Christine Blasey-Ford); as Spivak's paradox highlights, coloniality is such that to be heard entails expressing oneself in a manner that conforms to the epistemic model of the Eurocentered, capitalist modern/colonial world power, that is, in a rational and dispassionate manner; it requires being a split-separated subject who does not perceive richly. Because indigenous peoples do not conform to purportedly universal epistemic criteria, "the colonizers perceived indigenous peoples in speaking their tongues as doing less than being able to express knowledge" (Veronelli 2015, 113). For instance, as Trinh observes, non-Western languages like those of Taoism and Zen that are "perfectly clear but rife with paradox" do not qualify as clear, persuasive, or correct, for "paradox is 'illogical' and 'nonsensical' to many Westerns" (Trinh 1989, 16). Expressive modes that, analogously to these, do not "prune, eliminate, forbid, purge, purify" (17) are regarded as "simple communication," a form of communication that conveys more than denotative meaning, but less than dialogical rational communication, and that is an inherently less valorized form of expressivity than are Eurocentric languages (Veronelli 2015, 118–19).[9]

As Collins details in *Black Feminist Thought*, the distortion or exclusion from what counts as proper communication or knowledge of nonnormatively Eurocentered experiences has characterized the lives of US Black women, who have relied on alternative expressive forms like music, literature, and daily conversations as sites to develop self-definitions as well as produce and validate knowledge (Collins 2000, 270). Take, for instance, the erasure of the 2006 founder of "Me Too" Tarana Burke from the #MeToo movement when it first took off over a decade later in 2017. As Burke observes in a 2018 *Vibe* interview with J'na Jefferson, women of color—who, statistically, experience higher rates of rape and sexual assault than white women—are not only less likely to report, but their stories have not been granted nearly as much public attention as the testimonies of white women. Reflecting on her own experience with "Me Too," Burke asks, "Why isn't it valid when *we* talk about it?," thereby raising questions about 1) how race affects the epistemic authority of the survivor (but also of who qualifies as a survivor in the first place), and 2) of the extent to which credibility and correctness of an utterance is afforded by demanding conformity to grammatical and syntactic rules, key words, or technical terms. In this vein, Burke asks, "Is ["Me Too"] only valid if CNN talks about it?" (Jefferson and Burke 2018).[10]

The two axes perform a second (perhaps more insidious) erasure: this epistemic production conceals its own structural complicity in the reification of a system that casts the "other" as inferior. The move whereby the in-fact-European epistemic standards/knowledge-validation processes that norm what counts as knowledge and language is presented as universal *naturalizes* racialized differences, making the processes that produce these differences, that is, coloniality, invisible. Because the colonized deploy communicative practices that do not conform to the putatively universal model of rational expression, they are perceived as naturally inferior. In turn, such a naturalization makes invisible the mechanisms that produce the colonized as inferior. It is in this sense that, as Veronelli argues, CLS is more than the colonization of a language as a system of meaning, but a "process of dehumanization through racialization at the level of communication" (Veronelli 2016, 408).

In light of these considerations, we begin to see how the two axes of "coloniality" and "modernity" work in unison within CLS to discursively dehumanize the colonized and racialized "other," ultimately undermining the conditions of possibility for emancipatory exchanges. On the one hand, "modernity" naturalizes the colonial difference by upholding putatively universal and rational epistemic standards, a move that casts all those who do not conform to those criteria as naturally inferior or incapable of rational and clear linguistic communication. On the other hand, "coloniality" distributes this natural epistemic inferiority along racial lines; those who are epistemically inferior (putatively) by nature are those who are racialized as other. The outcome is that the epistemic criteria upheld by "modernity" are such that the natural inferiority of the non-European, racialized "other" is constantly reified through its own conceptual and linguistic schemas, which include reason, dialogical communication, and voice—in sum, *logos*.

Thinking through questions of voice in the context of coloniality reveals that, while coloniality displaces the colonized from the subject position by producing them as incapable of intelligible expression, a simple appeal to voice as emancipatory does not suffice; within a colonial context, the voice that can be/is heard by the majority community is normed by coloniality and, thus, is *exclusively* the voice of the colonizers. This is to say that the abstract imperative to speak up—the imperative according to which speaking up is *the* way to address oppression and violence irrespective of the nuances of a

given, concrete situation—skates over the important question of *whose* voice norms that imperative. In sum, uncritical appeals to voice do not allow the critical distance (which not so paradoxically can actually be obtained by remaining grounded in concrete lived experiences of those who speak up) necessary to question the (colonial) world in which language and naming are power, and "voice" a colonial tool. Quite the contrary—they play into existing power structures by deploying tools, like language, naming, and voice, that are normed by and effect the norming of coloniality, *giving voice* exclusively to the modern, split-separated, and rational lover of purity.

At this juncture, it is telling to briefly turn to Linda Martín Alcoff's *Rape and Resistance*, in which she puts forward a new epistemology of rape grounded in a more nuanced understanding of experiences of sexual violation as a way to reform and transform the condition of survivors' reception. Although she deems survivors' voices the critical force behind social revolution (on her account, speaking up is necessary, for example, insofar as it often is the catalyst for changing definitions, which affect the possibility of understanding and resisting sexual violation), Alcoff warns about the ways in which their testimonies echo in the public domain: testimonies are not only inscribed in frames that regulate the "criteria by which claims are interpreted and judged, what may be spoken of, what can come up for judgment itself" (Alcoff 2018, 10); they are also taken up in a domain in which the dominant understanding of sexual violation lacks complexity and nuance. To avoid the dismissal of "voices expressing complexity … as simply in denial, or as liars, or as deluded about their experience," and "to make survivor speech as politically effective as possible," it is paramount to complicate the understanding of the nature and dynamics of experiences of sexual violation to reshape the discourses norming the utterability and reception of such experiences (12, 17). In spite of her nuanced analysis of the challenges associated with public speaking, and her shift from individual responsibility to "speak up" toward transforming the discursive structures regulating uptake, Alcoff's advocacy for voice as the privileged emancipatory tool prevents her from making visible the imbrication of coloniality and voice, or the ways in which the discursive formation of coloniality undermines the conditions of possibility of emancipatory dialogues, ultimately reiterating those discursive schemas that frame and dismiss subaltern resistances.[11]

Uncritical appeals to voice thus contribute to making invisible non-Western "voices": because the voices that can be/are heard are those that conform to the epistemic norms of coloniality, those that do not conform are not recognized as communicative, rational subjects and are dismissed as *nonexistent* and nonsensical.

The claim that coloniality undermines the conditions of possibility of dialogical emancipation should not be taken to suggest that the colonized do not have a "voice" or cannot speak. Such an understanding would play into the same binary and totalizing logic this article seeks to destabilize. The colonized do have a "voice" and appeal to knowledge-validation processes, but to hear these "voices" and epistemic processes one needs to attune oneself to the echoes reverberating through and fissuring the putative silences to which they are relegated by colonial logic. Take the institutionalized sexual violation of black women under conditions of segregation, for instance. As Alcoff points out, "even if there is an official silence in the majority community concerning a given issue … this does not mean the silence is total"; black communities knew what happened even before the NAACP chapters began taking cases to the courts (Alcoff 2018, 38). "Even if these were not echoable in dominant discursive practices," the necessity for safety and knowledge-sharing led to the development of methods of communication not repressed by Eurocentered norms (38).

At this juncture, the MC affirmation, echoed by Veronelli, that "there is no way out of coloniality from within modern categories of thought" (Veronelli 2016, 405) accrues weight and clarity. The dire implications of these two erasures are not just epistemological, but ontological; they entail a world, a metaphysics, in which the only resisting subjects and modes of resistance that are recognized as existing, as sensical, are those normed by coloniality. In other words, the implications of the concealed normativity of voice are that those who are not heard/seen protesting—those who do not resist in a manner consonant with the standards prescribed by coloniality—risk being dismissed as either invalid or as facilitating their own oppression, as Martínez's narrative reminds us. In this sense, coloniality constructs an ontology that strives to eliminate any "residue" of resistance: Along with non-Western "voices," non-Western modes of insubordination, sense-making, and, as the following discussion will show, being, are also erased; the modes of insubordination, sense-making, and being made available are those sanctioned by colonial logic, modes that, even in their insubordination, play into coloniality by appealing to its concepts, structures, and logic.

In what follows, I unpack this last claim, suggesting that the abstract and uncritical appeal to voice is complicit in the reproduction and reification of colonial epistemic and ontological norms—what I call a racialized metaphysics of presence—that make visible only modes of existence that are normed by coloniality, ultimately preemptively foreclosing ways of reading and writing reality that uphold its complexity and ambiguity.

A Racialized Metaphysics of Presence

The second step toward understanding the ways uncritical appeals to voice reify colonial structures is by grappling with the ontological implications of coloniality. Although the theories discussed thus far focus predominantly on the epistemic ramifications of coloniality, this historical formation affects the "general understanding of being" (Maldonado-Torres 2007, 242). First, the casting of colonized people as lacking rationality has the effect of depriving them, in Fanon's words, of "ontological resistance," that is, of being. We saw this implication operative in the preceding discussion of CLS, especially in the discursive dehumanization of the colonial other through racialization. But this first ontological erasure relies on a second, conceptual one. The colonial/modern world power produces a racialized, dualistic conceptual framework or, more precisely, a metaphysics that limits "the sense of being within the field of presence" (Derrida 2015, 24)—what Derrida calls a metaphysics of presence—whereby this field of presence appears as the exclusive domain of the colonizer. In this sense, I speak of a *racialized* metaphysics of presence. As we will see, this racialized metaphysics of presence of being versus nonbeing, sense versus non-sense, light versus darkness, strives to reduce the multiplicity, complexity, and ambiguity of (the) being (of nonmodern subjects) to nothingness, to nonbeing.[12] Not only, then, are the colonized made invisible, reduced to nothingness through an exclusion from presence, but their being is conceived through a framework inadequate to express their complexity and ambiguity.

Take the first ontological implication of the colonial/modern world power that "the absent of rationality is articulated in modernity with the idea of the absence of Being in others" (Maldonado-Torres 2007, 252–53). In "The Coloniality of Being," Nelson Maldonado-Torres argues that the Cartesian *ego cogito* and its instrumental rationality operate according to an attitude of permanent suspicion—what he calls the "racist/imperial Manichean misanthropic skepticism" (245)—regarding the humanity of

colonized and racialized "others," which can be summarized thus: "'I think (others do not think, or do not think properly), therefore I am (others are-not, lack being, should not exist or are dispensable)'" (252). The tacit assumption guiding this logic marks the colonial and racial subjects as dispensable; it puts them under the murderous and rapist sight of the modern/colonial *ego cogito*.

Fanon's reflections in *Black Skin, White Masks* and Gloria Anzaldúa's testimony in *Borderlands/La Frontera* are a powerful testament to this insight. Because the colonial world is structured by colonial conceptual and linguistic frameworks grounded in misanthropic skepticism—here it suffices to think of Fanon's powerful description of his (linguistic) encounter with the young white boy's shout, "Look a Negro!"—"in the eyes of the white man … the black man [sic] has no ontological resistance" (Fanon 2012, 90, order rearranged). Coloniality is such that the colonized appears, in the eyes of the dominant group, not as a subject, that is, someone who has a culture, history, and language, but as nothingness. As Anzaldúa's narrative conveys, when interpreted through colonial schemas, the complex, ambiguous, and paradoxical dimensions of her being are taken to be an indication of her inferiority, of her non-sense. "I have so internalized the borderlands conflict that sometimes I feel like one cancels out the other and we are zero, nothing, no one. *A veces no soy nada ni nada*" (Anzaldúa 2007, 85), as she recounts. In a colonial context, ontology collapses into Manicheism whereby the colonized are reduced to the dark side of the light-dark equation; they are reduced to "a zone of non-being, a sterile and arid region, an incline stripped bare of every essential from which a genuine new departure can emerge" (Fanon 2012, xii).

This Manichean ontology, however, does more than relegate the *damné* to the dark side of the dichotomy; it deprives the colonized of a (nondualistic and nonlogocentric) "metaphysics" of their own capable of accommodating the complexity of (their) being (Fanon 2012, 90). Given the colonial episteme at his disposal, Fanon painfully realizes that the answer to the question, "Where do I fit in?" (93), is that he does not fit in. He has arrived "too late!," so to speak, in a world that chains him, through coloniality and the working of the two axes of power, to pre-existing images, concepts, and significations that have been fabricated without him and that relegate him to nothingness. As the anguish permeating the chapter titled "The Lived Experience of the Black Man" indicates, Fanon's existential struggle to make sense of his being through the colonial episteme leads him to one untenable position after another, ultimately culminating in a cry (an affective response that should not be overlooked and to which I will return). Similarly, we witness Anzaldúa struggle with conceptual and linguistic frameworks too narrow and transparent to make sense of the opaque, complex, ambiguous dimensions of her being, which are thus taken to be an indication of her inferiority, of her non-sense. In this sense, to use Maldonado-Torres's words, coloniality is a "metaphysical catastrophe" (Maldonado-Torres 2016, 11–16). But how is this metaphysical catastrophe possible?

As previously noted, the epistemic criteria upheld by sixteenth-century Europe served the cognitive needs of capitalism in which knowledge had to be conducive to the carving up, quantifying, and measuring of (external) reality for the sake of commerce and exchange. That is, the sixteenth century witnessed the proliferation of explicit discourses on method for the attainment of knowledge that resulted in not only the production of "objective," "universal," "dispassionate" knowledge, but also the sedimentation of ontological assumptions about what *being* should be like such that it could be known through the above-mentioned method. As it turned out, the

being that could be known through these epistemic criteria is limited to the field of presence. As Derrida suggests (following Heidegger) in *Ousia and Grammē*, Western metaphysics treats "the meaning of Being as *parousia* or *ousia*, which signifies, in ontologico-Temporal terms, 'presence' (*Anwesenheit*)" (Derrida 1982, 31). This means that it grounds determinations of the meaning of being in that which *is*—a move that produces, at once, being as "what *is* present," as immediate self-presence or "pure auto-affection" (Derrida 2015, 106) over and against nonbeing, which comes to be understood as "what is *not* present," "not-there," in sum, what cannot be known through immediate presence to consciousness.

Not to be overlooked is the crucial role that voice plays in delineating the field of presence: *logos*, Derrida tells us, is immediately present to consciousness *only* through voice because voice—or, as he specifies in *Voice and Phenomenon*, internal monologue (Derrida 2011, 35–37)—is (presumably) heard without external mediation. The West's logocentrism is the mark of a metaphysics of presence that understands speech and voice as the immediate conduit of (the) meaning (of being). The ontological implication of the axis of "modernity," then, is the reification of a Parmenidean ontology of being and nonbeing, presence and absence, light and darkness, whereby speech and voice are the mark of purity, presence, transparency, and the fullness of being, whereas its other, silence, is the mark of impurity, absence, and lack of being.

The work done in this article, however, should alert us against taking concepts like "voice" abstractly and toward the necessity of attending to the power differentials at play when dealing with questions of coloniality and ontology, bringing to bear considerations about the differential and racialized distribution of being onto ones about the metaphysics of presence. In fact, Maldonado-Torres's and Fanon's remarks indicate that the field of presence is demarcated by the consciousness or, more precisely, *the voice* of the colonizer. Within a colonial context, the "voice" that stands for presence is not just any voice; the only voice that has uptake and is recognized as Language is that of the colonizer—a speech act that conforms to the cognitive needs of capitalism. The exclusion of the colonized's communicative functions as language, then, does not merely entail the erasure of non-Eurocentric modes of communication, but also the relegation of racialized bodies/being to absence. In this sense, the metaphysics of presence is a *racialized* metaphysics of presence whereby the field of presence is the exclusive domain of the colonizer.

In light of these considerations, I *hear*, in the "cries of those whose humanity is being denied" (Maldonado-Torres 2007, 257), the reminder to call into question not only the colonizing power of voice permeating uncritical appeals to "speak up!," but also a world in which naming and language are power. That is, envisioning decolonial avenues of feminist insubordination cannot stop at questioning the conditions of possibility of reception of subaltern voices (as Alcoff among others does in *Rape and Resistance*); it must venture beyond voice, recuperating the generative power of deep silence. Importantly, I contend, the latter requires displacing the mechanisms that reduce the multiplicity and opacity of deep silence to oppressive silencing, to epistemic and ontological absence, and uphold deep silence as a fecund source of radical meaning-making, of a sense and a metaphysics that accommodate the *mestizaje* and complexity of (the) being (of the colonized). In this vein, it is time to repropose the questions raised at the outset of this article: Why is Martínez's silent response read as an absence of sorts? What are the structures and motives such that silence is immediately perceived and conceived as silencing? There are instances of silence that are, in fact, oppressive, but

why can't we find, within a colonial matrix, a way to think or live silence otherwise than as oppression? And what does this evisceration tell us about coloniality?

II. The Coloniality of Silence

I concluded the preceding section by suggesting that a racialized metaphysics of presence is such that the colonizers' is the only voice that is heard and stands for presence, which means that being (here limited to the field of presence) is the exclusive domain of the colonizer. Because the "voice," "speech," or "languages" of the colonized do not conform to Eurocentered, capitalist, colonial/modern criteria, they are not heard or recognized as such. This entails the reduction of the colonized's voice to nonsense (or, as Veronelli calls it, "simple communication") and their being to a "zone of non-being." However, a racialized metaphysics of presence that excludes communicative forms and beings that are not normed by coloniality has implications for the *phenomenon of silence* itself. Within a colonial context, embodied responses that are not normed by colonial voice, like Martínez's "joto passivity," fall through the cracks of a racialized metaphysics of presence; rather than being taken in their strangeness and allowed to displace usual expectations, what cannot be heard by and from the colonizer's standpoint is marked as unintelligible and nonsensical, as nothingness—as *mere* or *total* silence. Experiences of silences that can be negotiations of reality and fecund sources of radical meaning-making are vacated of their depth and thickness, of sense and being. That is, deep silences are eviscerated of their multiplicity and the phenomenon of silence comes to stand for the opposite of voice and sense, as that which ought to be broken or overcome to convey meaning or to gain recognition. As such, silence is signified negatively, as the mark of ontological nonbeing and epistemic non-sense or the index of oppression and displacement from the (purportedly universal but in fact colonial) subject position. I call the mechanisms that make invisible the depth of the phenomenon of silence the *coloniality of silence*.[13] The outcome is that silence is perceived, at best, as a phenomenon irrelevant to meaning-making, to communication, and to the disclosure of being, and, at worst, as an obstacle to be overcome if meaning, communication, and the disclosure of being ought to be attained. But what does it mean for silence to be excluded from the domain of presence, being, and sense? This is also to ask, what does it mean, for *sense*, to be limited to (the) presence (of the colonizer's voice)?

In "Cultural Alterity," Ofelia Schutte takes up these questions by thinking through the paradox inherent to cross-cultural communication already discussed in relation to Spivak's "can the subaltern speak?" Differently from Spivak, who deals with the untenable predicament of the subaltern from the standpoint of speech/voice, the lynchpin of Schutte's argument is that there is a "lack of complete translatability" (Schutte 1998, 69, n. 4), a *silence* of sorts, between linguistic-cultural symbolic systems but, more broadly, within sense itself. As she puts it, "[t]here is always a residue of meaning that will not be reached in cross-cultural endeavors, a residue sufficiently important to point to what I shall refer to more abstractly as a principle of (cross-cultural) incommensurability" (56). Although colonial/modern epistemic theories of meaning may acknowledge this incommensurability and the fact that it may impede a perfect mapping of culturally different discourses, they regard incommensurability as "irrelevant to philosophical meaning and knowledge, and thus irrelevant to the operations of reason" (61). This is because they understand incommensurability quantitatively rather than qualitatively; incommensurability is approached as the residue of an equation

whose balancing entails communicative transparency. Recall Lugones's lover of purity: The colonial/modern subject operates under the assumption that the sense of a purportedly unified reality and subject can be grasped in its totality through reason alone, that is, by occupying an acultural and ahistorical vantage point. Lovers of purity split-separate reality, sanitizing it from anything "impure" like affective residues and (seeming) incompossibles. That is, they operate under the assumption that a culture's, language's, or subject's meaning is perfectly available and accessible to another, that these meanings can be made available through dialogical exchanges, and that the colonized can deploy colonial meanings and frameworks to express their experiences of oppression and resistance—assumptions that, as we have seen, make invisible the colonized's communicative practices and being. In a word, the lover of purity casts sense and reality as *transparent*, thus skating over the "silence," "opacity," or "excess of meaning" inherent in sense and reality.

This assumption regarding the nature of incommensurability/silence and sense informs strategies devised to reduce barriers to cross-cultural communication. Because sense is assumed to be transparent, cross-cultural incomprehensions or miscommunications are taken to be direct results of a lack of information. The solution to this "lack," then, is taken to be a "more": comprehension and communication, this logic goes, are achieved by providing more complete, detailed, accurate information. Although these strategies, in some instances, may help reduce the incomprehensions or miscommunications, they mischaracterize the nature of incommensurability/silence and sense, which, in turn, leads them to mischaracterize the nature of the problem. Because they overlook the fact that "silence" or "excess of meaning" is inherent to sense and "the process of reasoning itself" (Schutte 1998, 61), they understand the problem of miscommunication to be a quantitative issue—addressed by providing more of the *same* kind of input—rather than a qualitative issue—the *nature* of sense and silence. In other words, they overlook the deep silence of sense and the sense of deep silence. This discussion of Eurocentered theories of meaning points to the fact that the colonial, logocentric apparatus is not equipped to approach, dwell in, harken to occurrences of deep silence, or let deep silence open onto other dimensions of being and sense that are prior to and cannot be accounted for by a discourse that operates at the level of conceptual thinking. Instead, epistemically, silence is framed as the lack or insufficiency of more complete, accurate, detailed sense/information that could be provided by the colonized via speaking up and coming to voice. In sum, what is made invisible, by virtue of its not being recognized or acknowledged, is the sense *of* deep silence.

Although the coloniality of silence strives to eviscerate deep silences, occurrences of silence can be rich phenomena that operate according to decolonial logics. Martínez's testimony points to the ways in which deep silence holds the promise of making sense of his situation otherwise than via colonial epistemic and ontological frameworks. Martínez shows us that his "joto passivity" opens onto practices of "radical meaning making" from which one can envision and bring about radically different gendered practices like nonmisogynist and nonhomophobic ways of practicing masculinity (Martínez 2014, 239). Or take the description of Marita Bonner, a celebrated writer of the Harlem renaissance, of black consciousness in "On Being Young, Woman, and Colored." Departing from narratives that equate black consciousness with resistance and the public, in her writing—conveyed both through her stylistic choices and content—Bonner emphasizes the voluptuousness of interiority and the strength of surrender:

> So—being a woman—you can wait.
>
> You must sit quietly without a chip. Not sodden—and weighted as if your feet were cast in the iron of your soul. Not wasting strength in enervating gestures as if two hundred years of bonds and whips had really tricked you into nervous uncertainty.
>
> But quiet; quiet. Like Buddha—who brown like I am—sat entirely at ease, entirely sure of himself; motionless and knowing, a thousand years before that white man knew there was so very much difference between feet and hands.
>
> Motionless on the outside. But inside?
> Silent.
> Still … "Perhaps Buddha is a woman." (Bonner, 7–8, cited in Quashie 2012, 34)

Quiet, stillness, and silence function in Bonner's text as the catalyst for novel understandings of black identity that do not stand over and against the world, its expectations, and its limited imagination. Silence here figures as a location of insight and meaning; in this context, silence is not oppression, "not performative, not a withholding," but instead, Kevin Quashie claims in *The Sovereignty of Quiet*, "is an expressiveness that is not entirely legible in a discourse of publicness" (Quashie 2012, 35).[14] So, again, *why* are these "silent" responses read as negative phenomena, as absence, passivity, or nonresponsiveness?

By emphasizing the why, I bring attention to the nonaccidental nature of this reading of reality, to the fact that the casting of deep silence as mere silence, that is, the coloniality of silence, is necessary to coloniality. In fact, because what is deemed as mere silence would open not only onto decolonial epistemic practices, but also onto a metaphysics or zone of being that is neither full presence nor nothing, taking seriously those experiences *as* deep silence would challenge usual assumptions central to coloniality itself. In this sense, the evisceration of deep silence to absence (and to oppressive silencing) is not accidental to coloniality, but, rather, a key process in the successful reification and legitimization of coloniality. By reducing deep silences to the expression of natural inferiority or the exclusion from the subject position, the coloniality of silence makes invisible modes of knowing, communicating, and being that are *otherwise* than modernity and that, by virtue of their existence, threaten to fissure the *naturalization* of coloniality so essential for its own justification. After all, the existence of decolonial modes of being and knowing challenges the operative assumption of coloniality, calling into question the "objective" and "transparent" qualities of Eurocentered, capitalist, modern/colonial epistemic and ontological schemas—features that are presented as natural and universal. To use language resonant with the previous section's discussion, the racialized metaphysics of presence eliminates any "impurity" or in-between, reducing them to nonbeing.

Significantly, because this in-between, this "herida abierta" (Anzaldúa 2007, 25), is a place where the colonized live in a way that "exceeds" the modern epistemic and ontological categories of coloniality, and, as such, offers "new critical horizons … within hegemonic cosmologies" (Mignolo 2000, xxvi), in addition to the concealment of the production of the difference between colonized and colonizer, the naturalization of the colonial difference makes invisible this concrete locus fecund with new horizons.[15] In this way, it preemptively dismisses on natural grounds as nonbeing or non-sense the *locus* from which one could contest the assumptions of coloniality. This erasure is crucial to coloniality in that it conceals the colonial difference as a generative source of subversion.[16]

III. Toward the Rereading and Rewriting of Deep Silence

As Lugones insightfully reminds us, decoloniality requires resisting the epistemological habit of erasing (Lugones 2010, 754). What would it mean, then, not to dismiss the residue or excess of meaning—the deep silence—of experiences like Martínez's, Fanon's, or Anzaldúa's? And if sense is not transparent, and if silence is not a lack, how are we to make sense of the operations of silence in sense? How can experiences like theirs help us make sense of the silence of sense and the sense of silence? Consider Fanon's and Anzaldúa's aforementioned experiences of not fitting within colonial norms and expectations. Although painful and disorienting, their experiences are not a defeat. Upholding the dismemberment brought about by a life in the "herida abierta," and dwelling in these experiences of displacement from the language and the world of the colonizer not only reveals the fictitious nature of the logic regulating this exclusion; it can also be a fertile "ground" for the rereading and rewriting of reality, for the displacement of usual meanings and expectations.[17] Although this colonial logic strives to reduce the *damné* and their multiplicity, opacity, and ambiguity to the dark side of the dichotomy (to nothingness), their material existence contextualizes such reduction. As noted, Fanon's existential struggle to make sense of his being culminates in a cry: "I tried to get up but the eviscerated silence surged toward me with paralyzed wings. Not responsible for my acts, at the crossroads between Nothingness and Infinity, I began to weep" (Fanon 2012, 119). We witness Fanon rejecting the split-separation imposed upon him by the logic of purity, a separation that would dismiss the emotional residue that makes up his difference, his being, reducing him to nothingness and the depth of silence to an "eviscerated" silence. Importantly, however, his rejection comes in the form of weeping, which suggests *another* way of being in and making sense of the world—an embodied, affectively charged *ethos*.

We find a more robust exploration of this affective sense-making in Anzaldúa's writings. We discover, in the remarks from *Borderlands/La Frontera* previously cited, that, although at times, when she gives in to colonial logic, Anzaldúa feels like she is a "zero, nothing, no one. *A veces no soy nada ni nada*," her existence contests the logic of purity: "*Pero hasta cuando no lo soy, lo soy*" (Anzaldúa 2007, 85). The being that she "is" does not conform to the usual expectation or familiar meanings; she "is" neither the plenitude of full being nor the absence of nonbeing: "But even when I am not, I am" (85, my translation). Similarly to Fanon, when upholding her being and speaking *from* her experience, from that purportedly eviscerated silence or nothingness to which colonial logic strives to reduce her, Anzaldúa is able to challenge the fiction of the racialized metaphysics of presence; "when not copping out," she lets her deep silence speak for itself, shaping a metaphysics of her own whereby she "is" a multiplicity: Mexican, *mestiza*, Chicana, *Tejana*, and so much more.

Testimonies like these point us to an alternative to understanding incommensurability as well as sense and silence in terms of transparency; they ask that we resist the tendency to subsume the other's opacity into familiar schemas or meanings, dwelling instead in that unsettling experience akin to when "another's speech, or some aspect of it, resonates in me as a kind of strangeness, a kind of displacement of the usual expectation" (Schutte 1998, 56). Withstanding this strange experience, this deep silence, is key to *hearing* the other *in her difference*, for new sense to emerge.

Although this article has followed decolonial thinkers in challenging the authorial and colonial power of voice, it moves beyond them, inviting the reframing of Spivak's question not in terms of voice—can the subaltern *speak*?—but in terms of

deep silence—can the deep silence of the colonized be generative of decolonial sense-making? In other words—by attending to colonial patterns of power, this article has revealed the imbrication of coloniality and voice, thus problematizing as naïve any abstract appeal to voice as emancipatory. Although survivors' voices and testimonies are a critical force behind social change, as the #MeToo movement continues to promote voice as the ubiquitous means of emancipation, it is paramount to contend with the fact that social change is not achieved by making the platform more inclusive to include the voices of those who have traditionally been marginalized because of their social positionality. As I have argued in this article, the matter at hand is rather to question the structural conditions and assumptions undergirding the movement, that is, its appeal to voice. In fact, assuming that voice is a ubiquitous means of emancipation, that speaking up is beyond race, gender, or class tacitly undermines the conditions of possibility of dialogical emancipation of those who do not conform to Eurocentered epistemic and ontological norms, ultimately reifying colonial formations whereby the other and their communicative practices are cast as inferior. In this sense, so long as liberatory movements championing the imperative to "speak up" do not critically call into question the guiding assumption norming what counts as reliable and correct speech, the testimonies of survivors whose expressive means do not conform to logical, clear, or persuasive speech will be reduced to nothingness, to "total silence" (Alcoff 2018, 38). As Spivak suggests in an interview with Jenny Sharp, perhaps "we must … take a moratorium on naming too soon, if we manage to penetrate there. There is no other way for you and me to penetrate there" (Sharp and Spivak 2003, 619). Perhaps, the openings to decolonial sense and the key to "rereading and rewriting of reality" (Anzaldúa 2015, 40) are not found exclusively in or through conceptual thinking or dialogical exchanges but via affective, sensuous harkenings to experiences of deep silence.

Notes

1 Aimee Carrillo Rowe's and Sheena Malhotra's *Silence, Feminism, Power* is a collection dedicated to critiquing, from a feminist standpoint, the dominant conception of silence that casts it as exclusively oppressive and recovering it as also a space of possibilities (Carrillo Rowe and Malhotra 2013). Over the decades, there have been attempts to reclaim silence outside of philosophy. Communication studies scholar Robin Clair, for instance, follows the path paved by Max Picard, arguing that silence and voice should not be thought as "bifurcated concepts," but as "self-contained opposites" (Clair 1998, xiii; see also Picard 1952). In *Organizing Silence* and "Imposed Silence and the Story of the Warramunga Woman," Clair investigates strategies to organize silence such that it becomes possible to hear the voices of those who have been silenced (Clair 1998; 2013). Following a deconstructive approach, Clair investigates the "silencing aspects of communication and the expressive aspects of silence" (Clair 1998, 5) as a way of moving beyond the bifurcation of voice and silence. Notably, Clair argues that aesthetics "provides a means for silence to escape and become expression, and an aesthetic perspective allows us to see it … an aesthetic perspective provides a way of exploring how silence is expressed" (40).

It should be noted that the history of silence and feminism is a complex one. By the mid-1980s, third-wave feminist analyses of oppression complicated the concept of silence. Silence was not exclusively a mark of patriarchal oppression, theorists such as Audre Lorde or María Lugones insisted (Lorde 1978/2007; Lugones and Spelman 1983), but *also* a phenomenon endemic to feminist discourse. Attending to what came to be known—thanks to Kimberlé Crenshaw's groundbreaking essay "Mapping the Margins" (Crenshaw 1991)—as the *intersectionality* of oppression entailed calling into question the *racialization* of silence, that is, the white assumption that silence is co-extensive with the feminine. On the one hand, intersectional analyses of oppression revealed that "silence" (as well as "passivity" or "fragility") characterizes and normalizes the experience of (most) WASP women, not of *all* women (Collins 2000, 14). In the collective imaginary and their communal spaces like the family and the church, Black women do speak and often are framed as rowdy and loud (Lorde 1978/2007; hooks 1989/2015). In this sense, the reduction of

oppressive, silencing practices to the silencing of patriarchal oppression performed a double erasure, that is, the erasure of women of color whose experiences are characterized by the intersection of multiple axes of oppression, but also the making invisible of white feminism's complicity in the oppression of women of color. In fact, so long as silence is understood to be coextensive with the feminine, the normative force of this assumption is that women of color, whose existence and experiences do not conform with this silent, (white) feminine norm, are made invisible within (white) feminist discourse. To be clear—by taking the experience of white women as indicative of *the* feminine, second-wave feminism foreclosed the recognition of its participation in the marginalization and exclusion of women of color. On the other hand, intersectional analyses of oppression revealed the limitations of the emancipatory strategy of effecting the transition from silence to voice; at stake in women of color's emancipation was the production of speech that would compel listeners, speech that would be heard—as Lorde and hooks argued. Yet, although the phenomenon of silence accrued complexity, coming to index not just literal silence, but also the "speech" of women of color (speech that would not conform to white, patriarchal standards of "proper" speech and, as such, lacked uptake), third-wave feminism left unchallenged the guiding political imperative of "breaking the silence" by "coming to voice," continuing to espouse a conception of silence coextensive with oppression, equating it to "starvation" (Moraga 2015, 24) or a locus of peril and vulnerability ("your silence will not protect you" [Lorde 1978/2007, 41]).

2 Given the spatial constraints of this article, I cannot thoroughly engage with critiques of ableist and normative modes of communication such as (narrow forms of) voice put forth by disability studies. A fruitful starting point for those engagements is Christine Ashby's "Whose 'Voice' Is It Anyway?," in which she takes up the difficult challenge of "giving voice" to those individuals who experience disability—in her case, those who do not use speech as the primary mode of expression—while also calling into question narrow conceptualizations of voice. "Ensur[ing] a space within a critical, qualitative framework for the inclusion of 'voices' that do not speak" entailed problematizing the use of the term "voice," which, as she observes, too often goes unchallenged, as well as the assumptions behind the desire to give voice. Ashby recognizes the importance of silence as a means for the individual to "give voice to his experience and provide an opportunity to talk back to the technologies of power that oppress. … perhaps *not* speaking, or not typing, is also a way to subvert systems of power that limit and marginalize" (Ashby 2011).

3 It was brought to my attention by one of the anonymous reviewers that my choice of the terminology *deep* silence may inadvertently reify problematic dichotomies such as surface/depth that have been central to the colonial/modern project. As Marlon B. Ross points out in his critique of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's epistemological theory of the closet in "Beyond the Closet as a Raceless Paradigm," the surface/depth dichotomy is at play in the delineation of sexual modernity whereby homosexuality is marked by claustrophilia, that is, the value promoted by the White, intellectual establishment of deep, hidden or "*closeted* meaning" (Ross 2005, 139). "Primitives, savages, the poor, and those uneducated in the long history of epistemology are not normally represented as epistemological subjects, partly because they do not have the luxury of composing the kind of voluminous texts that bear the weight of such deep buried—and thus closed/closeted up—intellectual dilemmas begging for painstakingly close readings" (139). I thank the reviewer for bringing attention to the possible limitations of "depth" as a concept. Aware of the imbrication of the binary surface/depth with the reification of Eurocentered norms, in the context of this article "deep" is deployed to effect an epistemological suspension of the familiar, and problematize the widespread and monovalent conceptions of silence as oppression. Given the decolonial lineage within which this work is situated, the deployment of "depth" as a qualifier for the generative and fecund silence at stake in this article is also meant to evoke the work of "making visible the invisible," to borrow Maldonado-Torres's words, "and analyzing the mechanisms that produce such invisibility or distorted visibility" (Maldonado-Torres 2007, 262). "Depth" indexes the recuperation of such invisibility.

4 American writer, historian, and activist Rebecca Solnit's latest book, *The Mother of All Questions*, is a prime example of how the phenomenon of silence is conceived and treated in mainstream white feminist circles. The author discusses how feminists have long used silence as a metaphor for oppression and makes the case for how liberation is "always in part a storytelling process: breaking stories, breaking silences, making new stories. A free person tells her own story. A valued person lives in a society in which her story has a place" (Solnit 2017, 15). Silence, she claims, is what condemns "people to suffer without recourse, what allows hypocrisies and lies to grow and flourish, crimes to go unpunished. If our voices are essential aspects of our humanity, to be rendered voiceless is to be dehumanized or excluded from one's humanity" (18). As I acknowledge in the body of the article, although there are oppressive forms of silencing, the equation of

silence as oppression and voice or storytelling as emancipation forecloses critical analyses of the violence entailed by the normativity of voice. What to do with the co-opting of principles like "having your voice heard" or "breaking the silence" for the fight against justice and equality through fake news, for instance? Or appeals to "free speech" as means to advance alt-right messages? Or the logically analogous instance whereby French actress Catherine Deneuve wrote an open letter, published in *Le Monde*, in which she undermines the #MeToo campaign, contending that men should be "free to hit on" women? And what about instances in which silence is needed for self-care and self-preservation? So again, though public testimony may be a practice that, in certain contexts and circumstances, is called for, the ubiquitous imperative to speak up and its association with agency and humanity upheld by most liberatory narratives entails harms of its own that ought to be brought to light to avoid complicity with structural oppression.

5 It should be noted that, as Carrillo Rowe and Malhotra point out, although the works of Glenn and Ratcliffe "productively bring silence more fully into focus by challenging the epistemological conditions of its annihilation, they remain bound to Western and modernist assumptions about completeness of understanding" (Carrillo Rowe and Malhotra 2013, 6).

6 To this end, in "Resistant Silences," Christine Keating works to recuperate silence from its equation with absence, distinguishing between enforced silences, which are oppressive and should be resisted, from three kinds of silences that serve as technologies of resistance: "silent refusal, silent witness, and deliberative silence" (Keating 2013, 25). In "Legacies of Silences," Malhotra speaks of her struggle with the "Western compulsion for voice and speaking … speak your position; take a stand; speak, speak, speak!" (Carrillo Rowe and Malhotra 2013, 220)—a commitment that problematically equates agency with voice. Reflecting on her experience as a survivor of ovarian cancer, Malhotra reframes silence as a "space of unsettling possibilities" (223) whereby words, ideals, thoughts, and explorations do not have to follow structured and linear regimens, but can hold "more than one thing at once" (225). She argues that agency is a prerequisite for silence to be empowering, a space for possibilities—"silence without *any* agency is oppressive, particularly given the material conditions of the lives in question" (224).

7 As Veronelli argues, although these conditions can be granted at the abstract level (she criticizes MC exponents Enrique Dussel and Walter Mignolo for taking for granted the existence of these dialogical conditions of possibility by operating at the level of "ideas, of epistemic and political projects" (Veronelli 2016, 408)), these conditions of possibility do not necessarily exist at the level of the concrete lives and experiences of colonial subjects.

8 As Collins points out, knowledge claims must satisfy criteria upheld by the context in which they are presented. Ultimately, "because this enterprise is controlled by elite White men, knowledge validation processes reflect this group's interests" (Collins 2000, 271).

9 This is also true for vernacular expressions, which are not acquired through formal institutions and thereby are not "repressed by either grammatical rules, technical terms, or key words" (Trinh 1989, 16).

10 Burke created "Me Too" in 2006 as a MySpace page to promote conversations and build community among women of color who were survivors.

11 As Sadie Graham points out in an October 2018 *Broadly* article, the ubiquity of reporting promoted by and characteristic of #MeToo fostered the belief that this journalistic form of reporting would "dismantle the oligo-patriarchy and save us all." Yet many of the same problems persist. Not only "other kind of reporting—to human resources, to police—are so aggressively unsustainable for survivors" (Graham 2018); closer scrutiny shows how this platform amplifies the voices of white, middle-class women to the exclusion of others.

12 In *In-Between*, Mariana Ortega argues that multiplicity and *mestizaje* are characteristic of all beings, not only of those who, because of their material, geopolitical existence, are forced to "travel" between cultural and linguistic norms and worlds of meaning (Ortega 2016).

13 Furthermore, as the discussion on the coloniality of voice indicated, the coloniality of silence inscribes silence as the *natural* expression of racialized and colonized subjects. The joint operations of the axes of "modernity" and "coloniality" are such that the racialized "other" is cast as naturally epistemically and ontologically inferior—as silent. Rather than being recognized as a colonial production, "silence as absence and nonsense" comes to be understood as the natural domain of the colonized—as the expression of the natural inability to fight back, the nonresponsiveness of queer Chicanos in the face of violence.

14 See Evelynn Hammonds's treatment of a politics of articulation and a politics of silence in "Black (W) holes" for a discussion of how the concept of silence figures in black women's cultural work (Hammonds 1994)

15 As Walter Mignolo affirms in the "Preface" to the 2012 edition of his earlier book, the root of the concept of the "colonial difference" can be traced to Anzaldúa's use of the Nahuatl term *Nepantla*, which she also refers to as "herida abierta"—the open wound that is the lived space of the borderland/*la frontera*. This lineage stresses the "physical as well as imaginary" (Mignolo 2000, xxv) place that is the colonial difference and the traumatic as well as generative/transformative quality that it bears.

16 In other words, as a place whose materiality refuses disappearance and erasure, the colonial difference threatens to undermine, in its resilience and concreteness, the colonial logic whereby "knowledge and aesthetic norms are … universally established by a transcendental subject" realizing instead that they are "universally established by historical subjects in diverse cultural centers" (Mignolo 2000, 5).

17 Although I speak of a ground here, this ground is a "lugar no lugar," what Anzaldúa calls *Nepantla*, "a Nahuatl word for an in-between space, el lugar entre medio. Napantla, palabra indígena: un concepto que se refiere a un lugar no-lugar" (Anzaldúa 2015, 28).

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