Critique and the Ambivalence of Colonial Modernity: Towards a Postcolonial Genealogical Critique

by

Zeinab Nobowati

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Dissertation Committee:

Colin Koopman, Chair

Bonnie Mann, Core Member

Nicolae Morar, Core Member

Michael Allan, Institutional Representative

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Zeinab Nobowati

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Title: Critique and the Ambivalence of Colonial Modernity: Towards a Postcolonial Genealogical Critique

This dissertation develops conceptual and methodological tools from a variety of traditions, especially that of critical theory and Michel Foucault's thought specifically, that can serve the development of a postcolonial genealogical critique, that is, a critique that rethinks the relationship between colonial history and the present and problematizes the postcolonial political order and its hold on our subjectivities. I think about Foucault's philosophical tools as a method of analysis that is both conditioned by its colonial context and at the same time enables a certain critical interrogation of those very conditions.

The first part of the dissertation develops and proposes genealogical postcolonial critique as a method for studying the normative ambivalence of colonial modernity, i.e., the entanglement of enlightenment and violence. Genealogical critique, a philosophical method of critique based on studying the history of the present and developed mainly by Nietzsche and Foucault, is an especially apt method for postcolonial critique, but I suggest that it needs to be modified due to its Eurocentric bias. The third chapter discusses the transformative work of postcolonial genealogical critique by highlighting its epistemological and affective work, as well as its practical implications for the pathologies of collective memories.

The last two chapters articulate the possibilities of ethical and feminist self-transformation in postcolonial times by drawing inspiration from Foucault's work on

ethical self-practices. The fourth chapter reflects on the effects of the afterlives of colonialism in relation to the ethical self and explores the relationship between critique, ethical self-practices, and internalized oppression through an engagement with Foucault alongside Franz Fanon and Audre Lorde. The last chapter builds upon my work in the previous chapters to discuss the relevance of postcolonial genealogical critique for the study of the gendered afterlives of colonialism. More specifically, I focus on the study of gendered ideologies in post-revolutionary Iran and show how the historical lens of genealogy allows us to situate the development of gendered ideologies in the global context of colonial modernity and recognize the relationality between local political formations and transnational relations of power.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter Page

I. INTRODUCTION 10

II. CRITICAL PHILOSOPHY AND THE AMBIVALENCE OF COLONIAL MODERNITY: FOUCAULDIAN CRITIQUE REVISITED 20

1. Introduction 20

1.1 Postcoloniality as a Distinct Lens of Analysis 22

1.2 Critical Philosophy: Borrowing Tools from Foucault 24

2. Genealogy and the Task of Critique 29

2.1 Genealogy as Problematization 29

2.2 The Normativity of Critique 34

2.2.1Normative Ambivalence 38

2.2.2 The Normative Ambivalence of Postcolonial Subjectivation 48

2.3 Critique, Political Struggles, and Social Change 52

3. With Foucault Beyond Foucault: Postcolonial Power and the Task of Critique 55

3.1 Critique and Anti-Colonial Revolt: The Case of Foucault and the Iranian. Revolution 56

3.2 Towards a Genealogical Postcolonial Critique 67

III. FROM "COLONIAL APHASIA" TO CRITICAL PROBLEMATIZATION: THE TRANSFORMATIVE WORK OF POSTCOLONIAL GENEALOGICAL CRITIQUE 70

1. Introduction: Critique Between the Past and the Present 70

2. A Practical Attitude to the Past: Insights from Nietzsche and Foucault 71

Chapter ..... Page

3. Postcolonial Challenges to Historical Inquiry 81

3.1 Intertwined Histories and Relational Methodologies 81

3.2 How to Read Difference Differently: The Postcolonial Challenge to Historicism 85

4. From Colonial Aphasia to Critical Problematization: Towards a Postcolonial Politics of Ourselves 90

5. Conclusion 103

IV. CRITICAL ETHICS FOR THE OPPRESSED: ENVISIONING ETHICAL TRANSFORMATION WITH FOUCAULT, FANON, AND LORDE 106

1. Introduction 106

2. Foucauldian Practices of Freedom as Critical Ethics 110

2.1 The Ethical Work of (Genealogical) Critique 112

2.2. Ethics and Power 118

3. Critical Ethics and Decolonial and Anti-Racist Practices of Freedom 123

3.1 Fanon and Decolonial Practices of Freedom 125

3.2 Lorde on Anti-racist Practices of the Self as Empowerment 134

4. Conclusion 142

V. GENEALOGICAL CRITIQUE AND POSTCOLONIAL FEMINISM: 'WOMAN LIFE FREEDOM' AND THE GENDERED AFTERLIVES OF COLONIALISM ... 146

1. Introduction 146

2. Genealogical Critique and Feminism 149

2.1 Foucauldian Critique and Feminism 149

2.2. The Work of Genealogical Feminism 152

Chapter ..... Page

3. The Freedom of Muslim Women: Feminist Appropriations and Postcolonial Predicaments 156

3.1 From Colonial Feminism to Postcolonial Feminism 157

3.2 Post 9/11 Feminist Hesitations 161

3.3 Postcolonial Genealogical Critique and the Political Formation of Gendered Religious Practices 167

3.4 The Woman Life Freedom Movement and the Unfinished Task of Decolonizing Anti-imperialism 171

4. Conclusion: Genealogy, Postcolonial Feminism, and Multi-directionality of Critique 179

REFERENCES CITED 181

CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

It was Nietzsche who wrote that forgetting is as vital for life as remembering, and that one cannot live life happily without forgetfulness (Nietzsche 1997, 62). One might think that the ability to forget the dark memories of the past must be crucial for being present in the moment and for not being haunted by those memories, that "letting go" of the past would eventually let the wounds heal. But the past does not haunt us primarily through conscious and intentional lingering on the past but more than anything through the ways that it conditions the structures of our feeling and experiencing the world and constitutes our behavioral patterns. Taking this insight into consideration, then, it seems that the best way to stop being haunted by the past is to understand this conditioning and aim to change it. That Nietzsche was not oblivious to the importance of this engagement with the past is obvious not just from his emphasis on the temporary character of forgetfulness and that one needs to also remember the past at the right time, but also from his understanding of philosophical critique as deeply historical.

When it comes to collective political history, one might also wonder whether lingering on the dark episodes of the past is not sometimes a barrier to improving the present and working towards development, economic growth, and social progress. It is from such hope in progress in the present that the discourse of development focuses on enacting change in third-world countries that are still dealing with the afterlives of colonialism. But sometimes transforming the present is not possible unless the history of

the present is understood and unless underlying structures, norms, and values are reflected upon, questioned, and transformed. This is especially the case if what we imagine as progress turns out to require a radical break from the present, for example, because economic growth in the context of global capitalism implies only assimilating to a form of life that is morally and politically questionable and that still leaves unchallenged various forms of harm including class oppression and exploitation, racial injustice, and environmental destruction.

I started my doctoral studies in the United States shortly after the election of Trump and the introduction of the so-called "Trump travel ban" or "Muslim ban", an executive order according to which citizens of seven Muslim-majority countries weren't allowed to enter the United States. The ruling was blocked by various courts after three months, but it left a long-lasting effect on many people in the Muslim immigrant community, including a feeling of never fully belonging in the United States even after having lived there as permanent residents. Although some observers tended to interpret the Muslim ban as a sign of the xenophobia of Trump as president, if we were to cut off the head of the king in a Foucauldian manner (Foucault 1978), it would become obvious that the roots of the problem were somewhere else, especially considering the parallels between the travel ban and not just the political moment of 9/11, but also the long history of Islamophobia in the context of European and American colonialism. The travel ban - and other instances of state-sponsored anti-Muslim racism cannot be understood separate from the broader context of colonial modernity and its connection to Islamophobia. It invites us to reflect on the ambivalence of colonial modernity as a moment of new freedoms but also new forms of domination.

Problems such as this continue to shape our political landscape – not just in the United States but also in Europe where the far right is winning more and more votes, especially from young voters – because we have not problematized the continued persistence of the afterlives of colonialism in our present. These afterlives involve not just racism and legal discrimination but also global inequality in the broad sense. The dominant discourse about global poverty still seems to be one shaped by the idea of charity according to which Westerners like to "help" poorer countries without acknowledging their own complicity in the emergence of the problem of global poverty. As Frantz Fanon (2004) argues, the wealth of imperialist nations is also the wealth of third-world countries because it has been accumulated through the colonial exploitation of labor and resources. Reflecting on these issues while working within the discipline of philosophy, my question became about what notion of critique and what analytical framework would be suitable for thinking about the afterlives of colonialism in the present and for understanding the ways these afterlives still condition our political practices, our cultural understandings, and our knowledge formations.

Another formative political moment for the development of this work was the emergence of the Woman Life Freedom movement in Iran in 2022 during which many Iranian women and queer people gained a new form of political subjectivity. Observing the relative absence of an anti-imperialist agenda in this movement, I became interested in thinking about gendered oppression in Iran in the transnational context of colonial modernity. Applying some of the conceptual tools that I had developed earlier in my research to the analysis of this movement led me to an account of the genealogy of the

gendered afterlives of colonialism which opened new windows for understanding the present.

A third significant political moment is worth mentioning here. The last phases of my dissertation research were coincident with the unfolding of unprecedented violence in Gaza and the rise of a new global movement in solidarity with Palestinians, involving encampments at university campuses all over Europe and North America, including at the University of Oregon. My project was too progressed at the time to make room for direct engagement with this third moment, but this moment too was a further indicator that the critique of colonialism and its afterlives remains one of the main intellectual imperatives of our time.

Much of Western philosophy might be a questionable candidate for responding to this intellectual imperative because of its underlying Eurocentrism and its relative disinterest in looking beyond the West, a problem I engage in depth in this work. I find it useful to pursue a creative intellectual approach to the study of the tradition of Western philosophy that allows us to use and modify some of the tools of this tradition for thinking critically about its own project. The choice of focusing on Michel Foucault's thought was certainly inspired by Edward Said's engagement with Foucault as well as by Foucault's significance for postcolonial theory more broadly. It was also primarily due to the fact that Foucault's genealogical critique provides a promising framework for the problematization of the afterlives of colonialism in the present, as I explain in detail in my second chapter.

This dissertation develops conceptual and methodological tools from a variety of traditions, especially that of critical theory and Michel Foucault's thought specifically,

that can serve the development of a postcolonial genealogical critique, that is, a critique that rethinks the relationship between colonial history and the present and problematizes the postcolonial political order and its hold on our subjectivities. I think about Foucault's philosophical tools as a method of analysis that is both conditioned by its colonial context and at the same time enables a certain critical interrogation of those very conditions.

My project is driven by the contention that social political philosophy is fundamentally an inquiry about power, and that there is still value in holding to the Socratic idea that philosophy itself involves speaking the truth to power and about power. If we follow the Foucauldian thesis that the philosopher cannot offer an abstract theory of power but needs to investigate particular relations of power, then looking into social reality becomes necessary. The particular power relations the dissertation takes up will not be the classical Foucauldian themes of prison, medicine, and sexuality, but rather colonialism and its intersection with patriarchy. The classical age of colonialism might be over, but its afterlives are not. These afterlives are a constitutive part of our lifeworld, but one that we more than often disregard or view as natural or coincidental differences between members of the global community.

In an interview, Foucault argues that the age of Western philosophy is over with the end of (colonial) imperialism, and that "if philosophy of the future exists, it must be born outside of Europe or equally born in consequence of meetings and impacts between Europe and non-Europe" (Foucault 2013, 113). How might such a philosophy operate, and how can Foucauldian critique be situated in relation to it? I argue that a key aspect of such philosophical perspective needs to be its attention to intertwined histories of the political, affective, and ethical dimensions of the present and that Foucauldian critique

needs to shift its focus from locality to relationality in order to be a good candidate for this purpose.

The Foucauldian conceptual framework of genealogy will be central to my inquiry. At the same time, I will not assume the neutrality of Foucault's analytical tools but will cultivate a reflective relationship to them in order to problematize their use. For the purposes of my inquiry, such problematization becomes necessary due to the embeddedness of Foucault's thinking in a European colonial condition and the failure of his work to reflect on global power relations, despite being heavily invested in them, and as a result not only obscuring its own position but naturalizing such colonial condition, a failure that has led later scholars to call Foucault a "provincial" thinker (Dussel 1997, 9). But the postcolonial "paradox" of Foucault's work – as Young (1995) describes it – is the fact that despite such ideological provinciality, his thinking has been central to the development of postcolonial thought. I hope to offer an analysis of the conditions of possibility of this paradox by tracing the paradox back to Foucault's philosophical thinking and distinguishing not only between a provincial Foucault and a postcolonial one but also between provincial and postcolonial genealogies. Overall, it can be said that my inquiry will be undertaken in the tradition of Foucauldian social and political philosophy, but from an angle that at the same time rethinks and problematizes some of the limits and boundaries of such framework and sets out to transcend them, partly through an engagement with postcolonial and anti-colonial thinkers such as Edward Said, Ann Laura Stoler, and Frantz Fanon.

This project hopes to contribute to an emerging interdisciplinary dialogue on ways of decolonizing our knowledge by investigating the possibilities of critique and

ethical transformation in the context of the afterlives of colonialism. While the legacies of colonialism still determine the unequal conditions of our world and not only shape the political dynamics between nation-states but also the experience of individuals, philosophy as a discipline too often works in frameworks that are detached from such crucial historical circumstances. Although decolonial thought – a field developed mostly by Latin American and Latinx scholars – is becoming gradually more present in the philosophy scholarship, postcolonial studies still continues to be neglected. My intervention hopes to fill this gap and also to contribute to a critical understanding of the thought of Foucault and mobilize new ways of approaching his thinking that are relevant to the political conditions of our global present.

Chapter Overview

The second and third chapters develop and propose genealogical postcolonial critique as a method for studying the normative ambivalence of colonial modernity, i.e., the entanglement of enlightenment and violence. Genealogical critique, a philosophical method of critique based on studying the history of the present and developed mainly by Nietzsche and Foucault, is an especially apt method for postcolonial critique, but I suggest that it needs to be modified due to its Eurocentric bias. The second chapter offers an in-depth discussion of the features of Foucauldian critique in order to show its relevance for the study of postcolonial political formations. After some introductory remarks about critical philosophy as a broad project, I argue that both Foucauldian critique and postcolonial critique can be usefully assigned to this category, which shows the mutual political and intellectual commitments of both enterprises. I propose that

genealogy as a method of problematization involves a distinct attention to normative ambivalence which makes it a good candidate for the study of postcolonial political formations. Additionally, I turn to Foucault's writings on the Iranian Revolution in order to explore some of the promises and limitations of the Foucauldian lens for investigating anti-colonial and postcolonial political transformations in the non-Western world.

My third chapter discusses the transformative work of postcolonial genealogical critique by highlighting its epistemological and affective work, as well as its practical implications for the pathologies of collective memories. I engage with Nietzsche and Foucault's critique of a scientific understanding of history and discuss the implications of their alternative practical attitude about history. More specifically, I show how this understanding can work against History as a progressive, totalizing, and identity-based narrative, and against occlusions that such a narrative entails in different political contexts, including in colonial and postcolonial contexts. Through engaging with Ann Laura Stoler's work (2016) on colonial aphasia and occlusion, I discuss the implications of the genealogical strategic use of history for the critical problematization of the postcolonial present and the affective and ideological investment of subjects in it, including how it pushes us toward engaging with what I call the postcolonial politics of ourselves.

The fourth chapter further develops the perspective of postcolonial genealogical critique outlined above by exploring the question of ethical transformation through an engagement with Foucault alongside Fanon and Audre Lorde. Inspired by Lisa Tessman's (2005) analysis of moral damage, this chapter thinks about the effects of the afterlives of colonialism in relation to the ethical self and explores the relationship

between critique, ethical self-practices, and internalized oppression. My reading of Foucault's late ethical writings characterizes this work as a critical ethics and demonstrates how his concept of practices of freedom can serve as a valuable framework for contemplating the interplay of ethics and oppression. I engage with Fanon's understanding of decolonization as a constant struggle to elaborate on the need to develop practices of freedom in postcolonial contexts, and finally discuss Audre Lorde's writings for expanding on ways to develop practices of freedom that help marginalized subjects in their quest to overcome internalized oppression.

The last chapter builds upon my work in the previous chapters to discuss the relevance of postcolonial genealogical critique for the study of the gendered afterlives of colonialism. I suggest that genealogical problematization allows feminist analysis to gain a critical distance from reliance on self-consciousness and also provides a perspective from which the postcolonial social world is analyzed with attention to the multiplicity of power relations, including imperialist domination and patriarchal domination as related but distinct phenomena. I apply this perspective to the study of gendered ideologies in post-revolutionary Iran and show how the historical lens of genealogy allows us to situate the development of gendered ideologies in the global context of colonial modernity and recognize the relationality between local political formations and transnational relations of power. This perspective is further elaborated by looking at the Iranian Woman Life Freedom movement as a feminist movement that protests against state-sponsored gendered oppression. I argue that the demands of this movement can be seen as an attempt to decolonize anti-imperialism by problematizing the affinity between the gendered elements of Iranian anti-imperialism and Orientalism.

Overall, all chapters aim to be part of the larger project of reflecting critically on the tradition of Western philosophy and modifying some of its tools for problematizing the global present. In all chapters, I grapple with the limitations of this tradition, sometimes through an immanent critique and sometimes through borrowing insights from radical thinkers who stand on the margins or outside of this tradition such as Fanon, Said, and Lorde. What this means for my project is that this research also lies somewhere in the margins of this tradition, not only because of its transdisciplinary nature that transgresses the borders of philosophy – something that is also true for Foucault's oeuvre – but also because it aims to resemble the spirit of that philosophy of the future anticipated by Foucault: a philosophy not bound exclusively to the intellectual traditions of Western empires but one that is born out of global encounters and reflects on their power dynamics.

CHAPTER II

CRITICAL PHILOSOPHY AND THE AMBIVALENCE OF COLONIAL MODERNITY: FOUCAULDIAN CRITIQUE REVISITED

1. Introduction

The primary objective of this dissertation is to borrow tools from Michel Foucault's thinking that can be productively used for the philosophical analysis of our postcolonial condition and to develop them into an account of postcolonial genealogical critique. Since my project relies heavily on Foucault's oeuvre, this chapter will start with a re-reading of Foucauldian critique. It aims to highlight the advantages of Foucault's understanding of critique for postcolonial studies, justify the choice of Foucault, and also point to some serious limitations in his work. Eventually, through engaging in-depth with the strengths and weaknesses of Foucault's work, I aim to prepare the ground for developing my account of postcolonial genealogical critique.

After some introductory remarks about critical philosophy as a broad project, I show that both Foucauldian critique and postcolonial critique – in their philosophical forms – can be usefully assigned to this category, which shows the mutual political and intellectual commitments of both enterprises. In the next section, I discuss some key aspects of Foucauldian critique, i.e., problematization, normative ambivalence, and its relation to social change. Finally, the last section discusses Foucault's writings on the Iranian Revolution in order to explore the potentials of the Foucauldian lens for investigating the non-Western world. The promises and limitations of Foucault's work

discussed in this chapter guide my attempt to develop new perspectives of problematizing the postcolonial present in the next chapters.

Borrowing the term from Bernard Harcourt, I understand *critical philosophy* to be that type of philosophy that remains committed to the above-mentioned double-goal of critique as being explicative and transformative at the same time. Harcourt suggests that critical philosophy is an activist, praxis-centered philosophy (Harcourt 2020, 8–9). This includes a variety of traditions and schools and subdisciplines, from Frankfurt School critical theory to feminist philosophy, all trying to understand the world in order to make it a better place by problematizing social constellations and existing relations of power, hierarchy, and domination.

That Foucault's work can be classified as critical philosophy is not self-evident. One of my aims in this chapter will be to offer a reading of Foucault that understands his work as critical philosophy. Before I do so, I wish to address the related question of postcolonial critique as a form of critical philosophy in the above sense. Some more clarification is necessary on why I choose to talk about postcolonial critique instead of a decolonial one, and whether the "post" in postcoloniality suggests that our world has overcome colonial dominations and their legacies.

What is meant by postcolonial critique is the critical intellectual enterprise of analyzing, interpreting, and problematizing the postcolonial condition, with the goal of both reaching a scholarly understanding of this condition and preparing the ground for social transformation. Critique can be understood at least in two ways: in the broadest sense, critique can encompass problematizations that happen in the context of non-academic and non-theoretical enterprises, such as art and journalism. While not

questioning the value and effectiveness of non-academic forms of critique, my project will be limiting itself to the scholarly enterprise of critique whose most prominent (and arguably earliest) representation, in its postcolonial form, has been Edward Said's *Orientalism*, an influential work that gave rise the development of the intellectual tradition of the so-called *Postcolonial Theory*.

The double-nature of the goal of postcolonial critique, i.e., the entanglement of interpretation and the hope for transformation can be traced back to the influence of Marx on the anti-colonial and postcolonial tradition and has been explicitly put forward by several postcolonial thinkers, such as Said himself (Said 1979, 5-6 & 23-24). Problematizing our postcolonial condition means problematizing those social conditions that disrupt and danger society as a result of what can be called the afterlives of colonialism, i.e., its legacy and political and cultural consequences. In sum, postcolonial critique sheds light on postcolonial problems and discontents that unsettle society, in order to understand such problems, bring them to public attention and get one step closer to transforming them in their roots and causes.

1.1 Postcoloniality as a Distinct Lens of Analysis

Although some have criticized postcolonial theory for its false assumption about the end of colonialism and imperialism, in-depth engagement with postcolonial scholarship reveals that such an assumption is not being made. What is at stake in postcolonial critique, is rather the study of the afterlives of colonialism in its original meaning of direct-rule domination, recognizing that such afterlives are themselves still "positioned within imperialism in its later sense of the global system of hegemonic

economic power" (Young 2016, 57). So, postcolonial critique aims to study the ways in which the legacy of colonialism still carries on into our present and overdetermines political and cultural relations in our world. In using the term "postcoloniality", I rely on Young's definition of postcoloniality as a term that "puts the emphasis on the economic, material and cultural conditions that determine the global system in which the postcolonial nation is required to operate" (ibid.). The reason I am choosing to use this category despite its seeming ambiguity is not the term itself but the rich tradition that is attached to it, the tradition of *Postcolonial Theory*.

My choice of the term *postcolonial* over *decolonial* stems from multiple reasons. A detailed discussion of the differences between the postcolonial and the decolonial tradition goes beyond the scope of this project. Here, it can be briefly mentioned that my project remains skeptical of attempts to "undo" colonialism or to reduce the European culture to coloniality, as well as to understand colonialism as a homogenous phenomenon unique to European modernity. Furthermore, my project remains skeptical of any attempt to romanticize pre-colonial cultures or to assume an essence to the native subject that needs to be preserved. While all these characteristics often seem dominant in the decolonial tradition, my project will defend, following prominent postcolonial thinkers such as Said and Spivak, the idea that colonialism consists of heterogeneous power relations with ambiguous normative character, and heterogonous afterlives that cannot be reduced to their destructive aspects. I believe that a more nuanced understanding of the afterlives of colonialism is necessary; an approach that does not critique Western culture as a whole but is attuned to its ambiguities, nuances, and contradictions and ultimately explores coloniality not as a totality (as many decolonial scholars such as Anibal Quijano

do[1]), but as a set of particular power relations that shape our present and can be challenged and transformed through critique. Furthermore, the methodological focus on heterogeneity will also shape my understanding of third-world politics and social dynamics, leading to a perspective about native cultures and subjects that is aware of the dangers of essentialism, and aims to prepare the ground for what David Scott describes as "an ethos of agonistic respect for pluralizations of subaltern difference" (Scott 1999, 224).

1.2 Critical Philosophy: Borrowing Tools from Foucault

My focus on Foucault is related to his position as a historian-philosopher of normative ambivalence and the thinker of problematization. His contributions offer a rich basis for thinking about power more broadly, and, as I will argue in my project, postcolonial power relations more specifically. This argument will be explained further in this section.

It must be noted at the outset that understanding Foucauldian critique as critical philosophy in the sense offered above is not necessarily the only reading that one can have of Foucault's work. I am following a specific reading of Foucault that I will be defending in my work, as much as the scope of my project allows. This project is more an attempt to use some of Foucault's tools for my own purposes, but as part of this attempt, I will also necessarily need to justify my own reading of Foucault. As a thinker who emphasized the transformative force of thinking and defined as one of the goals of his philosophical exercise the idea of enabling thought "to think differently" (Foucault 1990,

[1] See for example Quijano (2007).

9), Foucault's work is not a systematic one, which is why the search for "true Foucault" would be a futile project. Instead, what my project pursues is a *strategic* use of Foucault, thinking alongside him and through him about some problems many of which he did not work on in his lifetime.[2] If Foucault was a thinker who was "constantly writing against himself," as Geoffroy de Lagasnerie notes (de Lagasnerie 2015, 131), it only makes sense for a Foucauldian project to challenge Foucault as well, at the same time that it aims to use his thinking and conceptual tools in productive ways.

While most of Foucault's writings practice critique without saying much about the methodology of critique as such, a few pieces such as "What is Critique", "What is Enlightenment", and "The Subject and Power" do offer an in-depth elaboration of his understanding of critique. What is evident from these writings is that Foucault understands critique to be both a theoretical and a practical endeavor where the binary of theory and praxis is, similar to Marxist philosophy, overcome in favor of an understanding of philosophy that changes life through reflection. This unity between theory and praxis as well as the explicative and the transformative power of philosophy becomes especially evident in Foucault's late work where philosophy is understood not just as an activity of the mind but as a way of life. Just before his "late" period, Foucault highlighted the role of resistance in critique by defining critique as:

> The movement by which the subject gives himself the right to question truth on its effects of power and question power on its discourses of truth. […] Critique will

[2] The importance of self-transformation is especially emphasized in one of Foucault's interviews, where he states: "I am not interested in the academic status of what I am doing because my problem is my own transformation. That's the reason also why, when people say, "Well, you thought this a few years ago and now you say something else," my answer is, [Laughter] "Well, do you think I have worked like that all those years to say the same thing and not to be changed?" This transformation of one's self by one's own knowledge is, I think, something rather close to the aesthetic experience. Why should a painter work if he is not transformed by his own painting?" (Foucault 2013, 14).

> be the art of *voluntary insubordination*, that of reflected intractability. Critique would essentially ensure the desubjugation of the subject in the context of what we could call, in a word, the politics of truth. (Foucault 1997, 47, my emphasis)

This approach makes Foucauldian critique an especially good candidate for postcolonial thought since it enables postcolonial critique to be committed to the double-goal of critical philosophy and not just explain and interpret power relations but also prepare the destabilization and transformation of the conditions of their existence, and as Foucault emphasizes in the above quote, ensure the desubjugation of subjects.

Foucault's notion of critique is shaped and inspired by that of Kant in important ways. Foucault's work, similar to Kant's, emphasizes the relation of critique not only to freedom, but also to one's reflective engagement with contemporary reality. In contrast to Kant, however, Foucault's critical philosophy does not investigate universal conditions of possibility of knowledge, but historically contingent ones. In other words, the analysis of truth in Foucault's work is always the analysis of truth in a socially and historically situated context. By taking such a historical perspective, critique is equipped to leave universalism behind, and to understand events and structures in their singularities. Thus, Foucauldian critique is technically an enterprise that is not merely philosophical, but rather, as he puts it, "historical-philosophical" (Foucault 1997, 58), in that it works with not merely abstract concepts and arguments but also historical data, which is one reason for the productivity of his tools across various humanistic disciplines. Furthermore, this feature makes this work a good candidate for postcolonial studies, given that it enables us to study phenomena from different cultural and historical contexts in their singularity, without imposing supposedly universal concepts and norms upon them (Foucault 2008, 3).

Although critique is described as a "philosophical ethos" that connects us to the Enlightenment and the idea of the permanent critique of the present, for Foucault, this does not imply loyalty to the values of the Enlightenment period, but simply the acquisition of a critical attitude that Enlightenment thinkers such as Kant advocated for (Foucault 1984b, 42–43). Foucault calls the common view that one has to be "for" or "against" Enlightenment "the blackmail of Enlightenment", which needs to be left behind. Instead, Foucault advocated for historical inquiries that "proceed with the analysis of ourselves as beings who are historically determined, to a certain extent, by the Enlightenment" (42). If we follow Scott's postcolonial argument that people outside Europe were "conscripts—not volunteers—of modernity", meaning that Enlightenment for them was not a choice they could exercise but rather "a condition of choice" (Scott 2004, 19), we can conclude that as a result of colonialism and globalization, we all are determined by Enlightenment, albeit in very different ways, and not necessarily in a positive sense.[3]

However, through what Nikita Dhawan, following Spivak, calls an "affirmative sabotage of the master's tools", the postcolonial scholar can use the intellectual tools inherited from the European tradition against some of the same European ideas and beliefs, criticizing the colonial elements while preserving the liberatory ones (Dhawan 2014, 71). If the legacy of colonial enlightenment has this ambivalent character, it must be perceived not as a flaw to be overcome, as an anti-modern perspective might suggest,

[3] It might be appropriate to note here that although it is commonly hold that European Enlightenment is a purely Western phenomenon, many scholars across disciplines have questioned this belief, and have argued that the Enlightenment itself was based on borrowings from other cultures and knowledge transitioned from around the globe, and not purely a "Western" phenomenon. For an example of such approach see Hall (1996).

but can become the subject of the postcolonial scholars' creative and active work and needs to be recognized as what Scott calls, in language that sounds very similar to Foucault's, a "permanent legacy that has set the conditions in which we make of ourselves what we make and which therefore demands constant renegotiation and readjustment" (Scott 2004, 21).

Investing in the task of such negotiation in relation to Foucault's work would not be worth the effort if one believes that the tools offered in his work are not relevant for studying contexts beyond Europe because of their Eurocentric character. According to this objection, the fact that Foucault's philosophical-historical inquiries are focused on Europe makes his thought a questionable candidate for reflecting on social political relations beyond Europe. This objection flags an important matter. In order to confront this challenge, it is useful to distinguish between concepts and methods in genealogical inquiry. Koopman and Matza (2013, 824) warn against a straightforward application of Foucault's work beyond the original context of the historical inquiries, and argue that whereas methods are "constraints, limits, and heuristics that facilitate inquiry", concepts are "formulations emerging out of or produced by inquiry". In other words, concepts are derived from the study of a particular context, which in Foucault's case is a European context, and cannot be applied to other contexts without scrutiny, while methods are "much more portable in their original form' (825). For this reason, I focus in my discussion of genealogy on the method of genealogy and not the deployed concepts (such as biopolitics, discipline, or governmentality). However, even the method of genealogy contains a limitation that needs to be overcome in its deployment in postcolonial inquiries. As Erlenbusch-Anderson and Nigh (2020) argue through bringing Foucault into

dialogue with the Colombian philosopher Santiago Castro-Gómez, Foucault's genealogical method fails to consider how modernity and coloniality are connected to each other. I will suggest a solution to this problem in my next chapter by advocating for a relational methodology that shifts the lens of critique from the exclusive focus on a local context to the broader relations that shape that context, including translational and colonial relations.

2. Genealogy and the Task of Critique

In this section, I discuss important aspects of Foucauldian critique in order to evaluate their suitability for postcolonial analyses. First, I discuss the general features of genealogical critique and its mode of problematization, before examining the role of normativity in genealogical critique. I show that genealogical critique departs from normative foundationalism and is instead committed to studying what can be called normative *ambivalence*, a distinct notion of normativity that proves especially productive for postcolonial studies. Last but not least, I discuss the relation between genealogical critique and social change, showing that genealogical problematizations both draw from social dynamics and transformations and also give rise to them.

2.1 Genealogy as Problematization

In my reading of Foucault, I will be following Foucault's own characterization of his work as one concerned with *problematization*[4], understanding problematization as a

[4] In an interview titled "The Concern for Truth" (Foucault 2013b), Foucault describes problematization as a common theme of his books: "The notion common to all the work that I have done since *History of Madness* is that of problematization, though it must be said that I never isolated this notion sufficiently… In *History of Madness* the question was how and why, at a given moment, madness was problematized through a certain institutional practice and a certain apparatus of knowledge. Similarly, in *Discipline and Punish* I was trying to analyze the changes in the problematization of the relations between crime and

concept that functions as "a kind of master key for explicating what Foucault used archaeology-plus-genealogy to do" (Koopman 2013, 45).

In *History of Madness*, Foucault explores the problematization of madness through modern institutions and scientific disciplines, moving in later works to explore the problematization of discipline and sexuality. These works are inquiries of problematization in a double sense. Firstly, they explore and study the ways that certain phenomena such as madness and sexuality are rendered problematic in a specific historical period, as a result of which they become the subject of scientific studies and political and legal scrutinization. Secondly, these intellectual inquiries themselves provide a new sense of problematization that aims to unmask the social conditions of our understanding of such phenomena and expose their contingency. As Colin Koopman (2013, 98) puts it, problematization was for Foucault "both an act of critical inquiry (expressed in the verb form as 'to problematize') and a nominal object of inquiry (expressed in the noun form as 'a problematization')."

Problematization studies the conditions of possibility of our present through showing that they are contingent results of specific historical events and practices, despite the fact that more often these features are seen as necessary conditions of social life. Bringing an example that is less controversial in our times than it used to be, one can think about the gender binary either as a necessary condition of culture or rather, following social constructionism, argue that the gender binary itself is a dispositive whose conditions of possibility are a series of contingent discourses and practices such as modern medicine. If these conditions of possibility are presented as contingent realities

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punishment through penal practices and penitentiary institutions in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries."

that the philosopher can question, critique, and problematize, new possibilities for thinking, imagination, and action are opened, in other words, new forms of freedom are made possible.

Archaeology and genealogy are both methods of problematization. To be more precise, they are methods for analyzing and problematizing cultural formations such as language, systems of knowledge, and social institutions. They differ in their emphasis on discontinuity (in archaeology) and processes of social change (genealogy). Additionally, genealogy's attention to social change introduces a way of thinking about power as a productive source of social formation. Counter to the common understanding of genealogy as a genesis narrative that goes back to a single origin, Foucauldian genealogy – borrowing from Nietzsche – narrates the history of multiplicity and fragmentation that cannot be traced back to a single origin. In Foucault's words,

> …As opposed to a genesis oriented towards the unity of some principal cause burdened with multiple descendants, what is proposed instead is a genealogy, that is, something that attempts to restore the conditions for the appearance of a singularity born out of multiple determining elements of which it is not the product, but rather the effect. A process of making it intelligible but with the clear understanding that this does not function according to any principle of closure. (Foucault 1997, 64)

While Foucault's work until the mid-1970s primarily employed archaeology as method, the introduction of genealogy into his work in *Discipline and Punish* provides his philosophical analyses with a "wider scope." (Davidson 1988, 224). According to Arnold Davidson, Foucault never abandoned the archaeological lens but only used it in conjunction with genealogy, showing that these two methods of analysis are not contradictory but complementary (ibid., 227). Generally, it can be said that to different

degrees, all Foucault's works have been concerned with a historical study of knowledge and power by using the lenses of archaeology and genealogy.

Discipline and Punish was the first major publication in Foucault's genealogical period and is a compelling illustration of genealogy as a problematizing practice. Foucault's analysis of the birth of modern prison problematizes the dominant narrative of social progress about prison reforms and their transformation of physical violence and control into discipline. In doing so, Foucault unmasks the power of discipline in controlling and subordinating individuals, a power that is not only characteristic of the prison system but also other institutions like schools and hospitals. Methodologically, this book clearly expresses the important elements of genealogical critique. Firstly, as Foucault explains himself, it moves away from a focus on historical rupture for the sake of "identifying the transformation that made this hurried transition possible" (Foucault 2000, 43). Secondly, the book assumes a direct orientation of both addressing the present and destabilizing it. As Foucault himself says, *Discipline and Punish* is oriented at transforming the penal system and leading to social change: "What I wanted to write was a history book that would make the present situation comprehensible and, possibly, lead to action. If you like, I tried to write a 'treatise of intelligibility' about the penitentiary situation, I wanted to make it intelligible and, therefore, criticizable" (Foucault 2013a).

Additionally, there is a third aspect that *Discipline and Punish* introduces in Foucault's work: power. Although power played a quiet role in the archaeological examinations, it is only with *Discipline and Punish* that Foucault examined the systematic relation between power and knowledge. He argues that "power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative

constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations" (Foucault 1995, 27). Power becomes a central element in Foucault's work not only as an object of scholarly examination but as a social reality that needs to be challenged and problematized. We will see later that this aspect of Foucault's work makes his lens especially useful for postcolonial inquiries, that is, for the analysis of postcolonial power relations and forms of knowledge.

What distinguishes Foucault's notion of power from its competitors is Foucault's understanding of power as diffuse, fragmented, and manifested as a *relation*. In other words, power as such does not exist in society, but what we find are always power relations that are not centralized in one location but are rather heterogeneous and multiplex. This implies that we shift our attention from the question "what is power?" to "how is power exercised?", in order to be able to grasp power relations "in the diversity of their logical sequence, their abilities, and their interrelationships." (Foucault 2014, 219).

Furthermore, understanding power as heterogeneous and multiplex also implies that power does not necessarily refer to relations of violence or domination. Although some relations of power can include the use of violence, proceeding without obtaining consent, and leading to domination, these features are not the nature of power and its necessary components, but contingent instruments and effects. In a general sense, what defines a relationship of power is that "it is a mode of action which does not act directly and immediately on others", but "acts upon their actions: an action upon an action, on existing actions or on those which may arise in the present or the future" (Ibid., 220). So, power relations consist of guiding the other's conduct, which assumes that the other has a

certain freedom. As I will discuss in the next section, Foucault's critique of power is committed to a certain normative ambivalence, but it is important to keep in mind that the object of critique is relations of power and not cases of extreme domination such as slavery that quite unambivalently nullify the freedom of human beings.

Some scholars have regarded the Foucauldian reduction of politics to the micro-politics of particular power relations as a major weakness for political theory. Walzer maintains that the larger social system Foucault talks about is not a political system at all since he fails to locate a center or constitution or a sovereign state in it (Walzer 1988, 59). Foucault's account definitely is not an analysis of the political system through focusing on the state and its institutions, as traditional accounts of political theory do, but this is precisely its strength because it opens the window for the analysis of a new form of politics, one that productively goes beyond classically Marxist and liberal frameworks through enabling us to examine what Nancy Fraser calls "the politics of everyday life" (Fraser 1985). Foucault emphasizes throughout his work that his theory does not dismiss economic and legal accounts of power, but is rather based on the need to expand these models in order to be able to study the relations between power and the subject (2014, 209).

2.2 The Normativity of Critique

Foucault's account of genealogy and problematization confronts us with pressing questions: What are the criteria on the basis of which we problematize? What counts as a problem and what does not? These questions have been at the center of debates about genealogy and can by no means be considered settled today. In the following, I will discuss some of the main arguments of these debates not because I agree with their

criticism of Foucault but because they help us situate Foucault's distinct notion of normativity in the context of contemporary social political philosophy and the existing accounts of normativity. Then I move towards proposing an alternative reading of Foucauldian normativity in terms of what I call "normative ambivalence." As I will show in the next sections of the paper, Foucault's understanding of normative ambivalence can offer a useful framework for analyzing political ambivalences, especially in postcolonial contexts.

The most influential critiques of Foucault concerning the status of normativity in his oeuvre come from the side of critical theorists. Jürgen Habermas famously described the normativity of Foucault's genealogy as "crypto-normativity" and argued that Foucault's work lacks any normative justification about why resistance to power might be good or necessary (Habermas 1986). From this, Habermas concludes that Foucault's genealogy falls into relativism, ceases to be a form of critique, and ends up being merely a "tactic" (Ibid., 6). A similar but more moderate criticism is expressed by Nancy Fraser, who argues that Foucault's work suffers from a certain normative "one-dimensionality" and "confusion" due to the lack of distinction between different forms of power and between legitimate forms from illegitimate ones (Fraser 1985). Charles Taylor's critique of Foucault follows similar lines, arguing that Foucault's relativism results in a theory of incommensurability where any notion of social progress loses its meaning (Taylor 1986, 96). According to Taylor, although Foucault offers original thoughts about the "losses" of modernity, these thoughts suffer from an inability to establish a distinction between loss and gain. These and other critical theorists approach Foucault with the assumption that critique should necessarily offer normative criteria for the distinction between legitimate

and illegitimate political formations and that it should allow us to reject that which is illegitimate (in any number of forms such as being oppressive, dominating, exclusionary, or more).

At the center of a second generation of scholars considering these questions, Amy Allen maintains that Foucault is ultimately a Kantian thinker whose notion of critique both presupposes autonomy and aims towards it (Allen 2008, 64). Koopman has rightly pointed out a problem in this Kantian reading of Foucault, namely, the mistake of understanding Foucauldian freedom as a state or possessed capacity, despite Foucault's clear insistence that freedom needs to be understood as a *practice (*Koopman 2013, 206*)*. Allen's reading of Foucault further advocates for using his work in conjunction with critical theory and argues that Foucault's strategic notion of intersubjectivity needs to be supplemented with a Habermasian perspective about the possibility of non-strategic relationships that enable collective resistance and social transformation in the first place (Allen 2008, 64). Koopman's reading of Foucault agrees with Allen in arguing that Foucauldian scholarship should draw from neighboring intellectual traditions. According to Koopman, genealogy is a successful method of critique in the "explanatory-diagnostic" aspect of critique, but less in its "anticipatory-utopian" aspect (Koopman 2013, 218). Koopman argues that this is not that much a weakness of genealogy as it is a characterization of its limited task, thus Fraser's critique of normative ambivalence does not apply in the first place because Foucault's work is not normatively ambitious, although it is "normatively loaded" (88). According to this view, genealogy does not normatively evaluate the present but does *clarify* and *intensify* the dangers of the present.

Koopman's reading of Foucault proposes to understand Foucault's normative commitment not as a robust and substantive one but in terms of "procedural normative orientations" (45). The advantage of this reading is that it allows us to reconcile normativity with a non-teleological account of history and a non-dogmatic understanding of social norms and emancipatory values.[5] A procedural notion of normativity enables us to situate normativity in the transformations and struggles of history and recognize the role of various social actors and social dynamics in shaping our understanding of normativity. But most importantly, for my purposes, is the fact that a proceduralist view of normativity allows us to have an understanding of normativity that is reconcilable with cultural difference and value-pluralism. Normative proceduralism goes beyond the foundationalist defense of fixed (European) values and opens the door to understanding genealogy as a form of critique that is in a relation of immanence to existing social norms. In other words, genealogy as immanent critique assumes that social norms are historically situated, socially constructed, and derive their meaning not from a set of ahistorical or natural values but from their social context, that is, the problems, struggles and aspirations of social groups and actors who are situated in diverse cultures and geographies.

[5] Procedural accounts of normativity hold that norms and values are to be understood in relation to historically situated problems. As Seyla Benhabib notes, "every new stage of learning brings with it new problems and a new awareness of problems which in turn require new solutions" (Benhabib 1986, 271). A procedural account of normativity is thus opposed to foundationalism and its assumption about the ahistorical (or in some accounts, transhistorical) nature of norms. It must be noted that some forms of proceduralism, especially those of the Hegelian kind, remain bound to a teleological view of history, i.e., the idea that there is one final social formation that all societies, after overcoming all their problems and reaching the final stage of development, will arrive at. However, due to its critique of foundationalism, proceduralism also challenges conceptions of human nature and the idea of a universal form of human flourishing, thus creating the theoretical possibility of a pluralistic perspective about normativity and historical development.

2.2.1 Normative Ambivalence

What is the unique normative labor of genealogical critique? Scholars have described this labor as "problematization" (Koopman 2013), "possiblising critique" (Lorenzini 2020), "engaged critique" (Erlenbusch-Anderson 2018), "hyperbolical critique" (Saar 2007), or as an exposition of "the impurity of practical reason" (Allen 2008). Despite the fruitfulness of all these descriptions, what remains underemphasized in the multiple debates on Foucault and normativity over the past few decades is his commitment to normative *ambivalence*. I propose that it is only through attention to normative ambivalence that we can appreciate the normative labor of genealogical critique instead of being confused by its supposed normative "confusion." The concept of normative ambivalence allows us to move beyond the prevalent normative binarism of political thought, and to welcome what Colin Koopman has called "critique beyond judgment" (Koopman 2019). Or, using Foucault's own (often-misunderstood) words about the Enlightenment, it allows us to move beyond the blackmail of Enlightenment, i.e., the idea that "one has to be 'for' or 'against' the Enlightenment", a move that "even means precisely that one has to refuse everything that might present itself in the form of a simplistic and authoritarian alternative: you either accept the Enlightenment […]; or else you criticize the Enlightenment and then try to escape from its principles of rationality" (Foucault 1984b, 44). Foucauldian critique hopes to move beyond this authoritarian alternative between acceptance and dismissal. In the following, I argue that Foucault's thought moves beyond this "blackmail" only through employing normative ambivalence.

The problem with many readings of Foucault, especially coming from the tradition of critical theory, is their failure to read Foucault in his own terms and to

understand the uniqueness of the normative labor of genealogical critique. Foucault's genealogical critique exposes and unveils the conditions of possibility of our present *beyond* the binary of dismissing or celebrating the present. In other words, Foucauldian genealogical critique is not vindicatory, i.e., it does defend the object of its critique, for example, discipline.[6] But nor does it merely offer a "gesture of rejection" (Foucault 1984, 45). This is not to deny that there are phenomena that deserve vindication or dismissal, but the point is that genealogical critique is not a mode of critique suitable for such phenomena. Genealogical critique is, rather, needed when we are called to the different and more complex task of unveiling normative ambivalence. Foucault describes this as a philosophical attitude located at the "frontiers" and "beyond the outside-inside alternative" which is at the same time a historical investigation "into the events that have led us to constitute ourselves and to recognize ourselves as subjects of what we are doing, thinking, saying" (45).

As the above quote indicates, genealogical critique is first and foremost a form of critique suitable for analyzing the subject and the ambivalence of subjectivation. The French term *assujettissement*, often translated as "subjectivation," points to the ambiguity of being subjected to power: power can at the same time form a subject and regulate it, empower, and subordinate it simultaneously. This ambivalence is fundamental for modern subjectivation and as a consequence for genealogy as a form of critique that studies the relation between subject and power. Judith Butler, emphasizing the paradox of subjectivation in their reading of Foucault, states that "the subject is itself a site of this

[6] An advocate of vindicatory genealogy has been Bernard Williams (2010) whose work *Truth and Truthfulness* aims to vindicate the value of truth. For a critique of Williams' vindicatory genealogy, see Koopman (2013, p.70-73).

ambivalence in which the subject emerges both as the effect of a prior power and as the condition of possibility for a radically conditioned form of agency. A theory of the subject should take into account the full ambivalence of the conditions of its operation" (Butler 1997, 15).

If the relationship between the subject and power is fundamentally ambivalent, it follows that power cannot simply be reduced to its harmful effects, that power, in so far that it affects us, is fundamentally ambivalent as well. Although the role of ambivalence in Foucault's theory has often been criticized as a sign of the unproductivity of his work in the context of social-political philosophy, it seems to me that it is rather the fact that his work confronts us with a challenge, with an invitation to think beyond binaries, that apparently many scholars found overwhelming. If the ambivalence of power poses difficult challenges for political thought, that is not the shortcoming of Foucault's thought, but rather the challenge that our social reality has confronted us with. As Koopman puts it, "it is not Foucault who is ambivalent—it is the problematic of our modernity itself that is torn between two seemingly irreconcilable tendencies" (Koopman 2013, 170).

Discipline is without a doubt one of the darker sides of Enlightenment for Foucault. *Discipline and Punish* discusses how in the punitive system of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, punishments gradually became less visibly violent and intense, but "at the cost of greater intervention" (1995, 75), interventions that took the form of unprecedented surveillance, control and ultimately "a closer penal mapping of the social body" (78). Foucault shows how the advocates of this change presented it as a change motivated by a new respect for humanity, and how the real driving force behind the

change was to control the population more efficiently and to "increase both the docility and the utility of all the elements of the system" (218).

If somebody was trying to understand Foucault's viewpoint about the Enlightenment based only on *Discipline and Punish*, they might gain the impression that Foucault is an anti-Enlightenment thinker who is criticizing and attacking developments and changes of this period. But considering his oeuvre as a whole, it becomes obvious that this reading is too hasty. The essay "What Is Enlightenment?" specifically is a clear consideration of the *ambivalent* nature of Enlightenment as a project. Despite the dark sides of the Enlightenment, what Foucault finds worth preserving and celebrating, what he thinks might connect us with the Enlightenment, is the philosophical ethos of critique, exemplified in Kant's work. This philosophical ethos is the "mode of reflective relation to the present", where for the first time, the present is interrogated philosophically and man's relation to the present is problematized (Foucault 1984b, 42–44).

Here Foucault clearly distances himself from the common perspective that one needs to be "for" or "against" the Enlightenment (1984, 42). Despite rooting his own philosophical notion of critique in Kant's "critical interrogation on the present and on ourselves", Foucault questions the value of "faith" in the Enlightenment, reminding the reader of the relation between the growth of capabilities and the intensification of power relations and the emergence of the procedures of normalization during the Enlightenment period (48). So, while in Foucault's work the dark side of modernity is problematized, i.e., its dangers and harms, the analysis is also always attuned to the existing ambivalence at the heart of modern power relations, and modernity itself.

Another instance of normative ambivalence in Foucault's work is his analysis of rights. Ben Golder has described Foucault's analysis of the complexity of rights as a "critical affirmation" (Golder 2011). Given the various occasions where Foucault has discussed the positive function of rights – for example, in the context of the right to asylum – it is clear that Foucault cannot be regarded as an anarchist opponent to the discourse of rights as such. At the same time, a lot of Foucault's work criticizes rights, their role in modern politics, and their disciplinary effects on subjects. If Duncan Ivison is right that according to Foucault, "rights are often implicated in various relations of power as much as they are a means of criticizing them" (Ivison 2008, 180), then the analysis of rights needs to acknowledge the dual character of rights, despite the fact that it might open more questions than it answers. Foucauldian rights are, according to Golder "ambivalent artifacts" that "are used in the service of (and are the effects and incidents of) political struggles, struggles which can strategically go beyond and challenge existing liberal institutions, but they simultaneously constrain and determine the very political subjects who mobilize them" (297). Thus, the enterprise of critique needs to be aware of this ambivalence and capture it in its analyses, in order to not fall into a one-sided celebration or dismissal that might fail to grasp the complexities of social power relations.

In these and other instances of Foucault's oeuvre, Foucauldian genealogical critique does not dismiss its object (what Hegelians would call "absolute negation") but makes an intervention in pointing out the masked normative ambivalence in its object, thereby expressing the need for a transformation that preserves some aspects of the

present but overcomes others (or Hegelian "determinate negation").[7] In an interview, Foucault emphasizes the normative ambivalence of the subject of his analysis:

> I would like to do the genealogy of problems, of problématiques. My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad. if everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do. (Foucault 1984a, 343)

Not unlike the Nietzschean idea of going "beyond good and evil" (Nietzsche [1886] 1989), critique here is presented as the project of exploring the phenomena considering their problems, deficiencies, and dangers without offering judgment about them. Without denying the value of judgment in philosophical inquiry, the argument here is simply that genealogical critique has a humbler task, a task that is limited but also nevertheless significant.

The political stakes of turning to the concept of normative ambivalence in the context of social-political philosophy might seem worrisome or even reactionary to the mind that associates political action with clarity, and a Manichean separation between good and evil. The point of turning to the concept of ambivalence though is precisely the idea that many normative questions and many political events and actions transcend the binary framework of good and evil and can only be understood through attunement to their normative ambivalence. The history of modern Western thought includes many thinkers who understood modernity and the political and cultural events resulting from it as ambivalent phenomena that present dangers and promises at the same time (Smart 1998). Karl Marx's (1978) analysis of capitalist modernity criticizes the alienation and exploitation resulting from the advance of capitalism but also sees in the same social and

[7] For a discussion about normative ambivalence and dialectics, see Zambrana (2015).

economic structure the possibility for social progress and a better form of life. However, when we turn to the politics of ambivalence, and more precisely, the analysis of ambivalent power relations, it is hard to find a detailed account of such phenomena in the work of political theorists and philosophers before Foucault. Most theorists have focused on the less ambivalent aspects of power and have not had much to say about the ambivalence of power as such.

Different theoretical and philosophical accounts of the nature of power differ based on at least two criteria. Some thinkers understand power as a capacity of actors, and some see power as a structural or even ontological phenomenon that characterizes the social scene more broadly. The first account is regarded as the more traditional view of power and was put forth by Hobbes and adopted by many later liberal thinkers. On the other hand, philosophers such as Spinoza and Marx have challenged such accounts and have shown that the nature of power is more complex. While for Spinoza, power was an ontological feature of existence, and for Marx, a structural condition of our modern social world, later thinkers such as Foucault and Butler have continued this line of thought and understand power as a structural and fundamental phenomenon that cannot be reduced to individuals (Saar 2007; Jaeggi and Celikates 2017). As mentioned before, for Foucault power is not simply a relation between individuals or collectives, but it is "a way in which certain actions modify others" (Foucault 2014). Furthermore, power is not a possession of individuals, but as Foucault argues, it "exists only when it is put into action, even if, of course, it is integrated into a disparate field of possibilities brought to bear upon permanent structures" (Foucault 2014). So, in so far that power goes beyond relations between individuals and is a dynamic and mobile relation that might be

crystallized into social structures, its function and effects are too amorphous to be reduced to either its potential harms or its potential promises.

Another important question for the political theory of power concerns one's understanding of the repressive or productive qualities of power. While the more traditional perspective about power understands power as repressive, other accounts of power have challenged this assumption and have shown the productive or empowering side of power so far that power can enable agents to pursue certain actions. Foucault offers an extensive account of the productivity of power in *The History of Sexuality Vol. I*, in which the repressive hypothesis is rejected, i.e., the idea that power has (merely) repressed our sexuality. Foucault's work elaborates on the productive effects of power regarding our sexuality, for example, the way it produces new forms of desire (Foucault 1978, 23). In so far that it is easier to normatively judge and condemn repressive forms of power, for example, because they prevent some natural desire or right from being realized and fulfilled, one can say that the thesis of the productivity of power makes a normative judgment about power more difficult. However, if we agree with Foucault's analysis, we might want to conclude that this perspective also offers a more precise lens for describing social reality. For example, Foucault's genealogical inquiry in *The History of Sexuality Vol. I* suggests that homosexuality as a category is not based on a natural homosexual desire but that it rather was a product of modern regimes of power/knowledge and institutions of medicine and psychiatry that invented the category as a means of social control (43). But despite its link to social control, this process also has created new possibilities for resistance, which often included the usage of the same vocabulary based on which homosexuality was pathologized (101), possibilities that later

led to the emergence of queer identity politics and the fight for equal rights. This brings us back to the earlier discussed link between the empowering and subjugating elements of modernity, and that in modern relations of power, discipline and enlightenment, and control and new possibilities for freedom can go hand in hand.

Another reason for the normative ambivalence of power in Foucault's framework can be found in his understanding of the relationship between power and violence. Foucault suggests that relations of power do not exclude the use of violence; in fact, the exercise of power often comes hand-in-hand with violence (Foucault 2014, 220). Since violence is not inherent to power and does not constitute its nature, one can distinguish between the two, but this does not change the fact power is sometimes violent and sometimes not, adding to its ambivalent nature. However, in a Foucauldian framework, the ambivalence of political relations ends when we arrive at a state of domination. According to Foucault, states of domination occur when "an individual or social group succeeds in blocking a field of power relations", "preventing any reversibility of movement by economic, political, or military means" in a way that relations of power become immobile and "frozen" and to the point where "practices of freedom do not exist or exist only unilaterally or are extremely constrained and limited" (Foucault 1998). Foucault admits that his work does not always sufficiently differentiate between power and domination, but the basic distinction offered is nonetheless useful for distinguishing between power relations where resistance is possible and ones that are so intensified and violent that subjects do not have possibilities for counter-action. As an example of the latter, one can think of the institution of slavery and its form of exercise of power over

subjects, as well as totalitarian regimes where the possibility of resistance becomes extremely limited and where power relations are not so ambivalent.

Overall, the Foucauldian perspective suggests that apart from relations of domination, power relations are fundamentally ambivalent and can be restrictive or oppressive, and productive or empowering at the same time. In order for political analysis to remain faithful to the multifaceted nature of our social reality, it needs to take into account this role of the ambivalence of power in modern politics and acknowledge the complexity of ambivalent political dynamics that often cannot be reduced to one single normative category.

Acknowledging the ambivalence of the political and undertaking the critical labor of exploring and analyzing this ambivalence, however, should not be reduced to skepticism. While skepticism leaves the terrain of critical inquiry by giving up the hope to understand and to be able to make any distinction between good and bad, a critical analysis of ambivalence confronts and explores the complexity of the social reality and its history while acknowledging the co-existence of positive and negative elements in them. As Rocío Zambrana argues, a practical takeaway from the politics of ambivalence is *vigilance,* a needed stance that is necessary in order to ensure that the complicity of ambivalent agency remains subversive (2017, 40). Furthermore, as Butler notes, a critical paralysis that remains immobile at the level of reflection will be insufficient for political thought. Rather, the point of critical reflection on ambivalence is to "maintain a double-edge" and to "keep the tension alive between maintaining a critical perspective and making a politically legible claim" (Butler 2004, 108). In other words, critical reflection

on political ambivalence is not a replacement for the labor of political involvement and intellectual engagement with the social reality but is meant to enrich it.

2.2.2 The Normative Ambivalence of Postcolonial Subjectivation

How can the Foucauldian perspective about normative ambivalence enrich the analysis of postcolonialism? I suggest approaching postcolonial critique as an inquiry into postcolonial forms of *assujettissement* and subjectivation, i.e., the entanglement of empowerment and government, violence and growth, an inquiry that is characterized by a certain normative ambivalence. A number of crucial contributions to postcolonial scholarship of the last few decades have studied the afterlives of colonialism by focusing on the normative ambivalence of such afterlives – the coextensive positive and negative effects of European colonialism – and how progress and regress, oppression and liberation, and violence and growth have too often accompanied each other in (post)colonial histories. I turn to these below. In doing so, I underscore as an important point of such scholarship that reducing the effects of colonialism to nothing but its tragedies, a quite common perspective, is not quite truthful to historical realities. However, most of the scholarship that is more attuned to the ambivalence of these political formations is written from a historical and archival point of view, and it seems that there is still some lacuna that needs to be filled regarding the theorization of postcolonial ambivalence from a philosophical perspective. It is for this reason that I propose using the idea of normative ambivalence for enriching postcolonial thought and developing an account of postcolonial critique that can be attuned to such ambivalence.

Colonial and postcolonial histories confront us with complex political situations where violent power relations have not only led to harm and destruction but oftentimes –

and surprisingly – also to growth at the same time. Spivak points to the paradoxical nature of this normative ambivalence when describing the effects of colonial modernity of India as "an enablement that comes through violation":

> I am not against the British. I was against bad colonial policy. I am talking about the enablement: we got railways, a regular currency, schools, hospitals, a system of education, a civil service, an army, and of course a hegemonic language. […] So that is an enablement. It is an enablement that comes through violation. (Shaikh 2007, 176)

This is not to deny the vision that ideally, third-world countries should have been able to pursue progress without experiencing colonial violence and that that violence was not necessary and needs to be condemned. Spivak suggests that one can think about ways to "undo the violation, or rather how to sustain the enablement with a minimum of violation" (Shaikh 2007, 176). However, the point of employing the category of normative ambivalence in the context of postcolonial histories is developing an analytical framework that allows us to see and investigate historical facts in their complex and seemingly paradoxical character. Such a framework needs to go beyond one-sided moralism and capture the normative ambivalence of the social scene, although it will necessarily not leave normativity behind.

The turn to normative ambivalence, furthermore, is necessary for understanding the social dynamics of postcolonial societies, many of which have gone through decolonial movements and revolutions but whose politics are far from innocent. Here I am thinking not only of the heightened oppression of women and minorities in many of these countries but also of the birth of sometimes violent forms of ethnocentrism and nationalism. Scott's scholarship has emphasized the role of this different geopolitical position of postcolonial critique, arguing that our time requires turning to concerns that

are defined “not so much by the politics of epistemology as by a renewal of the theoretical question of the political.” According to Scott, “This would effectively shift the focus away from postcoloniality’s concern with the politics of colonialist representations and in the direction of the problem of rethinking the present in terms of new conceptualizations of postcolonial politics” (Scott 1999, 224). Genealogical critique, I argue, is a good candidate for serving a new conceptualization of postcolonial politics precisely due to the fact that it captures not only the dynamics of politics of representation but also the normative ambivalence that is a crucial but often ignored feature of postcolonial politics.

Kevin Olson’s recent work (2024) offers an enlightening account of this political ambivalence by studying the genealogy of subaltern silence and looking at the different modern techniques that replaced the brutal force of the colonialism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Olson’s work shows how some of these techniques were presented as progressive developments while at the same time subordinating people through silence, sometimes involving literal silence and sometimes silencing people through other means such as devaluation, misrepresentation, and delegitimation. Although Olson does not investigate the philosophical and normative dimensions of ambivalence as such, the genealogical method of his inquiry into different forms of subordination allows him to shed light on the ambivalence of postcolonial political formations and the entanglement of freedom and subordination. This becomes especially evident in the example of the Haitian revolution.

Olson’s account explores the political ambivalence of the Haitian revolution by looking at how the liberation brought about by this revolution implied subordination for

some Haitians because of how it erased other alternative visions of autonomy and freedom (197). According to Olson's account, the freedom imagined by rural Haitians was different than the one realized on the scale of national independence. Specifically, the idea of three free days advocated for in early slave rebellions in Haiti prior to the revolution constituted an alternative vision of freedom but it was silenced and displaced later by the Euro-inflicted project of Haitian independence (196). This account suggests that "even a well-intentioned, progressive movement can create forms of subordination" (200). I will discuss in a later section how a similar dynamic was at place in the 1979 Iranian revolution, and how Foucault's understanding of the relationship between liberation and freedom allows us to reconceptualize the ambivalence of these forms of decolonial resistance.

With its attention to normative ambivalence, genealogical critique enables us to capture the diffuse nature of postcolonial power relations and their productivity in terms of shaping institutions, cultural formations, and subjectivities. The relation between power and subjectivity is, according to Foucault, not that of repression but of productive formation. As we saw before, the term *assujettissement* is an attempt to capture the ambivalent nature of such formation, one that entails both positive and negative elements, and empowers and subjugates at the same time. Scott suggests that modern power works in the colonial world not merely as a top-down structure, but more importantly as a "politico-ethical project of producing subjects and governing their conduct". According to Scott, "What this required was the concerted attempt to alter the political and social worlds of the colonized, an attempt to transform and redefine the very conditions of the desiring subject" (Scott 1999, 52). Here, Scott, borrowing from Foucault, makes the

important point of studying the techniques of modern power in the colonial context not only in its totalizing forms but also in the individualizing forms, that is, in its "governmentality". Scott argues that the project of colonial governmentality, like that of discipline in the European context, was to establish a regulatory technique that would reach down to the very "motives" of the subject and direct their conduct not through direct coercion but through teaching them new forms of disciplined behavior, in a way that even makes them appreciate the alteration and see it as a form of progress.

Understanding postcolonial critique as a critique committed to exploring the normative ambivalence of postcoloniality allows us to reflect on our present and our path to future liberation without needing to leave behind the useful tools of the European philosophical tradition. If modernity itself is a normatively ambivalent project, European thought needs to be understood as an ambivalent system of thought which has partly reproduced colonial and oppressive hierarchies, but partly also criticized them. If this is right, then using the master's tools is not as much of a futile project as Audrey Lorde envisioned (Lorde 1984). An active and creative intellectual approach can enable us to use the intellectual tools inherited from the European tradition (though not exclusively those tools) against some of the same European ideas, liberate us from the futile dispute between advocates of modernity and anti-modernity, and also depart from the orthodoxies of anti-colonial critique, which have too often strengthened conservative nationalist political orders (Dhawan 2014).

2.3 Critique, Political Struggles, and Social Change

I discussed in the previous sections the double-character of critical philosophy in its aims toward reaching both intellectual understanding and social change. In this section, I would like to elaborate on the relation between genealogical critique and social change specifically. Can historical-philosophical inquiries really change societies, and if so, how?

The relationship between genealogical critique and social change is dialectical in the sense that critique does not only animate social change but is itself shaped by the forces of social transformation, shedding light on the close relations between theory and practice. As Foucault puts it, the new economy of power relation that he suggests,

> Consists of taking the forms of resistance against different forms of power as a starting point. To use another metaphor, it consists of using this resistance as a chemical catalyst so as to bring to light power relations, locate their position, find out their point of application and the methods used. Rather than analyzing power from the point of view of its internal rationality, it consists of analyzing power relations through the antagonism of strategies. […] And, in order to understand what power relations are about, perhaps we should investigate the forms of resistance and attempts made to dissociate these relations. (Foucault 2014, 211)

So, we clearly need to move away from the image of the philosopher detached from social happenings who is nevertheless wise and knowledgeable. For Foucault, our knowledge of power relations is made possible through the catalysis of social struggles and forms of resistance, which we need to be attentive to. The theory of the philosopher, at least the one who studies power relations, is developed only through interaction with the existing social practices and their dynamics, and the hereby produced problematizations do not exist independently of social reality but, as Koopman puts it, rather "contribute to the ongoing reproduction of problematizations already underway"

(99). According to Verena Erlenbusch-Anderson, genealogy is therefore an "engaged critique" whose normative reconstruction does not take the form of lawgiving but instead "extract norms from the practices of those who are engaged in political struggles" (2014, 181).

What about the transformative force of critique, and its influence on political practice? Political transformation is for Foucault, not the result of applying normative theories to practice, but is the contingent effect of the "interplay of a multiplicity of practices." (Erlenbusch-Anderson 2018, 179). In this view, theory is only one form of practice in the interplay of practices, one that can "bring about transformation only as one element in a network of actions—actions that can be theoretical or practical." In the network of actions, genealogical inquiries have a transformative force because of the transformative effects that they have on their reader as an actor of the social scene. It would be imprecise to interpret this form of critique as pure negativism because the negative force of critique "animates a new set of positions for the subject" and gives rise to new possibilities (Butler 2009). Through its *possibilising* force, as Lorenzini argues, genealogies "create a concrete political framework for action (a political 'we') that commits us to resist the arbitrariness of the power/knowledge formations it reveals" (Lorenzini 2020). For example, numerous scholars have argued that the hyperbolic style in which genealogy addresses the reader produces existential effects on the reader leading thereby to the cultivation of a critical attitude and ultimately opening new possibilities for practice (Saar 2007, 315–16).

Similarly, postcolonial genealogical critique would also stay in a dialectical relationship with the social reality, learning and drawing inspiration from occurring social

movements and political struggles, but also transforming the consciousness of the reader, inspiring them to social and political action, and giving the reader a certain agency in the face of cultural and political power relations. Further implications of such an account of critique for social change in the postcolonial context will be further explored in my next chapter.

3. With Foucault Beyond Foucault: Postcolonial Power and the Task of Critique

So far, I have discussed Foucault's method of genealogical critique and his understanding of problematization and have argued that Foucauldian critique offers promising tools for postcolonial inquiries. Most importantly, Foucauldian critique stands out in its attentiveness to normative ambivalence, a feature that is crucial to colonial modernity in general and postcolonial forms of subjectivation specifically. In this section, I turn to examine some of the ambivalences in Foucault's own oeuvre, showing that his perspective did not remain unaffected by the Orientalist scholarly traditions that dominated France's intellectual discourses. Through discussing the ambivalent character of Foucault's work on the Iranian Revolution, I argue that postcolonial scholarship needs to move with Foucault beyond Foucault and be attentive to these ambivalences.

Foucault's writings on the Iranian revolution and the (not-so-positive) reactions to them have been widely discussed in secondary literature in recent years. I continue these engagements with Foucault's writings on the Iranian revolution for the following reasons. Firstly, these writings show the productivity of Foucault's own thinking for understanding global politics beyond a universalist and Eurocentric framework and are an important resource for developing further Foucault's tools towards a postcolonial framework. Secondly, these writings offer useful tools for understanding the ambivalence

of postcolonial politics and anti-colonial revolts and revolutions specifically, in that they show the emancipatory power of revolts but also point towards their limitations and the fact that they never guarantee freedom. Lastly, Foucault's writings on the Iranian revolution offer a good case for analyzing Foucault's own inconsistencies regarding Eurocentrism, in that he criticizes Eurocentric politics but is himself still trapped in a certain form of Eurocentrism intellectually. Specifically, Foucault seems quite unaware of the influence of Orientalist preconceptions on his own thinking, an influence that ultimately constituted a major flaw in Foucault's engagement with the Iranian revolution.

3.1 Critique and Anti-Colonial Revolt: The Case of Foucault and the Iranian Revolution

Among Foucault's many interventions in the political happenings of his time as an engaged intellectual, his work on the Iranian revolution of 1979 remains the only significant engagement with politics beyond Europe and in the so-called third world. Foucault traveled to Iran multiple times, explored the political transformations firsthand, and wrote about them for several magazines and newspapers, as a typical journalist would do. If we understand Foucault as an "engaged intellectual" and as a critic, as he described himself (Foucault 1997, 49), it becomes evident that his interest and activism in the political events of his time needs to be understood as a constitutive part of his work as an intellectual studying the present in its conditions of possibility and potentials for transformation.

The Iranian revolution of 1979 had mixed reactions in the Western media and intellectual milieus of the time. While some read the revolt of a nation against a tyrannical monarch and his authoritarian agenda of modernization as an emancipatory

attempt for self-rule and autonomy, many had a certain unease and discomfort with the religious nature of the revolution. The fact that the revolution's most important leader, Khomeini, was a Muslim cleric, and that a certain return to tradition and to Islam, and a movement away from secularism, Westernization, and imperialist political domination was a central message of the revolution, made many witnesses and intellectuals read the revolution as a reactionary change, or even as a return to an oppressive, dark past. In Foucault's writings on the Iranian Revolution, we see him grappling with this binary, and yet it is clear that he is critical of the narrow Eurocentric perspective of those in the West principally opposed to an Islamic revolution based on its opposition to Western secular values. What makes Foucault's intervention so unique, and controversial, is his bold embracement of the entrance of religion into the political sphere, a change that is opposed to the central political principle of the French society, that of *Laïcité,* and which Foucault celebrates as "political spirituality" while anticipating the critique of French intellectuals, writing that "I can already hear the French laughing, but I know that they are wrong" (Afary and Anderson 2005, 209).

It is not only the element of spirituality in the Iranian revolution that Foucault salutes but also the anti-colonial nature of it. Although Iran was – in contrast to the vast majority of the Middle East – never formally colonized, it was nevertheless under various forms of economic and political domination by Western countries. From the beginnings of Iranian modernity in the 18th century, this often took the form of exploitative financial contracts with European countries, temporary military occupation by them, direct political interferences, and so forth. In the mid-20th century, America started to replace European countries and became the main imperialist force exercising its power over Iran,

not only through economic domination but most importantly through the coup of 1953. This coup – which is widely understood to have been engineered by the CIA (Kinzer 2008) – was the source of much political despair and possibly the "most traumatic event in modern Iranian history" (Dabashi 2007, 127), without which the revolution itself would not have been imaginable. Overall, the revolution was not only a revolt against the Shah but first and foremost against imperialist domination, in its economic, political, and cultural forms. Foucault is fascinated by the firm resistance of the Iranian people against imperialist domination, and describes it as "perhaps the great insurrection against global systems" (Afary and Anderson 2005, 222).

As Foucault himself anticipated, he was widely criticized for his positions, especially because the revolution itself did not turn out to be the ultimate emancipation that many had hoped for, eventually ending in a new form of authoritarianism, this time accompanied by anti-imperialist politics, but also the oppression of women and minorities, the aggressive oppression and (in many cases) imprisonment and murder of political dissidents and leftist intellectuals, and in sum, wide violation of basic democratic principles and human rights. Some of the criticisms of Foucault's writings are echoed in Afary and Andersons's work, where they argue that "something deeper than ignorance of Iranian history and culture, something more organic to Foucault's theoretical stance, was at work in creating the deep flaws that marked his writings on Iran" (2005, 136). This deeper flaw was a leftist discourse that took an uncritical stance toward third-world political transformations because it had "spent all of its energy opposing the secular liberal or authoritarian modern state" (136). Afary and Anderson's scholarship argues that Foucault takes an uncritical stance where a critical one was enormously needed

insofar as the revolution was complicit in the oppression of women and minorities from its beginnings, and was pursuing an agenda that was authoritarian, undemocratic, and reactionary in its core.

Afary and Anderson's work has many dimensions – a reading of Foucault's thought, an account of the Iranian revolution and its flaws, an engagement with gender politics and feminism in Iran, and so forth – all of which cannot be discussed here, but I ultimately agree with scholars who have argued that Afary and Anderson's understanding of Foucault contains serious misreadings and limitations. One limitation concerns an understanding of Foucault as an anti-modern thinker who romanticizes Greek and pre-modern cultures (Lynch 2007). More important than this flaw, for the purposes of my discussion, is Afary and Andersons' problematic commitment to what Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi has called an "enlightenment rationalist fundamentalism." (Ghamari-Tabrizi 2016, 15). In other words, Afary and Anderson's scholarship remains bound to a Eurocentric framework which does not allow for the conceptualization of positive political reforms that transcend the European secular discourse of politics, a discourse that is rooted in Europe's particular history of modernity but is wrongfully assumed to be universal. Furthermore, another shortcoming of this framework, following its false universalism, is its overgeneralized dismissal of political Islam, which is rooted in its limited understanding of Islam as immobile and unchanging, a common view that Foucault himself criticizes in his writings explicitly.[8]

Ghamari-Tabrizi's more recent scholarship shows the importance of Foucault's approach in reading the Iranian revolution and emphasizes the way in which Foucault's

[8] For example, in his correspondence with Attoussa H. See Afary and Anderson (2005, 210).

portrayal of the revolution leaves (false) universalism behind. This allowed Foucault to see the mobility and the pragmatic and creative uses of Islam, a religion that was "neither a burden of the past nor a blueprint for the future", but a context for a "creative reinvention of the self" (Ghamari-Tabrizi 2016, 173). Corey McCall argues that Foucault's departure from false universalism allows him to move towards a theory of multiple modernities, according to which "Modernity becomes a multivalent set of practices, beliefs, and institutions often at odds with one another rather than a simple, univocal concept" (McCall 2013). I agree that Foucault's attacks on the Shah's authoritarian politics and what he calls his "archaic modernism" need to be understood not as an anti-modern account, but as a critique of "the attempt to modernize the Islamic countries in a European fashion" (28).

So, whereas Afary and Anderson's perspective remains bound to a universalist framework, both Ghamari-Tabrizi and McCall argue that the strength of Foucault's account lies precisely in the way that it departs from universalism and allows us to imagine and conceptualize polyvalent or multiple modernities that take shapes and forms that distinguish them from European modernity. This, ultimately, is the most crucial lesson of Foucault's work on the Iranian Revolution, as it relates to my work because it establishes a framework for writing history and, genealogy specifically, that goes beyond Eurocentrism and enables us to conceptualize postcolonial histories. The other resource that Foucault's work offers for conceptualizing postcolonial histories lies in its attention to normative ambivalence.

Although Foucault's account of the Iranian Revolution was largely affirmative, what is mostly ignored in its reception is the cautionary hesitations that Foucault offers in

his writings. Although Foucault embraces the revolt of the Iranian people as a positive movement and praises the Iranian people for their "intensity of courage" and their "absolutely collective will" (253), he also expresses worries and hesitations about whether the revolution will continue to represent the majority of the population as the revolutionaries gain political power. In an interview a few months after the revolution, Foucault points out that the strong collective will of the revolution has been based on local traditions and institutions that "carry a charge of chauvinism, nationalism, exclusiveness, which have a very powerful attraction for individuals (260). The question then becomes whether this revolution will "have the strength to cross its own frontiers and go beyond the things on which, for a time, it has based itself", or whether it will be moving towards repressive politics and a non-democratic government, despite all the emancipatory powers that it has displayed. I think that in a Foucauldian framework, this remains the crucial question for every political revolt and revolution, but especially the ones of the anti-colonial kind. Foucault's discussion about the relationship between liberation and freedom can shed light on this claim.

In an interview that took place in his last year of life, Foucault offers an instructive hesitation about narratives of liberation. It is worth quoting Foucault at length here:

> I have always been somewhat suspicious of the notion of liberation, because if it is not treated with precautions and within certain limits, one runs the risk of falling back on the idea that there exists a human nature or base that, as a consequence of certain historical, economic, and social processes, has been concealed, alienated, or imprisoned in and by mechanisms of repression. […] I think this idea should not be accepted without scrutiny. I am not trying to say that liberation as such, or this or that form of liberation, does not exist: when a

> colonized people attempts to liberate itself from its colonizers, this is indeed a practice of liberation in the strict sense. But we know very well, and moreover in this specific case, that this practice of *liberation* is not in itself sufficient to define the practices of *freedom* that will still be needed if this people, this society, and these individuals are to be able to define admissible and acceptable forms of existence or political society. (Foucault 1998, 282).

Was Foucault thinking about the Iranian revolution when he was pointing to the insufficiency of the anti-colonial revolt (given how much he was criticized for his affirmative remarks on the Iranian revolution)? We do not know. But I find the distinction between liberation and practices of freedom helpful in the sense that it reminds us that power is more complex –and more ambivalent– than being defeated through a liberatory event and an episode of resistance. Rather, what is required for freedom are constant practices of freedom (in the Foucauldian sense of critical practices that function as care of the self), in order to ensure that one is not taken over by new (or old) power relations that might dominate and restrict human actions violently. As my earlier discussion of normative ambivalence has shown, Foucault's understanding of power as diffuse and multi-faceted is incompatible with the utopian hope in final liberation through an episode of political change. Lorenzini and Tazzioli have pointed towards the "temporality" of resistance in Foucault and rightly argue that Foucault considers that "the acts of de-subjection and de-objectivation only constitute a first (although necessary) step of an effective practice of resistance, which should always be implemented with a second step consisting in the positive creation of new forms of subjectivity – that is, with a process of subjectivation" (Lorenzini and Tazzioli 2018). I would add to this that practices of freedom themselves also necessarily need to involve a constant problematization of power relations and should not be defined in a utopian

manner but need to have a critical and self-scrutinizing function. If society always involves power relations, it cannot come as a surprise that overthrowing a set of particular relations of power can mean the birth of new ones.

Furthermore, understanding power as multivalent means that political change can eradicate certain sets of relations of power while keeping others intact. This insight is especially important from an intersectional perspective. As numerous scholars have shown, many anticolonial revolts have had a male patriarchal character and have either left relations of gendered oppression untouched or have exasperated them (Chatterjee 1993). The same was true for the Iranian revolution, which resulted in many losses for women's rights, as well as the implementation of compulsory hijab for all women (Afary 2009). Interestingly, an Iranian woman named Atoussa H. who corresponded with Foucault at the time of the revolution already had warned him about the deterioration of women's situation in Iran and was aware of the dangerous transformations underway, as were many other Iranian women (Afary and Anderson 2005, 209). By describing the Iranian revolution as an ambivalent anticolonial revolt, I hope to emphasize not only its complex character, but also how emancipatory and oppressive effects have co-existed in it, and how attention to the heterogeneity of power relations can enable us to recognize this normative ambivalence and to appreciate its empowering effects but also understand and criticize its oppressive afterlives.

Despite the value of Foucault's writings on the Iranian Revolution, however, these writings do suffer from a problem that most of the secondary literature agrees upon, and that is its affectedness by Orientalism. Foucault's views about the Iranian Revolution were influenced by Orientalist thinking in significant ways. The Orientalist tradition did

not only shape scholarly perspectives but played a significant role in guiding political actions, shaping the common sense of the general public, and in general, forming Europe's perspective about non-western cultures more broadly. As Ghamari-Tabrizi shows, Foucault's view of Islam was influenced by French Orientalists such as Corbin, who overemphasized the role of spirituality in Shia Islam, neglecting the political, legalistic, and doctrinal aspects of Islam (Ghamari-Tabrizi 2016, 73–74).

Afary and Anderson describe Foucault's Orientalism as "romantic Orientalism", arguing that Foucault's romanticization of the revolution was only possible by turning a blind eye to the multiplicities of forces and contradictions of the revolution itself, contradictions that even many Western intellectuals at the time were aware of (Afary and Anderson 2005, 142). Here they rely on Said's idea that Orientalism is fundamentally rooted in a projection of one's ideas – either negative or positive – onto the Orient and avoids a real confrontation with its subject. Afary and Anderson rightly point to Foucault's sometimes simplistic depiction of the revolutionary forces, understanding them not as plural forces representing diverse interests and motivations, but as an "absolutely collective will". Ironically, Foucault himself points out that the collective will is a "political myth", it is something nobody has ever seen, something that he always thought was "like God, like the soul, something one would never encounter", but then adds that "we met, in Tehran and throughout Iran, the collective will of a people", represented in their common radical rejection, "not only of foreigners but of everything that had constituted, for years, for centuries, its political destiny" (253). This tendency to romanticize and reduce a complex political situation to a homogenous and undifferentiated totality and a unitary movement is seen throughout Foucault's

engagement with the Iranian Revolution. In an interview, while praising the writings of another French journalist on the Iranian Revolution, Foucault explains that what he particularly liked was that these articles, while analyzing the revolution,

> didn't try to break up this phenomenon into its constituent elements; they tried to leave it as a single beam of light, even though we know that it is made up of several beams. That's the risk and the interest in talking about Iran. (257)

Here again, we see that Foucault is well aware of the *risk* of this reductionist approach, the fact that it leaves out the complexity of the event and is not loyal to the fragmented nature of reality. But surprisingly, or not so surprisingly, Foucault ultimately praises this approach because it is *interesting*.

Ultimately, Foucault's account suffers from a lack of nuanced engagement with the cultural diversity and the heterogeneity of power relations in Iran, which can be traced back to his limited knowledge about the Iranian society. Ghamari-Tabrizi argues that similar to Frantz Fanon's case with Algeria, although Foucault "correctly emphasized the significance and the hegemonic position of religion in giving rise to the revolutionary movement, he failed to see the deeply rooted networks and ethos of legalistic and doctrinal Islam that would eventually dominate the postrevolutionary state politics." (2016, 73–74). Additionally, Foucault's limited familiarity with Iran prevents him from recognizing "the extent to which the revolution belongs to a historical situation different from, but related to the Western context", which brings us back to Orientalism and romanticizing the other's alterity without taking seriously our similarities, and our relations toward each other (McSweeney 2013). What also remains absent and missing in Foucault's work is a reflection about what today we would call his own "positionality", i.e., the way that his thinking (as a white French philosopher) has been shaped by colonial

thought and the system of orientalist knowledge production, a reflection that could have helped with potentially overcoming such influence, and without which the work of solidarity from a privileged position remains incomplete.

A pressing question that concerns any scholarship moving forward by using Foucauldian tools is: Is this Orientalism a necessary part of Foucault's thinking, and any scholarship based on Foucault's framework? If we consider the elements of this Orientalism – i.e., a simplistic reductionist reading of the other as homogenous, partly rooted in intellectual projections, and partly influenced by Orientalist legacy and scholarship – we see that these limitations can be overcome. I suggest that the way out of this dangerously narrow perspective is pursuing a genealogical approach in studying cultural differences and exploring non-western cultures and histories with an eye to their multiplicities, heterogeneities, and fragments. Before I unpack this suggestion, I want to briefly reiterate the significance of Foucault's work on the Iranian Revolution.

Foucault's writings on the Iranian revolution evince a rare departure from the false universalism of European political ideas such as secularism. This departure enables Foucault to leave the widespread teleological view of history behind, a view that led both Marxists and liberals the misconception that all societies need to follow the European script of progress and development. Through recognizing the value of the Iranian anti-colonial and anti-imperialist movement, Foucault is acknowledging the colonial harms caused by France, and the West in general. However, as I discussed above, this self-critical stance does not go far enough to make him assess the influence of Orientalist scholarship on himself, and the subtle ways in which his thinking was still carrying a colonial legacy.

3.2 Towards a Genealogical Postcolonial Critique

I have discussed the flaws and problems of Foucault's analysis of the Iranian revolution in detail because my project highlights that a postcolonial genealogical critique ultimately needs to go beyond Foucault and the limitations that his engagement with the Iranian revolution exposes. To argue with Foucault against himself, one could say that serious intellectual engagement with the politics of a foreign country requires a genealogical analysis of a society's power relations and discourses, one that Foucault did not bother to do. In the end, we know that the discourse of Orientalism presupposes that the other does not have a history. One can go so far as to say that Said is more Foucauldian in the sense of using the method of discourse analysis for thinking about Orientalism, whereas Foucault ultimately was interested, as he admits himself, mostly in the Western world, even when he was investigating other cultures and other geographies (Foucault 2013b, 111). As Ann Laura Stoler (1995) has argued, a self-referential conception of Europe is present in Foucault's work, where he problematizes European identity but fails to see it in *relational* terms, that is, as a uniqueness that distinguished Europe from its colonies and justified imperial domination. Making use of Foucault's theory and concepts for postcolonial thought, one needs to critically reevaluate his work with attention to these problems. Overall, Foucault the philosopher-journalist offers us invaluable insights, but they are ultimately doomed to a certain fallibility that some even might attribute to the nature of the journalistic enterprise. Without wanting to offer ambitious claims about the nature of disciplines, I propose that the imperfection of Foucault's journalism can be corrected through the genealogical perspective while preserving the virtues of his non-teleological analysis.

The main advantage of Foucault's genealogical critique is its attunement to the heterogeneity and multiplicity of power relations in the social scene. Contra the philosophies of totality that perceive the social world as a dynamism centered around one ultimate source of arrangement (for example, capitalism), Foucault's theory of micro-power enables scholars to study the power relations in their multiplicity and irreducible heterogeneity. The advantage of this perspective for postcolonial critique is that enables us to move beyond Orientalist lenses with their simplistic homogenizing assumptions, and also beyond those postcolonial frameworks that reduce the political dynamics of the non-western world to colonial and anti-colonial struggles while bracketing other power relations, such as those based on gender, sexuality, and race. Instead, so I shall argue, the genealogical lens enables us to recognize the political complexity of postcolonial societies, ultimately moving towards what Scott calls "an ethos of agonistic respect for pluralizations of subaltern difference" (Scott 1999, 224). Furthermore, the genealogical account of normative ambivalence provides tools to analyze the ambivalences of not just European modernity, as some of Foucault's main works do, but also the ambivalences of postcolonial social and political transformations (which I will come back to in my last two chapter).

In my next chapter, I engage with some of the existing scholarship on Foucault and postcoloniality, most notably the work of Said and Stoler, and discuss the relevance of their insights for my argument, as well as the contribution my work can make to the aspirations of those studies. I show that through a constructive critique of Foucault, these analyses guide us toward the possibility of a postcolonial genealogy. Additionally, I will

be engaging with some historical studies on postcoloniality that enable me to discuss some concrete questions about the “applications” of the genealogical method.

CHAPTER III

FROM "COLONIAL APHASIA" TO CRITICAL PROBLEMATIZATION: THE TRANSFORMATIVE WORK OF POSTCOLONIAL GENEALOGICAL CRITIQUE

"Our valuation of the historical may be only an occidental prejudice: but let us at least make progress within this prejudice and not stand still! Let us at least learn better how to employ history for the purpose of life!"

Nietzsche (1997, 66)

"All pasts are futural in orientation."

Chakrabarty (2009, 250)

1. Introduction: Critique Between the Past and the Present

What is the use of genealogy? Scholars have thoroughly explored the work of genealogical critique in its normative and methodological aspects. Whether we take genealogy to be a practice of "problematization" (Koopman, 2013), or a "possiblising" (Lorenzini, 2020), "engaged critique" (Erlenbusch-Anderson, 2018) that explores the "impurity of the practical reason" (Allen, 2013), the question remains why we might want to commit to the project of rereading the past itself, and whether going back to the past adds anything new to the present.

A common perspective is that genealogical critique delves into the past in order to unmask the contingency of the present and challenge it by exposing the constructed nature of some aspect of social reality. This has the practical outcome of making us

question our own beliefs about the present, as well as showing us a sense of forgotten freedom and agency in the face of existing conditions, perhaps one that we might use for making actual changes in social reality. But why do we employ specific histories rather than others?

Not all histories matter in the same way. By advocating for what I call *postcolonial genealogical critique*, I propose that colonial histories matter. In order to explain why, I discuss which histories matter for the genealogist and how. I consider first Nietzsche's *Untimely Meditations* and his argument for history in the service of life. I then turn to Foucault and track his struggle with this question throughout his work – for instance, the issue of what motivated his turn from archeology to genealogy, a movement driven by the contention that critique happens from a specific location and is bound to background ethical-political commitments. I show that both Nietzsche and Foucault replace a scholarly interest in history as pure science with a practical attitude about history. In a second section, I discuss the transformative force of postcolonial genealogical critique by highlighting its epistemological and affective work, as well as its practical implications for the pathologies of collective memories.

2. A Practical Attitude to the Past: Insights from Nietzsche and Foucault

Michael Oakeshott coined the term "practical attitude to the past" so as to criticize this view as the "chief undefeated enemy of history" (1962, 165). Contrary to Oakeshott and the generation of conservative historians that were influenced by him, Nietzsche and Foucault saw in such a practical attitude the ultimate value of history and its transformative potential for the present. In their perspective, history only matters as the

history of the present, and in so far that it not only gives us a certain knowledge about the present but also opens up new possibilities for its critique and transformation.

In his 1876 *Untimely Meditations*, in a chapter titled "On the uses and disadvantages of history for life", Nietzsche makes a case for a strategic practice of history that is attended by action and serves practical purposes. For Nietzsche, a strategic practice of history means that history will serve life, instead of the other way around (1997, 59). Nietzsche's elaboration of the dangers and harms of a theoretical approach to history, i.e., a view that historical knowledge is valuable for its own sake, highlights the futile nature of history when it is merely a scholastic discipline, or what Nietzsche calls history as pure and sovereign science (67), and prepares the ground for his later developed account of genealogical critique in *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1887 [1998]). This critique remains relevant for us today for developing our own approach to history, especially when doing genealogical work that engages with the discipline of history and its findings, for example, as it pertains to colonial histories.

Nietzsche argues that the historical sense, when it is not in the service of the present, makes people passive and retrospective (1997, 102), mummifies life (75), and ultimately becomes the "gravedigger of the present" (62). Conservative readings of history that aim to revive a certain golden past – often called the golden age syndrome – romanticize the past and often regard it as a source of communal pride and meaning-making that replaces serious engagement with the present, with its novelty but also with its problems. Similarly, when history is approached from a scholastic and reductionist perspective, i.e., as an end in itself, its relation to the present is bracketed and its potential meaning for present problems is disregarded. However, Nietzsche argues that when used

properly, that is, in the service of the present and its *invigoration*, history can liberate the one who suffers (62).

Genealogical critique, following Nietzsche, does not go back to our history for the sake of information or knowledge, and thus has no interest in history as a science. Rather, genealogy is a strategic use of history, and it has the therapeutic function of invigoration and healing, and ultimately augmenting life. When it comes to critical history, history can also serve the purpose of liberation (*Befreiung*). In the sense that postcolonial genealogical critique is committed to the strategic use of history in the service of the present, it takes up the Nietzschean perspective, but replaces the Nietzschean emphasis on life and vitalism, with a *political* notion of freedom. For developing this perspective, Foucault is key.

Foucault's use of history has oscillated during different phases of his work, ranging from a rather positivist approach in the archeological period to a more political one that focuses on power in the genealogical period. Towards the end of *Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault expresses doubt about the ambiguous position of his own archaeological critique as a "discourse about discourses", writing that "for the moment, and as far ahead as I can see, my discourse, far from determining the locus in which it speaks, is avoiding the ground on which it could find support" (Foucault 2013). In his genealogical work, Foucault abandons the lack of positionality of his critique and replaces that with an understanding of critique that not only becomes tied with a critique of power but also leaves behind a pretense of scholarly neutrality by viewing progressive social movements and existing forms of resistance to power as a "chemical catalyst" (2014, 211) for his own diagnosis of social power relations, ultimately moving towards a

notion of "engaged critique" (Erlenbusch-Anderson, 2018).", as discussed in the previous chapter.

Foucault takes up the Nietzschean critique of history in his essay "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History", and shows that he is no more a friend of history than Nietzsche was, arguing that "it is necessary to master history so as to turn to genealogical uses" (1984a, 93). Genealogy is called "effective history" (87) and is presented as a form of knowledge that is not for understanding but for "cutting"; in other words, it serves not a scholastic purpose but a practical one. Through the function of cutting, genealogy uproots the seemingly natural and stable foundations of the self and unmasks the multiplicity and heterogeneity of forces behind it, hereby using history for a "systematic dissociation of identity" (94). In the metaphor suggested by Foucault, genealogy works like a knife or razor; it cuts totalizing concepts and beliefs into the smaller fragments that they are actually made of, and it cuts linear continuous histories into fragments of rupture and discontinuity that they actually are. In other words, the cutting of genealogy does the opposite of what Ockham's razor did. While Ockham's razor favored simplicity over complexity by arguing for "never positing pluralities without necessity" (Schaffer 2015), Foucault's genealogical lens – or what we could call "Foucault's razor" – seeks to find plurality behind socially constructed unities. Skeptical of simplicity, the Foucauldian genealogical lens uses history to posit pluralities that might have gone out of our sight.

Later in *"Society Must Be Defended"*, Foucault distinguishes between a historical knowledge that has been subject to *disciplinarization* and a historical consciousness that "is polymorphous, divided, and combative" (2003,160). It is not hard to see the parallels between the latter form of historical consciousness and genealogy whose function was

described with the metaphor of "cutting". In *"Society Must Be Defended"*, Foucault calls genealogy an "antiscience" that is an "insurrection of subjugated knowledges" and serves the purpose of desubjugation (2003, 10). The aim of the recourse to history is then, as Foucault puts it, "to learn to what extent the effort to think one's own history can free thought from what it silently thinks, and so enable it to think differently" (1990, 9).

My discussion of the use of colonial histories for postcolonial critique is interested in "effective history", i.e., a genealogical approach to history, and not the discipline of history as such, which is also subject to limitations due to its ties with modern instruments of governmentality such as law and systems of bureaucracy, as Chakrabarty argues (2009, 107). Genealogy includes an important departure from an identity-based historical consciousness, and postcolonial critique, through making use of genealogy, accepts the risk of some of its own foundations being cut. Any identifying label such as third-world, middle eastern, global south, and subaltern will go through the "genealogical razor", but this might not be a threat to postcolonial critique in the first place. Already Edward Said (1979) had argued for the destabilization of labels such as East and West, and a new consciousness of global relations of power and influence beyond such binaries and divisions. Later in *Culture and Imperialism*, Said is even more vocal in his critique of identity-based politics in the third world (and beyond), arguing that "What matters a great deal more than the stable identity kept current in official discourse is the contestatory force of an interpretative method whose material is the disparate, but intertwined and interdependent, and above all overlapping streams of historical experience" (1994, 312).

In Foucault's version of the Nietzschean critique of history, history serves not life as such but rather "desubjugation", and a refusal to be governed in particular ways (Foucault 1997). Such desubjugation implies a disruption in our discourse and destabilizes the power relations that govern knowledge, but it also destabilizes the subject as such. It is precisely because genealogical critique is also self-critique that it goes beyond liberal perspectives that are commonly committed to an uncritical individualism that celebrates the individual's freedom of choice regarding their navigation of private life, forgetting that the subject and their private life are inseparable from and entangled with social power relations, and as such potentially *problematic*. If genealogy as self-critique explores what Allen (2007) calls "the politics of ourselves", then its mission of transformation includes the self along with social relations of power, while challenging the boundaries between the two by outlining the historically and socially constructed nature of power and subjectivity itself.

Genealogical self-critique operates not only on the content of its historical narrative but also through its *style*. The style of the genealogical inquiry departs radically from the discourse of history as an academic discipline and betrays history's commitment to objectivity and scientific clarity. Martin Saar has emphasized this aspect of genealogical work, arguing that the disruptive nature of genealogical narrative unsettles the beliefs and thought patterns of the reader especially due to its rhetorical power. According to Saar, the genealogical critique of both Nietzsche and Foucault makes use of rhetorical techniques such as "hyper-concretization", "hyperbolic and dramatic amplification" and direct "appeal" (2007, 306), mainly in order to confront the reader with the contingency of their selves and feed the desire for self-transformation (309).

Genealogical style challenges the traditional divisions between rational truth and emotional speech and presents a narrative that does not follow the scholarly pretense of objectivity and neutral loyalty to facts. The question of style becomes especially pertinent if we acknowledge that the structure of our beliefs is not only governed by rational thinking, but also by affects, and if genealogy is after not merely a transformation of academic discourse, but also a transformation of minds and people, it clearly needs to present its narrative accordingly. One could go as far as to argue that the genealogical text has an essayistic character; if we understand the essay as "the assay or test by which, in the game of truth, one undergoes changes" (Foucault 1990, 9). Foucault argues that the essay is "the living substance of philosophy, at least if we assume that philosophy is still what it was in times past, i.e., […] an exercise of oneself in the activity of thought". I will argue that this aspect of the genealogical narrative can and should do substantial work in postcolonial genealogical critique, thereby bringing about the possibility of a postcolonial politics of ourselves.

For understanding the labor of genealogical critique as effective history, it is important to highlight that the effectiveness is not just a result of the content, i.e., the information and knowledge that it spreads, but also a result of its affective influence on subjects, i.e., how it changes subjects in their dispositions, feelings, or attitude. By highlighting the relation between affect and genealogical critique (and philosophy in general), I follow the argument of scholars such as Deleuze and Guattari (1994) that intellectual work is not a merely rationalistic enterprise but has also significant affective dimensions that play a crucial role in the process of the work but also for its consequences. While scholars have explored this connection through various frameworks

of terminologies, I choose the term affect based on its compatibility with Foucault's framework due to the fact that it does not assume a psychic interiority in the subject as the basis of feelings and emotions. Rather, affect describes sensations as they go beyond the interiority of the subject, or as Deleuze and Guattari put it, affects as "beings whose validity lies in themselves and exceeds any lived", beings that "exist in the absence of man." (1994, 164). In the context of critique as a practice, attention to the role of affect highlights how critique does not only prepare a certain transformation but also *performs* certain transforming labor (Sheehey 2020, 76).

The affective dimension becomes important especially given the internal resistance to disruptive pieces of knowledge in individuals. Given that Foucault's work has been precisely invested in studying the relationship between power and knowledge, it might seem surprising that the affective dimension of such a relationship, i.e., the psychic and emotional aspects of subjectivity in its entanglement with power and knowledge has been quite absent in his studies, especially given that Nietzsche investigated this dimension in his genealogical work at length. I think such absence can be traced back to Foucault's critique of psychology and his argument about the "interiority" of subjectivity being a product of historical power relations, or as Deleuze puts it, the idea of "the inside as an operation of the outside" (1988, 97). *Discipline and Punish* expresses this idea, for instance in Foucault's claim that "the soul is the effect and instrument of a political anatomy; the soul is the prison of the body" (2012b, 30). Saar suggests that such a perspective does not leave much room for the analysis of (referring to Butler) the "psychic life of power" (2007, 300). I argue, however, that acknowledging the productive hold of power on subjectivity does not necessarily mean questioning the existence of

affective or psychic dimensions of subjectivity. Even if we agree with Foucault that the soul is a result of power and serves power relations by imprisoning the body, the psyche, as it is understood in psychoanalytic theory, cannot be reduced to power. As Judith Butler explains:

> […] the psyche, which includes the unconscious, is very different from the subject: the psyche is precisely what exceeds the imprisoning effects of the discursive demand to inhabit a coherent identity, to become a coherent subject. The psyche is what resists the regularization that Foucault ascribes to normalizing discourses. (1997, 86)

In the same vein, emotions and affects might be results of power, but they are not overdetermined by power and are not necessarily an instrument of power, and they still exist and make up the complex life of subjectivity, especially in its *experience* of power relations, experience here understood as "the correlation between fields of knowledge, types of normativity, and forms of subjectivity in a particular culture" (Foucault, 1990, 4). Butler considers the turn to the psychic life of power as a "psychoanalytical criticism of Foucault" (1997, 87), but I think this turn can be also considered as an expansion or even continuation of the genealogical project, especially if we consider Amy Allen's (2018) argument that Foucault's project is not incompatible with psychoanalysis, as has been frequently argued, and that Foucault's critique of psychoanalysis as a discipline was not so much a rejection but a problematization of psychoanalysis.

The affective aspect of the transformative labor of genealogy can be explained through its disruption of what Lauren Guilmette has called "affective scripts", i.e., "contingent habits animating our responses, attractions, and repulsions" (2014, 286). If affective scripts that we are conditioned by are products of relations of power that shape subjects through disciplinary institutions, the affective labor of critique deviates from

such scripts by offering an alternative perspective. Reading Foucault's genealogies, following Jana Sawicki (2005, 392), as narratives that aim to "incite rebellions against pernicious disciplinary productions, to produce an experience of their costs", it becomes evident that genealogy becomes effective in history through doing affective work in the present. Here there is a parallel between genealogical critique and the therapeutic method of psychoanalysis based on both of these methods opening up a horizon of transformation not merely through arguments but also through an "experiential shift". As Allen explains, Foucault's method is also concerned with bringing awareness to "those unconsciousness aspects of experience that structure our current ways of interpreting the world" and destabilizing them by showing their contingent historical production (2020, 180). Thus, genealogical critique needs to be understood as a mode of critique that has rational elements but is not rationalistic, precisely because the transformative goal it has can only be reached through a process that includes an affective transformation.

So far, I have looked at the genealogical critique of history as a discipline and have discussed how genealogy utilizes history for strategic – and as Foucault writes, "desubjugative" – purposes. I have argued that such utilization works through a methodological shift toward heterogeneity and pluralism and against identity-thinking. Additionally, I proposed that the effective history of genealogical critique becomes truly effective through its *affective* labor, i.e., the experiential shift that it offers to the individual which destabilizes one's relation to social practices that are the object of critique. Before I utilize these ideas for inquiring into the transformative possibilities of postcolonial genealogical critique in relation to the present, I briefly engage with some

postcolonial challenges to historical inquiry that are important to consider for the practice of postcolonial genealogical critique.

3. Postcolonial Challenges to Historical Inquiry

In the first part of this section, I discuss how the local character of Foucault's genealogies has resulted in its occlusion of colonial relations of power and argue that postcolonial genealogical critique needs to adopt a relational methodology that tracks the entanglement of local and global relations of power. The second part of this section engages with some postcolonial challenges to the discipline of history through the work of Dipesh Chakrabarty and Amy Allen. We will see that some of the critiques expressed by the postcolonial perspective align with the genealogical perspective, which is why postcolonial genealogical critique can offer a way out of the Eurocentric impasse of historical thought that Chakrabarty rightly identifies.

3.1 Intertwined Histories and Relational Methodologies

In order to study postcolonial relations of power genealogically, we need to overcome a major limitation of genealogical critique in the form that it is practiced by Foucault: its local character. One of the distinct features of Foucauldian critique is that unlike some other intellectual traditions of its time – most notably the Marxist tradition – it moves away from global projects and the critique of universal systems and focuses on local political formations in specific geographies and specific historical contexts. This less ambitious project hopes to be more precise and more empirically grounded and study instead "very specific transformations" (Foucault 1990). For example, the analysis of sexuality in *The History of Sexuality Vol.1* does not aim to offer a universal account of

sexuality but limits itself to the study of very specific discursive practices that give rise to the modern construct of sexuality in 19th-century Europe. Foucault suggests that his particular genealogical studies nevertheless have a *general* character in the sense that they do reveal something about *Western* societies (49). However, this research framework seems to suffer from a major omission: it neglects the relations between Western societies and non-Western societies and the role of these relations in the development of cultural practices and political formations in Europe. In this move to turn away from the ambition of studying global systems of power, there seems to be an overcorrection: the turn to the local comes at the expense of ignoring the existence of global relations of power that – as I discuss below – have been crucial for the development of local practices in their material, cultural and political dimensions during colonial modernity.

In her critical study of Foucault's *History of Sexuality Vol. 1,* Ann Laura Stoler (1995) discusses the inadequacies of this local lens for studying modern sexuality by exploring the relations between Europe and its colonies that were crucial for the development of sexuality as a modern construct, relations that are left out in Foucault's account. More specifically, Stoler argues that Foucault's history of European sexuality "misses key sites in the production of that discourse, discounts the practices that racialized bodies, and thus elides a field of knowledge that provided the contrasts for what a "healthy, vigorous, bourgeois body" was all about" (7). Stoler's work suggests that the study of Europe needs to consider the relationality between Europe and its outside, manifested by various practices including imperial technologies of rule. By ignoring the constitutive role of Europe's outside in shaping social practices in Europe,

the local lens of critique misrepresents reality or at best captures only one part of it, resulting in a limited or skewed view that is inevitably Eurocentric and neglects the contributions of other societies to European culture and history.

The idea of "intertwined histories" suggested by Said (1994) aims to correct this Eurocentrism that has not only been a feature of Foucault's work but also much of modern European thought in general. By advocating to understand histories as intertwined, Said argues for the need to recognize the relations between societies in the study of culture. As a postcolonial scholar, Said is interested in studying the role of colonialism and imperialism in the development of European culture, but these relations are not limited to colonial or imperial relations and can include also general contributions and influences that have taken place as a result of interaction between societies. To correct the above-mentioned shortcoming, genealogical critique would benefit from taking up this Saidian idea and include the intertwinement of histories in its study, especially if it is used for the study of the global present that is shaped by the afterlives of colonialism.

The idea of "intertwined histories" challenges the clean separation between "Western" and "non-Western" societies because it emphasizes the ways that many practices and material realities in both contexts are entangled. In discussing the need for a postcolonial sociology, Julian Go makes a distinction between substantialism and relationalism that is helpful here: While substantialist methodologies assume a unified "culture" or single "society" containing intrinsic properties and insist on basic units of inquiry as substances that retain their identity throughout, relational methodologies do not presume essences or substances but understand phenomena to be a product of their

relations and interactions with other phenomena (Go 2013, 42–43). This relational methodology offers a helpful corrective to Foucault's understanding of genealogy: although Foucault's genealogical critique operates methodologically based on the study of relations (of power) and how they constitute the social world and does not posit a stable identity or essence to things, as I discussed in the earlier section, it fails to fully avoid substantialism because of its implicit assumption about the self-sufficiency of the "West" and its lack of attention to the relations between the Western and non-Western societies that shape and constitute these societies. Commitment to this relationalist methodology enables postcolonial genealogical critique to move beyond the local level in its inquiry in order to also capture the global transnational relations that define our social practices.

To capture this relationality, we need to consider the role of global capitalism and the long history of transnational economic relations between societies, including colonial relations that involved the exploitation of the material resources of colonized countries. This relationality also shapes the material realities of our neocolonial world order. As I am writing these sentences from Eugene, Oregon, it is very likely that one of the items of clothing that I am wearing has been produced in the Global South through cheap exploited labor. As European Enlightenment thinkers discussed philosophical ideas, it is very likely that they were consuming coffee or other products that were coming from the European colonies. In this sense, material existence and intellectual production in the West is possible through its relations with the non-Western world.

One study that explores the role of such relations in the development of French modernity is C.L.R. James' *Black Jacobins* (1989). In this historical study about the

Haitian Revolution, James invites us to reconsider our understanding of the French Revolution as a solely European event by showing how the French Revolution was materially dependent on overseas slavery and also how it was inspired and made possible by the Haitian Revolution. Frantz Fanon's (2004, 58) claim that Europe is the creation of the Third World emphasizes the constitutive role of European colonies for the economic, political and cultural formation of Europe and can serve as a guiding principle for postcolonial genealogical critique. Without taking these relations into consideration, both philosophical reflection and historical inquiry about Western political formations remain incomplete and reproduce Eurocentrism. This is the major corrective to the genealogical critique of Foucault that my framework of postcolonial genealogical critique suggests: going beyond the narrow focus on the local and broadening the scope of inquiry by tracking the entanglement of local and global relations of power.

3.2. How to Read Difference Differently: The Postcolonial Challenge to Historicism

Does historical thought discriminate against cultural differences? It might be clear that many hegemonic modes of history writing have been caught in Eurocentric modes of thought that have regarded other cultures as inferior, and that the prejudices and biases of Western historians might have inflicted their work with blind spots. In this section, I am not interested in the question of individual biases and history writing, but I am rather interested in historicism as a general framework of modern historical thought that poses a limitation to the representation of difference. By highlighting these limitations, I argue that the genealogical postcolonial perspective can serve as an alternative mode of historical thought that escapes these limitations.

In his book *Provincializing Europe* (2009), Chakrabarty shows how various versions of Western historical thought, ranging from Hegelian, Marxist, and liberal, never abandon a certain Eurocentric universalism that reads historical difference as a sign of "backwardness", and assumes that the culturally different parts of the world have to ultimately "catch up" and follow the path of progress that we have already taken. According to Chakrabarty, a totalizing logic of linear development does not allow historical thought to imagine a plurality of forms of progress, but it instead reduces historical difference to inferiority or a certain lack (which might be read as the lack of civilization, culture, infrastructure, technology, etc.). Interestingly, Chakrabarty demonstrates that even Guha, the leading scholar of the subaltern studies group, was not immune to this fault, and by reducing the religiosity of the Indian subaltern population to the Marxist idea of "false consciousness" failed to identify the heterogeneity of the social practices of the subaltern classes in India (105). Chakrabarty goes on to argue that subaltern pasts pose a limit to the discourse of history because they "do not give the historian any principle of narration that can be rationally defended in modern public life" (110). If the guiding reasoning of historical narratives is inseparable from the dominant mode of rationality in a society, the historical difference of the subaltern pushes the discourse of history to its limits and challenges the principles of public and intellectual reasoning.

Does this all mean that all history is necessarily bound to some form of Eurocentric universalism and to a totalizing logic of linear development? Chakrabarty argues that historical thought remains limited precisely because of its geopolitical position in Western academia, i.e., because it is part of the institutional relations of power

and knowledge production (2007, 41 & 45) and their link to political units such as the nation-state. But at the same time, and perhaps unsurprisingly (given that postcolonial scholarship has started to destabilize the limitations of academic discourse for some time now), his own account, by virtue of its critique, is opening another possibility for historical thought, one that Chakrabarty only hints at. Chakrabarty suggests that such an alternative view of history would involve acknowledging the multiplicity of the subaltern subject (147) and the "plurality of times existing together", while unsettling "totalizing thought by putting into play nontotalizing categories" (22). This would mean writing into the history of modernity "the ambivalences, contradictions, the use of force, and the tragedies and ironies that attend it" (44), so that "the world may once again be imagined as radically heterogeneous" (46).

This alternative form of historical thought remains underdeveloped in Chakrabarty's work, but Chakrabarty's critique of historical thought can be read as preparing the ground for thinking about the relationship between cultural difference and history in a radically different way. We saw earlier that genealogical critique too aims to depart from the totalizing logic of history, investigate the ruptures and discontinuities in history, and refuse to construct new identities but rather "cut" the supposedly stable foundations that we have based our self-understanding on. Although the genealogical inquires of Foucault and Nietzsche were not necessarily immune to Eurocentrism themselves, as I have discussed earlier, I think the theoretical ground they offer is a promising alternative for thinking about historical differences differently.

Amy Allen (2016) has made a similar argument in the context of Frankfurt School critical theory, problematizing their commitment to a developmental notion of history

that remains bound to Eurocentric progress and disregards the constitutive relation between European modernity and colonialism. Instead of history as such, Allen's approach is rather interested in the relationship between the notion of progress and normativity, but her argument about the relevance of Foucault for decolonizing critical theory is also of relevance for my discussion of historical thought. Allen argues that the backward-looking conception of progress as a "fact" developed by the recent generation of Frankfurt critical theorists remains too complicit with imperialist norms and their violent history. In contrast, Allen finds in Foucault's (and Adorno's) work useful tools for "decolonizing" critical theory and developing an alternative framework for thinking through the relationship between history and normativity; a framework that does not take factual progress in history for granted but rather tries to "historicize and to problematize the very notion of History" and is rather *forward-looking*. Allen suggests that Foucauldian genealogical problematizing can be viewed as an alternative methodology for a philosophy of history that historicizes "History", i.e., the Hegelian idea of history as a progressive linear development, and replaces that with an account of history as a story that includes both progress and regress (179). A genealogical philosophy of history does the significant work of establishing a framework that allows us to view history beyond the totalizing narratives of progress and linear development, but that work remains incomplete without actual genealogical inquiries that utilize the Foucauldian "razor" in specific contexts and engage with the historical and social reality.

Genealogical inquiries into colonial histories can do significant critical work by transcending the universalizing and totalizing logic of prevalent historical thought. An example of such an approach is Afsaneh Najmabadi's *Women with Mustaches and Men*

without Beards (2005) which takes up a Foucauldian inquiry into the historical constitution of the gender binary during Iranian modernity. Her main thesis about the causal relation between colonial European influence and the birth of a modern regime of heteronormativity and gender binary in Iran problematizes the "progress" of Iranian modernity and shows how it has come at the expense of the marginalization of gender and sexual minorities (and third gender or "Amrad" subjectivity specifically). While problematizing the history of the Iranian feminist movement, Najmabadi asks: "What cultural and political work could contemporary feminism perform to reconfigure a genealogical branching that would deal with its own history of erasures and screening?" (2005, 235). Najmabadi's genealogical inquiry of the gendered nature of Iranian modernity is an attempt to enable us to envision the plurality of progress that Chakrabarty was advocating for, thereby liberating historical thought about Iran from its dependence on Eurocentric progressivist history, even if such liberation means first and foremost an unsettling and disruption of self-understanding and identity of the Iranian subject. This disruptive function appears because Najmabadi's genealogical narrative about the relation between progress and gender in modern Iran destabilizes the logic of heteronormativity that is so central not just in prevalent history writing about Iran, but also to the Iranian social order and the self-understanding of subjects. Such critical problematization unmasks the fragments and heterogeneous forces that totalizing narratives of linear progress conceal. Encountering and developing such problematization, however, is not an easy task and is often met with resistance, but this only shows the timeliness of its critique, as my next section argues.

4. From Colonial Aphasia to Critical Problematization: Towards a Postcolonial Politics of Ourselves

From its beginning, postcolonial critique has been a form of critique invested in challenging and destabilizing relations of power and thus shares the genealogical rejection of pure science and its intrinsic interest in knowledge. Similar to genealogy, postcolonial critique replaces a purely scientific approach to history and culture with an interest in critique as *desubjugation*. Already Said had announced that his *Orientalism* is a "partisan book", and not a "theoretical machine" (1979, 339). But note that the *desubjugating* task of postcolonial critique only makes sense if we assume that colonial relations of power, or their afterlives, are still an influential presence in our current social-political order. Although it is common to suppose that colonialism and its hold on our political lives are over, Ann Laura Stoler's work on colonial duress hopefully sheds light on the complex forms of colonial presence in the postcolonial world and thus argues for a sense of continuity (amid discontinuity) between the colonial past and the present.

Stoler highlights the connectivities between the colonial past and the present through the concept of duress – her term for the durable marks of colonialism in our times in their "temporal, spatial, and affective coordinates" (2016, 6). Through what she calls "recursive analytics" (26), i.e., an analytical framework that looks at the modes of the mobilizations of the colonial past in the political present, Stoler argues for the investigation of the sedimentation and reutilization of colonial relations of power in the present, for example, as seen in racist state policies and contemporary forms of governmentality. Given that Nietzsche and Foucault's "effective histories" also trace the relation between the past and present, or as in Foucault, look at the historical conditions of possibility of the present, such analyses fit well with the agenda of genealogical

critique as I have described it above. However, though she explicitly aligns her work with his, Stoler also departs in some moments from the Foucauldian lens of analysis in significant and potentially productive ways.

According to Stoler, the "strange continuity" between the colonial past and the present is hidden and concealed in our times through a certain "occlusion", i.e., blockages that impede our access (2016, 10). Occlusion, a key term for Stoler, is an ongoing and malleable process, and one that gives rise to "imperial dispositions of disregard" that constitute part of the "colonial common sense" (22). What stands out in Stoler's account of occlusion is its attention to not just the relation between power, knowledge, and history, as we see in Foucault, but also the impact of the occluded histories of empire on the affective side of subjectivity. Stoler's lens of analysis investigates the effects of colonial relations of power on our sensory regimes and our ability and inability to listen, understand, and perceive, not just as it pertains to our thinking, but also our "sensory regimes" (33). In this regard, her recourse to history is not only motivated by the aim of enabling thought "to think differently", as it is for Foucault, but it also hopes to open pathways for "training or senses" (6).

Stoler introduces the concept of colonial "aphasia" for describing the intentional concealment of embarrassing histories and practices and the inability to speak about them, an inability that involves "both the loss of access and active dissociation" (2016, 128). Stoler argues that the relation of Western culture to its colonial history is not merely forgetfulness or ignorance but the seemingly contradictory condition of simultaneously knowing and not knowing. What Stoler calls aphasia is a political condition and not just the problem of the individual (12). Rather, it is a result of power relations that limit the

field of truth to which the subject has access. For Stoler, aphasia is not only a pathology of expression but also of thinking and feeling, so it pertains to both rational and affective dimensions.

Scholarship in the field of epistemology of ignorance (Medina 2017; Tuana and Sullivan 2007) provides useful resources that help with understanding the complex nature of colonial aphasia and colonial occlusion. Epistemology of ignorance aims to interrogate the conditions of active ignorance in subjects that exist due to their social position and privilege (i.e., factors such as class, race, gender, and others). Medina argues that racial ignorance is based on a certain epistemic dysfunction that involves "the cognitive-affective investment in not knowing, in protecting one's beliefs and meanings through a resistant insensitivity to meanings and perspectives that can create *friction* in one's epistemic life" (2017, 249). Active ignorance (or what sometimes is called willful ignorance) can be distinguished from passive ignorance at least based on the existence of cognitive resistances (such as prejudices), and affective resistances (such as apathy), among others (Medina, 2017, 250). When it comes to colonial ignorance, we see also that the investment in ignorance is both cognitive and affective, both of which emerge early in people's lives. Fanon (2008) has studied this dimension in colonial France through the analysis of children's cartoons and their subtle but influential racist content that plant racist beliefs and prejudices in children's minds and shape their affective perception of black people (so that they are for example scared of black men, as Fanon's fifth chapter on the lived experience of the black man skillfully shows). Active ignorance is not only a crucial part of children's socialization in certain parts of the world but is also reinforced throughout their lives through channels such as popular culture and news outlets, the

latter being the subject of Said's inquiry in his book *Covering Islam* (2008). Postcolonial scholarship from its beginning has been interested in the question of active ignorance, examples of which can be seen in Said's analysis of colonial knowledge production and prejudice in *Orientalism* (1979) and Spivak's analysis of structural silences of the subaltern in *Can the Subaltern Speak*? (2015).

As Medina has argued, genealogical critique is an especially apt method for studying epistemologies of ignorance because of its critical power that lies in "the capacity to empower people to resist oppressive power/knowledge effects" (2011, 21). Both genealogy and postcolonial critique offer ideas that diverge from the social common sense and enter the domain of what Stoler has called "occluded knowledges". While the political condition of occlusion – one that Stoler calls a "political disorder" (2016, 166) – prevents us from reflecting on colonial histories, recognizing colonial afterlives in our present and transforming the present, I suggest that it also speaks to the need for critical problematizations that challenge such troublesome relationship with the past and offer an alternative. Here lies the relevance and timeliness (and at the same time untimely character, to provoke Nietzsche's idea in *Untimely Meditations*) of postcolonial genealogical critique and its project of taking up occluded histories and making them available to us.

The force of a genealogical inquiry for postcolonial critique lies not only in its critical problematization of the present through narratives of the historical nature of our knowledge and belief system and their entanglement with relations of power. Postcolonial genealogical critique can also be an effective and transformative form of critique due to its style of addressing the subject and disrupting its self-understanding. In

other words, genealogical critique not only does epistemological work but also affective work, intervening with the existing forms of the psychic life of power and destabilizing it towards what Stoler calls "training our senses", i.e., a transformation of the subject that saves it from the "political disorder" of aphasia and gives rise to critical practices of the self. In that regard, genealogical work has a direct link to ethics as "a form of practice for responding to the problematizations we find ourselves facing" (Koopman, 2013, 183), and postcolonial critique will also necessarily involve an ethical dimension that pertains to self-practices that disrupt the colonial presence on the subjective level (which I will discuss in my next chapter at length).

To make the argument about the relation between the political disorder of aphasia and the transformative labor of genealogical critique more concrete, I suggest that the genealogical relation to the past can be inquired across two axes: archive, and memory. Archive and memory are both sites that entail traces of the past either in the form of historical documents or personal and collective knowledge about the past. While the archive has been quite central to Foucault's work and its reception across humanities and social sciences, the relation between memory and genealogical critique has been underdeveloped. However, thinking about that relation not only shows us interesting links between the archive and memory but also expands our understanding of the political labor of genealogical critique.

The meaning of archive in Foucault's work goes beyond the historical records we associate with the term in disciplines like history or anthropology. While the historical records and the old and often neglected documents that bear the relation of a culture to its past are important to the archive, for Foucault, the archive points to something more

general and fundamental. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault defines the archive as "the law of what can be said" and as "the system of discursivity" that lays down the "enunciative possibilities and impossibilities" for a culture at a time in history (2013, 145). While admitting that "the archive of a society, a culture, or a civilization cannot be described exhaustively" (146), and also that a greater chronological distance helps in the analysis of the archive, and that there are particular challenges and limitations involved in describing the archive of one's own time, Foucault nevertheless highlights the importance of archival work that attempts to "illuminate, if only in an oblique way, that enunciative field of which it is itself a part" (149). If the analysis of the archive is "the border of time that surrounds our presence, which overhangs it, and which indicates it in its otherness; it is that which, outside ourselves, delimits us" (149), then we can conclude that the archive is also defining the present by delimiting it.

The archive has been central to postcolonial scholarship despite the difficulty that is entangled with distinguishing colonial forms of knowledge production from historical realities. Said's idea of Orientalism as an "archive of information" (1979, 41) builds off of Foucault's notion of the archive and extends it to a discourse of global power relations, while still emphasizing the constraining effects of it as a discourse:

> In a sense Orientalism was a library or archive of information commonly and, in some of its aspects, unanimously held. What bound the archive together was a family of ideas and a unifying set of values proven in various ways to be effective. These ideas explained the behavior of Orientals; they supplied Orientals with a mentality, a genealogy, an atmosphere; most important, they allowed Europeans to deal with and even to see Orientals as a phenomenon possessing regular characteristics. But like any set of durable ideas, Orientalist notions influenced the people who were called Orientals as well as those called

> Occidental, European, or Western; in short, Orientalism is better grasped as a set of constraints upon and limitations of thought than it is simply as a positive doctrine. (1979, 41-42)

Said emphasizes the relationship between the archive and the present, and the fact that criticism is not secondary to the archive just because it comes after the archival documents. Rather, criticism is "the present in the course of its articulation" (1983, 51), i.e., it is an active part of the social reality, constructs and transforms it and with that also renders the archive as a system of discursivity contingent. Although Said is on most occasions interested in literary texts and literary criticism more specifically, he remains devoted to Foucault's idea of the archive as being about "the text's situation in the world" (1983, 151) and concludes that criticism needs to be worldly as well, i.e., it ought to be in the world and engage with ideas in relation to the social and historical conditions that give rise to them. In the case of Orientalism, these worldly aspects of the archive are especially important because the colonial archive of knowledge and literary production has a direct link to quests for political domination, and it is in the cultural archive that "the intellectual and aesthetic investments in overseas dominion are made" (1979, xxi). In Said's analysis, the worldly perspective of the archive also explores the affective dimensions of the archive (perhaps more than Foucault did), the way it was governed by "a battery of desires, repressions, investments, and projections" (1979, 8), highlighting specifically the role of paranoia (72) and fear (260) as a guiding affect in the discourse of orientalism. In this way, knowledge is understood not only in relation to power but also to affects that drive the pathologies of power and motivate the quest for domination, for example by imagining the Other as so threatening that dominating them is the only way of protecting oneself.

The disruption of occluded knowledges through genealogical critical problematization involves transformations that concern both epistemological and affective dimensions. I suggest that memory is crucial here – for it can be regarded and studied as connecting these two dimensions. Memory does not involve only our epistemic understanding of the past but is also crucial to our emotional apprehension of ourselves and our relation to the social world. Following the definition of memory offered by Michael Rothberg as "the past made present" (2009, 3), I would like to suggest a link between memory and genealogy as the study of the history of the present, where memory can be seen as both a constructive resource and a troublesome burden. Rothberg argues that memory "captures simultaneously the individual, embodied, and lived side and the collective, social, and constructed side of our relations to the past" (4). If we agree with his argument that "many manifestations of contemporary violence, including war and genocide, are in part the product of resentful memories and conflicting views of the past" (3), we can anticipate that another outcome of postcolonial genealogical critique can be healing the political pathologies of memory and prepare us for a better a future. I think such therapeutic function can indeed be found in genealogical critique, and that Nietzsche's and Foucault's works offer us resources for reorienting our relation to the past through transforming our relation to collective memory.

Fields such as critical genocide studies and Holocaust studies have been working towards a study of historical relations of extreme violence such as mass murder in a way that is insightful here. One function of such studies is the processing of repressed and unsettled collective memories and the production of collective historical consciousness about the past that might help prevent such catastrophes in the future (Rothberg, 2009). In

the case of colonial histories of violence and genocide, such work becomes more complex precisely because it cannot be simply directed towards processing collective memories of the past and cultivating a culture of "remembrance", something that for example has been central to Germany's handling of its Nazi history (Moses 2007). Rather, our work, and the task of postcolonial genealogical critique, needs to also involve recognizing the afterlives of colonialism and their role in our political life in the present, especially if we agree with the decolonial perspective that "the history of modernity is a history of power whereby genocide is a mode of instituting and maintaining the modern world order" (Zambrana 2020, 86). That being said, the notion of collective memory and the collective processing of the past is not unrelated to genealogical critique, and its postcolonial possibilities.

In Nietzsche, we find the idea that history can be a healing force for a culture that is suffering from its past. Nietzsche argues that for those people and cultures who have a "plastic power", history can be a means to "transform and incorporate into oneself what is past and foreign, to heal wounds, to replace what has been lost, to recreate broken moulds" (1997, 62). Forgetting a dark traumatic past (or pretending to forget it) might seem an easier path, but Nietzsche suggests that engaging with that past is the only way of healing from its long-term harmful effects. Paul Ricoeur (2004) has suggested the term "sick memory" for describing memories that take a pathological form. Ricoeur's analysis of sick memory draws on Freud and his argument about the connection between repressed memory and the "compulsion to repeat" (*Wiederholungszwang*). Like Nietzsche, Freud too suggests that not engaging with the past only reinforces the harmful effects of the past in the present, since in this case, the analysand reproduces the past "not

as a memory but as an action; he repeats it, without, of course, knowing that he is repeating it" (G.W., 10:129, as cited in Ricoeur, 70). What Nietzsche described as incorporating the past into oneself is described by Freud as *Durcharbeiten* or "working through" which is a dynamic and ongoing process through which the compulsion to repeat is replaced with a truthful and courageous confrontation with the past (Ricoeur, 71). According to Freud, transference in the context of psychoanalysis offers the "playground" for this form of working through oneself and one's relationship to the past. Going back to the analogy between critique and psychoanalysis and following Allen's (2020) thesis that genealogical critique offers a transformative experiential shift similar to the one realized through psychoanalysis, I suggest that genealogical critique can be regarded as another "playground" for working through sick memories, one that is dedicated not to childhood memories of the individual but to collective memories that condition the subjects in various ways.

In *"Society Must Be Defended"*, Foucault briefly mentions the importance of "local memories of struggles" for genealogical critique and points towards the constructive role of memory for critique. Foucault himself does not expand on this thesis much further, but retrospectively analyzing his work, we can see how genealogy itself works as a form of "counter-memory", precisely because of its work of giving voice to subjugated knowledges and local memories that have been excluded from official knowledge and official memory (Allen 2017b, 187). Said interestingly offers a similar perspective by describing the intellectual as a "counter-memory" (2006, 142) that offers a counter-discourse that challenges the dominant narratives of history:

> The intellectual's role is to present alternative narratives and other perspectives on history than those provided by combatants on behalf of official memory and

> national identity and mission. […] The need now is for deintoxicated, sober histories that make evident the multiplicity and complexity of history without allowing one to conclude that it moves forward impersonally, according to laws determined either by the divine or by the powerful. (2006, 141)

In Said's account, intellectual work draws a link between memory and history: offering an alternative account of history – which he calls "sober histories" – challenges the dominant historical consciousness of a society. Although what Said means by sober history does not necessarily equate with genealogy – Said seems to emphasize the disinterested nature of these histories here in a way that Nietzsche and Foucault might have found problematic – his argument about the relationship between history and memory can be helpful for our discussion of genealogical critique. If we understand the "official memory" of society as a form of collective memory that is produced and reinforced by social institutions such as schools and channels such as mainstream media and is in this way an effect of dominant power relations in society, sober histories inevitably contest those narratives of history and become a challenge to the official memories of each society. Both Said and Foucault highlight the role of alternative history as a "counter-memory", and while in Said's account, the privileged nature of intellectual work might be related to a certain moral authority of the intellectual, for Foucault, counter-memory is derived first and foremost from the archive: By going back to lost forgotten histories and bringing them back into our historical consciousness, "by coupling together of the buried scholarly knowledge and knowledges that were disqualified by the hierarchy of erudition and sciences" and recovering "the memory of combats, the very memory that had until then been confined to the margins" (Foucault 2003, 8).

An illustration of the role of genealogy as counter-memory can be found in Ladelle McWhorter's study of American racism and biopolitical normalization, where she looks at local memories of marginalized people in Virginia and elsewhere whose knowledge of the violence done to their communities "for decades was not recognized as any kind of knowledge at all and that barely recognizes itself as such even now" (2009, 295). McWhorter's work utilizes the memory of violence for the critique of the continuation of that violence in the present, and for illustrating how what is known as official memory is too often not the only channel through which people remember the past. Charles Mills' study of racism also highlights the role of collective memory in relation to white ignorance by discussing what he calls "the management of memory" in the working of white ignorance, i.e., the social regulation of official memory through various disciplinary and institutional channels that ultimately serves the interests of a privileged group and reinforces social power relations (2007, 28–29). I think it is important to highlight the active element of such ignorance. As we saw earlier with both Stoler and Medina, the occlusion of the history of colonial and racial oppression is reinforced every day through social structures, people's active role in upholding them, as well as their active resistance to alternative historical narratives on both cognitive and affective levels. Foucault's suggestion that genealogy should aim at an "insurrection of subjugated knowledges" (2003, 9) is apt precisely because it reminds us that the work of counter-memory is not a neutral remembering of what is forgotten but is perhaps also a revolt against such resistances to alternative narratives.

The two aspects of archive and memory are connected in so far as the recourse to the archive in genealogical critique is motivated by the objective of problematizing

official forms of memory, and confronting the subject with a "playground" or an experience that enables them to work through what thought "silently thinks, and so enable it to think differently", to borrow a phrase from Foucault (1990, 9), or to escape the socially induced forms of active ignorance that we are trapped in. The archive is the source from which critique draws to question the totalizing narratives of history and their occlusions and exclusions, to cut through stable identities and foundations and show them as the multivalent and fragmented beings that they are.

Postcolonial genealogical critique utilizes the practical approach to the past that Nietzsche and Foucault advocated for its own kind of critical problematization, one that is concerned with what I called earlier the postcolonial politics of ourselves. When it comes to colonial and postcolonial relations of power in which we are situated, genealogical postcolonial critique does not only turn them into the object of deliberation, as a rather traditional political critique would do as well, but it is also concerned with our relation to the present social structures and political formations. It problematizes this relation by challenging our affective, ideological, and personal investment and entanglement in them, and aims to destabilize our subjugation to them. If following the analogy between critique and psychoanalysis, we want to look for a form of "healing" in this process, such healing does not consist in the reconciliation as gaining "health" and overcoming the problem at hand. The healing, I would argue, consists in nothing more, and nothing less, than gaining the agency to confront our entanglement in these political dynamics, an agency that is quintessential for political action. But it would be wrong to assume that where critique ends political action begins, and that genealogical political theory is only concerned with the moment prior to political action. The work of critique

and problematization is a constant work, and as such a necessary complement to political action and saves it from falling into the creation of new totalizing and homogenizing narratives, in short, it saves action from dogmatism and thoughtlessness.

5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that the transformative force of genealogical critique works against History as a progressive, totalizing, and identity-based narrative, and against occlusions that such narrative includes. My recourse to the genealogical method of Nietzsche and Foucault aimed to show that the genealogical method offers unique promises for the critique of the postcolonial present. Through its strategic use of history, postcolonial genealogical critique problematizes the postcolonial present and the affective and ideological investment of subjects in it, pushing us toward engaging with what I called the postcolonial politics of ourselves.

Postcolonial genealogical critique will have different political quests depending on the context in which it is utilized. Whether it is used in the context of the Global North and is speaking to a problematization of colonialism in the context of former colonial powers, or whether it is applied in and to the Global South and analyzes the legacy of colonialism in the formerly colonized countries, in both contexts, the problematization of the colonial occlusion does important political work. In the context of formerly colonized countries, such critique speaks against the binary of Eurocentric modernization (in its Marxist and liberal forms) and the nativism of religious and ethnocentric anti-colonialisms. We saw that according to Najmabadi's genealogical analysis of Iranian feminism in the context of colonial modernity, both modernity in general and feminism

as a modern social enterprise are normatively ambivalent: they are subjugating and emancipating at the same time because they give rise to growth and more freedom for some but not without restricting other forms of freedom through exclusions and occlusions (which often includes violence). Through the analysis of the normative ambivalence of colonial modernity, genealogical critique also offers a critique of progress in the Global South and problematizes the occlusion of historical difference during the process of modernization (such as in Najmabadi's work, the occlusion of queerness in modern Iran), to open the possibilities of imagining the world once again as radically heterogeneous, to borrow Chakrabarty's formulation of his vision of a future beyond eurocentrism.

In the context of postcolonial critique in the Global North, postcolonial genealogical critique implies the acknowledgment of the "messy" and normatively ambivalent nature of the legacy of the enlightenment and colonial modernity for the present, and that such legacy is neither to be celebrated blindly (as perhaps some believers in the supremacy of European culture would tend to), neither set aside for refuge to non-modern, non-western cultures and modes of life. It is after jettisoning the "blackmail" of such binary thinking, as Foucault (1984, 42) calls it, that the serious work of critically engaging with the past begins. The end stage of this process might be a decolonial mode of transforming the legacy of enlightenment, which we could understand as a "fuller realization of enlightenment ideals" such as freedom, as Amy Allen (2016, 165) argues. But we also might want to quit the agenda of saving the enlightenment from itself, given that such hope might only repeat patterns of cultural patriotism and foundationalism. In other words, we might want to problematize the self-sufficiency of

enlightenment ideals and argue that there might be no reason to think colonialism itself was not an equally full realization of enlightenment ideals. As Foucault argues, the enlightenment is important in so far as it is the domain in which we are historically situated, but introducing "dialectical nuances" for distinguishing between the good and bad elements of enlightenment and seeking to recover the "essential kernel of rationality" of enlightenment does not rescue us from the blackmail of Enlightenment (1984, 43).

Rather than grounding itself in European enlightenment ideals, my account of postcolonial genealogical critique shifts the perspective to inquire into the relationality between Europe and its outside. In other words, postcolonial genealogical critique cannot be local anymore, as Foucault's genealogies with their focus on the "West" were. Rather, it transcends cultural and political borders (especially those between the so-called West and the so-called East) and regards such borders as the products of contingent histories. Such analytical shift can be found in the work of many scholars I discussed in this chapter, including Stoler, Najmabadi, and Said himself. This perspective sheds light on transnational power relations that were crucial to the development of modernity not only because of the existence of "the dialogical relations between the West and the Rest, a relationship that was essential to the formation of the ethos of modernity", and one that according to Tavakoli-Targhi, postcolonial historiography should reenact and narrate (2001, 33–34). A Transnational (and potentially global) lens enriches the genealogical perspective also due to the history of asymmetrical relations between colonial powers and colonized countries, their constitutive role in the development of colonial modernity, and their continuation in the present.

CHAPTER IV
CRITICAL ETHICS FOR THE OPPRESSED: ENVISIONING ETHICAL TRANSFORMATION WITH FOUCAULT, FANON, AND LORDE

"You who will come to the surface
From the flood that's overwhelmed us and drowned us all
Must think, when you speak of our weakness in times of darkness
That you've not had to face:

Days when we were used to changing countries
More often than shoes,
Through the war of the classes despairing
That there was only injustice and no outrage.

Even so we realized
Hatred of oppression still distorts the features,
Anger at injustice still makes voices raised and ugly.
Oh we, who wished to lay for the foundations for peace and friendliness,
Could never be friendly ourselves.

And in the future when no longer
Do human beings still treat themselves as animals,
Look back on us with indulgence."

(Bertolt Brecht, "To Those Born After")

"And self-empowerment is the most deeply political work there is, and the most difficult."

(Lorde 1984b, 170)

1. Introduction

In the previous two chapters, I have discussed some of the links between genealogical critique and self-transformation more broadly, elaborating on how

genealogical critique operates not only as a critique of power relations but also as a critique of the self by destabilizing subjectivity and opening up new possibilities for self-formation. Applied to the postcolonial context, I discussed how this involves challenging the colonial presence on the subjective level, visible in phenomena such as colonial aphasia, and reorienting ourselves towards transformative practices that change our relationship to the colonial past. In this chapter, I will explore the relevance of Foucault's ethical writings for developing these practices and will also turn to Frantz Fanon and Audre Lorde for exploring tools of ethical self-transformation in the context of the afterlives of colonialism and slavery.

In her book *Burdened Virtues*, Lisa Tessman asks whether oppression should be thought of as a mere deprivation of resources and social and material advantages, as it often is, or if there is also certain moral damage that oppressed people endure. For example, while the context of liberatory movements pushes social actors to remain loyal to certain collective goals, Tessman shows that "not only might a loyal disposition be detrimental for the one who is loyal, but it may actually turn out not to truly support liberatory ends" (Tessman 2005, 9). It seems that certain oppressive social contexts give rise to character traits that might not only limit the agency of individuals but also limit the potential for collective action and resistance in marginalized communities. Moral damage as a concept suggests that oppression can influence the character of oppressed people in ways that might become a barrier in their attempt to live their best possible lives. Framed in the language of virtue ethics, it can be said that moral damage points to the limits that oppression can place on the development and exercise of virtues. Attention to moral damage in oppressed communities does not deny the existence of moral damage in the

oppressors; in fact, one might argue that the oppressors are the ones who are primarily morally damaged and whose character is dominated by vices. However, attention to moral damage in oppressed communities can help us explore strategies for collective empowerment that can increase the effective resistance of the oppressed.

Tessman's understanding of moral damage and the constitutive relationship between ethics and social conditions builds off Aristotelian ethics but also challenges some of its main assumptions. Already in Aristotle's work, the ethical goal of flourishing is dependent on a set of contingent social conditions or "external goods", as Aristotle calls them (Aristotle 2009, 14). Aristotle believes that these external goods are distributed either *naturally* or *accidentally,* a conservative perspective that does not motivate any critique of that distribution.[9] Tessman suggests that we should conceive of those conditions as political ones and instead of simply talking about "moral luck", we should turn to the concept of "systemic luck" and analyze the *systematic* conditions that lead to an unequal distribution of external goods (Tessman 2005, 13). Taking into account the systematic conditions that shape the ethical life of individuals opens a perspective on ethics that enables us to study the relationship between ethics and social oppression more broadly. I understand oppression to include not only distributive inequalities that follow from institutional power structures but also the marginalization of individuals based on social norms and values that result in inequalities regarding social hierarchies and status, a form of inequality that Anderson (1999) has called "relational inequality". According to Tessman, attending to moral damage is an indispensable part of liberatory social change

[9] Aristotle focuses more on the accidental character of such distribution and brings the example of a very ugly or ill-born man who is unlikely to be happy as a result of that (ibid.). But there is a natural determination in the distribution of external goods as well, since the life of socially inferior groups such as women and slaves preclude happiness. See Introduction by Lesley Brown in ibid., p. xi.

because social change does not happen merely through institutional changes but requires ethical transformation as well (ibid., 27).

If we agree with Tessman that oppression poses an ethical problem for both the oppressor and the oppressed, the question arises: Given that character formation is a slow and lengthy process, usually undertaken not primarily under one's control and based on conscious decisions, how can liberatory social movements contribute not only to political change, but also to ethical change?

In this chapter, I further develop the perspective of postcolonial genealogical critique adumbrated above by exploring this question of ethical transformation and structural change through an engagement with Foucault alongside Fanon and Audre Lorde. Without wanting to commit myself to the project of developing a systematic virtue ethics, I borrow Tessman's analysis of moral damage in order to explore the relationship between critique, ethical self-practices, and internalized oppression. Feminist philosophers such as Cressida J. Heyes and Linda Martín Alcoff have shown the relevance of Foucault's ethical writings for theorizing feminist emancipation, and feminist self-transformation specifically, in the context of oppression (Heyes 2007; Alcoff 2018). Here I will be exploring this question through a focus on race and the afterlives of colonialism and argue that the development of ethical practices of the self can play an important role in the process of overcoming the harms of racial and colonial violence. While postcolonial theory traditionally scrutinizes cultural and social structures, with less emphasis on ethical and moral considerations, I contend that adopting a postcolonial ethical perspective is beneficial for effecting the social transformation that the tradition of postcolonial theory has been committed to. This perspective can be seen

as an approach to ethics that seeks to disrupt and reshape the ethical self that is partly shaped and influenced by histories of colonial oppression. By turning to ethical self-practices that empower and transform the self, this approach is concerned with overcoming moral damage as well as broadening the possibilities for collective political action.

The first section frames Foucault's ethics as critical ethics and shows how Foucault's idea of practices of freedom can be a useful framework for thinking about the relationship between ethics and oppression. I first explore the ethical implications of genealogical critique as a form of critique that transforms the subject, before discussing the relationship between ethics and power in Foucault's work and looking at the implications of this understanding of ethics for studying moral damage in the context of oppression. The next section engages with Fanon's understanding of decolonization as a constant struggle and argues that this struggle also needs to involve practices of freedom. Finally, the last section explores some of Audre Lorde's writings and argues that internalized oppression can be resisted and challenged – and hopefully overcome – through practices of freedom.

2. Foucauldian Practices of Freedom as Critical Ethics

In the introduction to *The Use of Pleasure*, Foucault introduces his understanding of ethics and defines it as "the manner in which one ought to conduct oneself—that is, the manner in which one ought to form oneself as an ethical subject acting in reference to the prescriptive elements that make up the code" (Foucault 1990, 26). Foucault distinguishes between two elements of morality that are in constant tension with each other: "moral

codes", which are the prescriptive ensemble that consists of rules, laws, and obligations, and "ethical self-formation" or simply "ethics".

The term "ethical self-formation" suggests that this aspect of morality is about the capability of the subject to work on itself and to explore a realm of ethical practice that goes beyond obedience to moral rules and codes. Foucault also uses the term "practices of freedom" to describe these practices, suggesting that these practices of self-formation are also ways of exercising freedom (ibid., 253). While morality always exists as an interplay between moral code and ethics, moralities differ in the weight they give to each of these elements. Foucault distinguishes between "ethics-oriented" and "code-oriented" moralities and argues – similar to many virtue ethicists such as Anscombe and MacIntyre – that during modernity, moral codes take the upper hand, resulting in a morality of "juridification" and "codification" (ibid., 30). As we will see, this distinction is helpful for exploring the possibilities of overcoming moral damage through certain ethical self-practices that can facilitate subjective transformation in the context of social oppression.

While in the ancient Greek and Roman world, ethical self-practices took priority over moral codes, Foucault argues that modern subjectivity is primarily shaped by its subjection to the order of the law in a way that provides little room for self-formation (Foucault 2005, 319). The flexibility of rules in relation to each person and each situation in ancient ethics enabled the agent of moral action to choose between different forms of conduct even when obeying the given rules, and as a result of this feature, the cultivation of a critical attitude that enabled making the right choices became important.

In ancient Greece, such a critical attitude was cultivated through various practices that included intellectual exchange, artistic creation, letter writing between friends, and

political debate. The best example is the practice of philosophy itself. Foucault's ethical writings discuss how philosophy itself functions as a form of ethical self-practice that aims to re-orient the relationship of the subject to itself and others. In this view, the radical force of philosophy in our times comes partly from the fact that it constitutes a "counter-practice" which can challenge the selves that have been consumed by disciplinary techniques of normalization and also the "despiritualization of philosophy", a process provoked by the rise of modern forms of knowledge and power that has led to the separation between ethical practice and philosophy (McGushin 2007, xx-xxii). As a result of this process, the care of people is primarily managed by (bio-)politics and by disciplinary institutions, but Foucault's genealogical project problematizes this history and renders it contingent, opening up possibilities for transforming its continuation in our present and for the revitalization of a practice of philosophy whose task of problematization ceases to be a theoretical one (ibid., 283).

Looking at the project of critical philosophy in this way, it becomes apparent that what I have called postcolonial genealogical critique has also an ethical dimension. The unity between theory and praxis – most notably argued for in the tradition of Marxist philosophy – becomes an ethical imperative when the theoretical engagement with the world not only serves the transformation of the world politically but also the transformation of the subject ethically.

2.1 The Ethical Work of (Genealogical) Critique

One of the main effects of genealogical critique can be found in the specific ways that it provokes the reader to revise her own beliefs and certainties with regard to the history of power and the constitutive role of power relations for the emergence of the self

(Saar 2009, 251). Genealogy produces a destabilizing doubt in the reader and entails an appeal for self-reflection as well as an invitation to self-transformation, thereby generating a crisis in the self-understanding of the reader (ibid., 253).

If we regard genealogies as not merely pointing out the general fact of contingency, but also narrating how the contingent present has emerged, a new perspective about the transformative potentials of genealogical critique will emerge. By narrating the history of the role of power in our constitution, genealogies offer rich materials for building strategies of resistance against this power and for remaking ourselves (Koopman 2013, 143). Foucault underlines this effect of genealogy when he writes that critique "is seeking to give new impetus, as far and wide as possible, to the undefined work of freedom" (Foucault 1984, 46). By equipping us with a certain reflexive relationship to ourselves that we did not possess before, critique enables the subject to challenge those norms and habits that are the results of relations of power and to move beyond them by developing alternative practices. Following McGushin's reading of Foucault that the "diagnostic" moment and the "etho-poetic" moment of Foucault's work (McGushin 2007, 22) are connected, and both can only be fully understood in relation to each other, I contend that the realm of these alternative practices that genealogy directs us to it is the realm of ethics. The example of homosexuality as analyzed both in Foucault's genealogical and ethical writings can shed light on this connection.

A well-known part of Foucault's project in volume one of *The History of Sexuality* is his analysis of the productive role of power in constructing sexuality where he argues that sexuality is not a natural given that power represses but "it is the name that

can be given to a historical construct" (Foucault 1978, 105). While rejecting the repressive hypothesis about sexuality, it is shown that modern sexuality is intensified and directed through continuous regulatory and corrective mechanisms that qualify, measure, hierarchize, and normalize (ibid., 144). The psychiatrization of perverse pleasure is a central element of this deployment of sexuality and gives rise to specific mechanisms of knowledge and power that function as corrective technologies for control. While in this context, homosexuality is pathologized as abnormal, the genealogy of modern sexuality shows the contingency of these processes and underlines the productive role of power in the formation of homosexuality as a pathological category. Considering the argument about the ethical implications of genealogical critique, we can see how this genealogical narrative entails ethical implications for the queer community in terms of the alternative possibilities that it opens.

One important lesson of the genealogy of modern sexuality is that the modern inclination to search our truth in sexuality is an effect of these forms of power that construct "the sovereignty of sexuality" (Foucault 1978, 156). It is the power that intensifies sexuality, multiplies and categorizes it in order to control, and the "mechanisms of sexualization" and "intensification of body" function as technologies of power in general (ibid., 121). While a counterattack at these technologies might be sought in recourse to pleasure – as Foucault himself mentions at the end of his book – the problem with this strategy is that in the context of these technologies every recourse to pleasure is trapped by "seeking pleasure in the truth of pleasure" (71). For this reason, the account of homosexuality that Foucault offers in his interviews in connection to his understanding of ethics distances itself from any celebration of homosexual desire or

sexual liberation but understands homosexuality as friendship or a way of life in a broad sense. After showing the constitutive connection between Foucault's ethics and genealogy, I will come back to this point and argue that Foucault's late understanding of homosexuality as a self-transformative practice builds on the genealogical insights about modern power relations that regulate sexuality.

Seeing genealogy and ethics as being in close connection offers us a better understanding of our possibilities of agency and transformation as subjects situated in relations of power. In the important essay "What Is Enlightenment?" Foucault argues that the historical form of critique and its practical form both are part of the critical attitude and accompany each other. Here the philosophical attitude appropriate to the critical ontology of ourselves is characterized as a "*historico-practical* test of the limits that we may go beyond, and thus as work carried out by ourselves upon ourselves as free beings" (Foucault 1984, 47, my emphasis). Foucault here brings genealogical critique in close connection to a practical experimental form of critique that includes *very specific transformations* (ibid., 46). Foucault proceeds with characterizing this ethos as "work carried out by ourselves upon ourselves as free beings" and regards the problematization of "the constitution of the self as an autonomous subject" as a crucial element of this ethos (ibid.). The work of critique includes besides the historical analysis of the present an engagement with oneself and an invention of oneself that enables self-constitution. In other words, subjects are not simply "liberated" by gaining knowledge about power but have to secure their freedom permanently through working on themselves.

The ethical dimension of this work is explored further by stating that there is no forming of the ethical subject without an "ascetics" or "practices of the self" that support

them (Foucault 1988, 28). Practices of the self or ascetics are the practices that serve the self-constitution of the subject and offer avenues for conducting oneself. In other words, while subjects are formed by the relations of power and their behavior is directed by rules and moral codes, they do have the possibility of forming themselves through ethical practices.

However, a political understanding of ethics must also be able to show us which practices can function as self-constitution and transform the self in an emancipatory way, and which practices are simply the effects of power. Especially in light of Foucault's understanding of power as having individualizing effects, the question emerges whether there can be a method for ensuring that the creation of the self through ethical practices is not merely another strategy through which power controls individuals. In her critical reading of Foucault's ethics, Lois McNay emphasizes the important point that "Without an interactional notion of the self – that is, without making the analytical links between one's own actions and the social context – the individual cannot distinguish between what constitutes a radical exploration of identity and what is simply an arbitrary stylization of life" (McNay 2013, 165).

If ethical practices are forms of self-constitution and self-determination, they need to be grounded on an understanding of their social context and the relations of power in the context in which they operate. I argued earlier that the work of genealogy as a history of power is exactly doing this task: by showing us how the contingent self and the contingent power relations have emerged, it offers us rich materials for resisting power and constituting ourselves. Only if we know the structure of power and its strategies, we

can identify its lines of fragility. Coming back to the example of homosexuality will shed light on this point.

In an interview, Foucault argues that the point about homosexuality is not to integrate the mere practice of same-sex sexuality into an existing culture. Rather, homosexuality should be seen as a form of friendship that invents a new culture, new forms of relationships, and in short, a new form of life (Foucault 2000a, 137). To realize this sort of invention, we need to advance into a "homosexual ascesis" that would make us work on ourselves. He elaborates his understanding of a new culture by suggesting to take "the pleasure of sexual relations away from the area of sexual norms and its categories, and in so doing making the pleasure the crystallizing point of a new culture" (Foucault 2000b, 160). In other words, to invent a new culture of sexuality, we first need to analyze the current sexual norms, their connection to power relations, and their effects and scope. Furthermore, in stating that a recourse to the secret of gay sexual desire is the wrong approach but homosexuals should rather try to invent new forms of relationships (Foucault 2000a, 136), Foucault seems to be pointing out that the obsession with the truth of sexuality simply remains an effect of the power relations without challenging them. As we saw earlier, the genealogy of modern sexuality shows the entanglement of the truth of sexuality and the regulatory techniques of power and sheds light on the mechanisms of sexualization that work in this context. When Foucault emphasizes that focusing on the sexual aspect of homosexuality is a "neat image of homosexuality without any possibility of generating unease" (ibid.), his statement can be better understood in light of his genealogical attempts to show how the relations of power that have reduced homosexuality to mere perversion. In this regard, it becomes clear why the emancipatory

potentials of homosexuality are not in its call for sexual liberation, but in the work it does to "reopen affective and relational virtualities" (ibid., 138). Thus, the genealogy of modern sexuality can direct us to new possibilities for the creative invention of new forms of practice that can be crucial for the self-constitution of the queer community as an oppressed community.

2.2. Ethics and Power

Foucault's understanding of ethics offers a promising basis for thinking about the relationship between ethics and oppression because it does not perceive ethics in a vacuum free of power hierarchies and inequalities. Following the Foucauldian principle that power is not merely constitutive of political institutions but shapes also our subjectivity, this turn to ethics is not a turn away from politics but a turn to a more radical notion of political resistance. As Foucault says in one of his lectures, ethics is a necessity for resistance "if it is true after all that there is no first or final point of resistance to political power other than in the relationship one has to oneself" (Foucault 2005, 252). For Foucault, the political relevance of ethics comes from the fact that any liberation from existing power structures "paves the way for new power relations, which must be controlled by practices of freedom." (Foucault 1998, 284). This suggested function of ethical practices as ways of keeping power in check and controlling relations of power has implications for both the oppressors and the oppressed.

If we agree that the damage of oppression often takes the form of the diminishment of self-formation, or self-practices, then it follows that oppression demands not only a political but also an ethical response from us. As we saw, Foucault's writings

on homosexuality highlight the role of ethical self-practices for gay people as a marginalized and oppressed community. For Foucault, the idea of friendship as a way of life becomes one of the avenues for ethical transformation and for the self-creation of a community that has been objectified by hegemonic social discourses but needs to work on defining and creating itself in order to gain agency in the face of social oppression. Looking at the relationship between social oppression and ethics more closely, one clear implication of Foucault's account is that an oppressed group needs to resist the internalization of socially dominant narratives about itself and partake in the labor of defining and creating itself autonomously and collectively. This work of self-creation and self-definition is the only way that the oppressed community can escape the dependency of its identity and culture on the oppressor, and also the only way that it can go beyond some of the harmful emotional effects of oppression such as self-hatred and shame. These harms, some of which I will discuss later in the context of Fanon's and Lorde's work, limit the possibilities of agency and ethical self-transformation, and can also become a barrier in the way of effective collective political action.

One might object to this view that if the possibility of self-formation is diminished through social oppression, how can we expect ethical self-practices from oppressed individuals? Foucault reminds us that where there is power, there is resistance. Although for Foucault, relations of domination like slavery posit an exception to this rule, Saidiya Hartman has argued that, even within the routinized terror of slavery, ''[w]ithin the confines of surveillance and nonautonomy, the resistance to subjugation proceeded . . . [and] the enslaved seized any and every opportunity to slip off the yoke.''(Hartmann 1997, 50). In other words, we cultivate ethical practices even when their possibilities

have been limited due to external factors simply because our capacity to engage in practices of freedom can diminish but as such it never disappears completely. As Amy Allen argues, the capacity to "reflect critically on existing technologies of the self and the capacity to transform deliberately such technologies" is required for any resistance to become possible (Allen 2008, 64).

I understand the normative force of Foucauldian ethical self-practices to be based on how these practices enable us to act autonomously in the world. Acting autonomously implies being more engaged in self-formation and self-transformation, and to borrow from Allen's definition of the term, it consists of "calling into question that which is presented to us as necessary, thus opening up the space for a possible transgression of those limits that turn out to be both contingent and linked to objectionable forms of constraint" (ibid., 65). As scholars (Allen 2008; Koopman 2013) have pointed out, concepts such as autonomy and freedom are underdetermined in Foucault's work, but this minimal definition will still allow us to make a distinction between practices in which one's actions are determined by power, and practices in which relations of power are challenged and socially imposed limits are transgressed. Here, we need to distance ourselves from a view of autonomy as a capacity that assumes metaphysical assumptions about transcendental ego because of its contrast to Foucault's understanding of subjectivity (Koopman 2013, 208). Rather, I suggest understanding one's engagement in practices of freedom as a question of character formation, i.e., as the cultivation of the ethical work of engaging in self-transformative practices. If we agree with virtue ethicists such as Aristotle that habit is key to the formation of character (Aristotle 2009, 23), we can say that it is the repetition of ethical self-practices that installs a self-reflexive

relationship in oneself that allows for self-formation and self-transformation. In this sense, engagement in practices of freedom can be a source of ethical empowerment because the subject is being formed to act more freely and autonomously in the world and to overcome some of the imposed limits by relations of power that have constrained its ability to engage in self-transformative practices in the past.

Foucault's ethics can be understood as *critical* ethics mainly due to this attention to the relationship between power and ethical formation based on which ethical self-practices provide oneself with an avenue to go beyond the scripts of action that are imposed by relations of power, and by socially dominant discourses, norms and institutions. Challenging these scripts through our actions is not a task that cannot be dealt with once and for all but is rather a constant practice. In his reading of Foucault's ethics, Richard Lynch describes this practice as a "critical attitude of reevaluation" that does not only concern social norms but also the reevaluation and examination of the self (Lynch 2016, 184). Another positive dimension of ethical self-practices for Foucault is how it affects our interpersonal relationships with each other. It is suggested that in applying self-techniques such as writing exercises, meditation, and dialogues, ethics is at stake, in the sense of a good relationship with our fellow humans, with 'as little domination as possible' (Foucault 1998, 298). Domination understood as "the crystallization or freezing of power relations" (ibid.) posits an obstacle to the development of ethical self-practices by creating hierarchical relations in which one side has little to no agency in shaping and defining the relationship. Although Foucault does not offer us much in terms of a theory about reciprocity and solidarity – an absence that some scholars have found problematic (Allen 2008, 69; McNay 2013, 165)– it seems that

this view already suggests a normative orientation for evaluating interpersonal relations by proposing that minimizing domination should be the criterion for evaluating these relationships. We can explain and defend this criterion by referring to the value of ethical self-formation that was elaborated earlier: Because domination can be an obstacle in one's engagement in practices of freedom, ethics needs to be concerned with minimizing domination in order to create space for practices of freedom.

A prominent application of this Foucauldian understanding of self-practices as transformative in the context of social oppression can be found in Cressida J Heyes' work (2007). From a feminist perspective, Heyes analyzes exemplary self-techniques such as dieting and cosmetic surgery that are overdetermined by normalizing and disciplinary power. Heyes maintains that it is not enough to criticize oppressive social structures and practices, but feminists also need to develop "constructive ethical practices" as alternatives. Heyes suggests yoga, and other practices "with potential for integrating the body-mind" such as martial arts (Heyes 2007, 128). She especially considers yoga a pleasurable counterattack against "the mental anguish and disease caused by corporeal normalization" that could move us into freedom (ibid., 121). One might disagree about the emancipatory potentials of these specific examples, but that does not take away from the value of the argument that developing specific transformative feminist practices needs to be an indispensable part of any feminist politics and theorizing that is interested in the empowerment of people who are oppressed by patriarchal relations of power.

While the idea of practices of personal transformation as a means for reaching feminist liberation has been explored in feminist scholarship from a variety of perspectives, less work has been done on this question concerning anti-racism and

postcoloniality. In the following, I will engage with Fanon and Lorde to explore the possibilities of ethical transformations that challenge the afterlives of colonialism and can serve as a guide towards anti-racist futures.

3. Critical Ethics and Decolonial and Anti-Racist Practices of Freedom

The moral damage resulting from histories of colonial and racial violence can be studied in at least two domains: the intersubjective domain of interpersonal relationships, and the subjective domain of one's relationship to oneself. On the intersubjective level, ethical possibilities become constrained because of the ways that the harms of histories of violence affect the current realities of marginalized communities. In Lorde's work, we see many examples of how the long history of racial violence and its continuation in the present has limited the possibilities of friendship and genuine human connection between black women in the United States. Fanon discusses similar problems in the context of postcolonial nations that have liberated themselves from the violence of colonialism but in which social dynamics continue to be burdened with that history. On a subjective level, that history continues to limit ethical possibilities primarily through the existence of internalized oppression and its personal, emotional, and ethical effects upon individuals.

I turn now to elaborating these two dimensions and exploring the possibility of ethical problematization and practices of freedom as avenues for transforming the damaged moral self. Nadine Ehlers' argument about the ethical work of problematization in terms of race and the exploration of alternative practices of the self provides an orienting frame here. In *Racial Imperatives*, Ehlers argues that

> Any ethical relation of self to self in terms of race must […] seek out and enact embodied practices that increase behavioral possibilities; these practices will

> be/are ones that enable subjects to live the racialized body in ways that question dominant power/knowledge relations and refuse disciplinary aims of racial docility. (Ehlers 2012, 138)

Since racial oppression also affects one's relationship to oneself, for example through internalizing oppressive norms about beauty or self-worth, the resistant subject needs to explore ethical possibilities for working on changing these influences and transforming the self that has been shaped by conditions of racial oppression. If we understand race in this context as a sedimentation of the afterlives of colonialism and slavery, we can see that the "ethical relation of self to self in terms of race" offers transformative possibilities both in the post-slavery US context and in postcolonial settings.[10] In a similar vein, ethical work in relation to decolonization can be defined as a practice that aims to increase the freedom and behavioral possibilities of individuals whose lives and actions are caught in and overdetermined by the afterlives of colonialism and its legacies.

Framing the work of this ethical attitude as a self-transformative work that challenges dominant power/knowledge relations, as Ehlers argues, suggests that these practices do not follow socially dominant norms but rather deviate from them. This disobedience against dominant social norms can be understood as virtuous if we agree with Butler that "virtue is not only a way of complying with or conforming with pre-established norms. It is, more radically, a critical relation to those norms, one which, for

[10] Although the work of some afro-pessimist scholars such as Frank B. Wilderson's *Red, White & Black: Cinema and the Structure of US Antagonisms* (2010) argues for the incommensurability between anti-black racial violence and colonial and settler-colonial violence, other approaches to black studies have offered frameworks that attend to histories of both enslavement and colonialism. An example can be seen in Sylvia Wynter's body of work that offers a critique of Western humanism by studying how it has constructed both black and indigenous and colonized populations as its perpetual limit. The links between anti-black and colonial racism can be better studied in a theoretical framework that moves away from race as an essence and studies racialization based on its political functioning as a product of power and as tool of political management and social organization (Sheth 2009, 4). By holding these two contexts together, I am not arguing for sameness, but rather pointing towards parallels that allow certain practices of resistance to be borrowed and developed across these historical contexts.

Foucault, takes shape as a specific stylization of morality" (Butler 2002, 224). What follows from such an understanding of critical self-practices in relation to race and postcoloniality is that the ethical work of postcolonial critique does not consist in simply giving the subjects their "authenticity" back, but that it must involve a certain self-distancing and self-overcoming, a certain self-critique. As we will see, both Fanon and Lorde advocate for practices of self-scrutinization and self-critique as avenues for overcoming the internal life of oppression and provide us with helpful resources for thinking about the transformative possibilities of ethical practices in the context of histories of colonial and racial violence. While Fanon's work provides a justificatory account for deploying the ethics of self-transformation in postcolonial contexts, Lorde adds conceptual tools that enrich the conceptions from Foucault's account and help us overcome some of its limitations.

3.1 Fanon and Decolonial Practices of Freedom

Although at first glance ethics is not the central theme in Fanon's writings and certainly did not take as much of his scholarly attention as the study of mental illnesses and neurosis in his psychiatric writings, the experience of racialization and alienation in *Black Skin White Masks* and the complex dynamics of anti-colonial revolution and its aftermath in *The Wretched of the Earth*, in all these works there is also a subtle attention to the ethical dimensions of oppression and liberation. In Fanon's work, morality and ethics are discussed in two major ways. In the first usage of the term, Fanon uses the terms morality and ethics to point to the existing hegemonic understanding of right and wrong. Here Fanon discusses how the socially dominant understanding of morality is conditioned by a racist and colonial viewpoint that equates white culture with good and

non-white cultures with evil, according to which "sin is black and virtue is white (Fanon 2008, 118). This dominant understanding of morality not only shapes the ethical perspective of colonizers but also becomes internalized in the black and colonized population and gives rise to a certain ethical conflict or fracture in which "moral standards require the black, the dark, and the black man to be eliminated from this consciousness" (ibid.). Similarly, the colonized are described as being insensible to ethics because they lack moral values (Fanon 2004, 41). This usage of the term is merely descriptive and refers to the existing understanding of ethics as a set of moral rules and norms that serve the interests of the colonizers and are racially determined.

In a second usage of the term, Fanon discusses ethics through a normative lens to evaluate the condition of the colonized and the oppressed. In *Wretched of the Earth*, the state of formerly colonized countries after independence is described as a state of "moral decline" (177). While independence has brought moral reparation to the colonized because it recognized their dignity, this reparation is incomplete because the work of elaborating a society and building values has not been accomplished yet (40). In *Black Skin White Masks*, the problematic condition of the black subject is discussed through a clinical and existentialist lens but many of these problems such as guilt and loss of dignity are also ethical problems.

What stands out from Fanon's inquiry about the ethics of the oppressed is first of all his historical-political perspective: Fanon situates ethical problems in the historical context of colonialism and its afterlives, instead of viewing them as problems of individuals and rooted in factors such as moral will, family upbringing or natural tendencies. While the moral system of the dominant white population deems the

oppressed as immoral and devoid of virtue, a perspective that is both racist and essentialist, Fanon's approach is not to celebrate the authenticity or moral heroism of the oppressed but to acknowledge the moral damage of oppression upon their subjectivities, but to situate this damage in the historical context of colonialism and show how colonial relations of power have given rise to these specific maladies. This historical and genealogical element is important for the study of ethical practices in relation to colonial afterlives because situating ethical practices in a historical context enables inquiry about ethical limitations to go beyond the focus on moral will (as in Kant) or moral luck (as in Aristotle). It also does not situate ethical actions in the context of an individual's history – for example by focusing on childhood traumas – as classical psychoanalysts would do. Rather, ethics is studied in relation to the historical and political conditions that have limited the possibilities for certain forms of ethical self-practices to emerge, which also paves the way for exploring how practices of freedom can be cultivated despite this history.

The political-historical conditions of colonialism shape the life experience of the black colonial subject in the white world on an ethical level because his personality and character are determined by these conditions. In Fanon's analysis, oppression manifests itself in the personality of the black colonized subject in so far as he develops problems such as inferiority complex, dependency complex, lack of self-esteem, and guilt. While Fanon studies these traits primarily from a clinical and phenomenological perspective, the existence of these traits has also an ethical dimension in so far as they manifest the moral damage of oppression on the character of the oppressed subject and on his ability to engage in self-practices that might contribute to his self-formation and self-creation. In

other words, the black subject is not just incapable of developing "good" relationships – good in the sense of relationships that involve the least amount of domination, as discussed earlier – with white people because of the racist colonial structures governing their relationship, but he is often also incapable of developing such ethical relationship with himself and his community because of the ways that the internalization of oppression has affected his character and limited his possibilities for ethical practice and self-formation. In existentialist terms, one could say the black subject is not acting authentically and based on freedom as an ethical ideal but exists as "being-for-others" (Sartre 1956, 475), i.e., objectified by the white gaze without asserting his subjectivity and freedom. In Foucauldian terms, one could say that the external conditions and the social power relations determine the conduct of the oppressed subject and make it difficult for the oppressed subject to engage in practices of freedom that create the possibility of "forming oneself as a subject in control of his conduct" (Foucault 1990, 28). As Lewis Gordon's reading of Fanon suggests, Fanon's main solution in *Black Skin White Masks* is a recourse to political and structural change that makes the emergence of ethical reciprocal human connections possible (Gordon 2000, 35). But in *Wretched of the Earth*, his analysis of the postcolonial social-political dynamics shows that political decolonization is insufficient for overcoming the damage of colonial oppression and that repairing the damaged self involves much more work beyond revolutionary action.

Despite arguing at the beginning of *Wretched* that violence is a "cleansing force" for the individual (Fanon 2004, 51), later in the book it becomes clear that violence is far from the final solution for colonized people. Decolonization is certainly one step in the long process of redistributing relations between people and social groups, but according

to Fanon, it also gives rise to new problems, among them ethnocentrism, religious rivalries, dictatorships, and ultranationalism, issues that all are very familiar to us from many formerly colonized countries and the violent conflicts that have emerged in them. According to Fanon, violence does not vanish after independence (ibid., 35-36). The subject is free from colonial subjection – at least in the form that it was experienced during the colonial era – but replaces the militant subjectivity with one characterized by ethnocentric, nationalist, gendered, and tribalist bonds. These bonds might be exasperated as a reaction to the violence of the anti-colonial revolution, but they remain intact in the postcolonial society and need to be confronted as a problem. As Butler suggests, "we have to ask whether violence itself, said to efface the marks of violence, does not simply make more such marks, leaving new legacies of violence in its wake", i.e., whether violence can remain a pure instrument (Butler 2015, 187). Rather, it seems that violence often gives rise to a cycle of violence in which old problems are replaced by new ones, a cycle for which without a doubt the event of colonialism is to blame, and not anti-colonial revolution. Fanon might be right that violence is an indispensable part of decolonization, but this does not rule out problematizing the afterlives of such violence as social maladies.

Fanon argues that there is a certain "moral decline" that shapes the society after independence that shows itself in many examples, from political corruption to greediness and egoism that shapes the political and ethical landscape of newly independent countries (Fanon 2004, 116). This moral decline cannot be solved by political and structural change only. Instead of relying on the transformative force of violence, Fanon argues that the colonized need to replace the national consciousness with a "social and political

consciousness" (ibid., 142) and aim their struggle not simply at the annihilation of colonialism but at a "fundamental redistribution of relations between men" (ibid., 178). It seems that in order to overcome the social harms of the postcolonial era and break free from the cycle of violence, what is needed after political decolonization is a fundamental transformation of consciousness as it relates to social relations. Since in Fanon's account, this transformation cannot be achieved through mere political action, part of this work needs to be done through the ethical realm of practices of freedom.

As Scott (1999, 219) has argued, part of the value of implementing the Foucauldian idea of practices of freedom in Fanonian politics is that the postcolonial state becomes a structure that sustains itself by producing new hegemonies and normalizing strategies and produces exclusions, and practices of freedom are an important avenue for controlling the harms produced by relations of power. Given that one of the common grounds between Foucault and Fanon is how they both consider the acts of de-subjection as only a first step of an effective practice of resistance, as Lorenzini and Tazzioli (2018) argue, exploring decolonial practices of freedom through combining the conceptual tools of Foucault and Fanon provides a productive pathway for developing alternative strategies of resistance and self-transformation.

Given that the struggle for decolonization is a constant one, as Fanon argues (2004, 51), it is imperative to think about decolonial liberation not as a single episode of emancipation but as a continuous and permanent work. Fanon's writing emphasizes the collective, inventive aspect of this work. Here is a point where it is helpful to read Fanon and Foucault alongside each other: Foucault's idea of practices of freedom gives us a useful framework for theorizing about the need for resistance in general – and decolonial

resistance in particular – as permanent work that has both ethical and political dimensions. For Foucault, this work contains individual and collaborative ethical self-practices that establish a reflective relationship to oneself and to each other. For Fanon, examples of this include the work of political education, the social impact of political leaders and their implementation of political programs, and in general the work of creating a collective social and political consciousness that recognizes the nuances and ambivalences in decolonial politics and the multiple faces that oppression takes. The role of political education as a transformative practice is especially crucial for him, and although we don't find a systematic theory about liberatory education, as it is offered later by Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Fanon's emphasis on the transformative and empowering role of education for the formation of character and consciousness is crucial for understanding his idea of decolonization as permanent work that is not only aimed at transforming social structures and institutions but also the oppressed themselves. If we frame these practices as practices that can guide us towards controlling relations of power and establishing "good relationships" among ourselves, i.e., relationships with as little domination as possible, as Foucault's understanding of practices of freedom suggested, we can see how they can productively challenge the new hierarchies of power relations based on ethnicity, gender, religion and so forth that we find many postcolonial societies.

While in the recent Fanon literature, much of the discussion focuses on the emancipatory role of violent militant work (Neil 2004; Stawarska 2020), the intellectual aspect of Fanon's decolonial work has often been underemphasized. This is partly the result of what a few of Fanon's own passages suggest, and overall, the consequence of

many scholars having a very selective reading of his work. Fanon's famous praying at the end of *Black Skin White Masks*, "O my body, make of me always a man who questions!" (Fanon 2008, 206) certainly suggests that the body of the oppressed affects change not only through violence and militant work but also through questioning and inquiry. Butler argues that it is here Fanon's work offers "an alternative to the hyperresolute masculinism of anticolonial violence" by calling for a certain reflexivity and self-scrutiny that implies this interrogatory relation to oneself and others (Butler 2015, 193–94). Interestingly, this reflexive dimension of decolonial work has remained under-discussed in the Fanon reception, a pattern that started from Sartre's preface. Perhaps the legacy of orientalist and colonial thinking with its emphasis on the primitive physical nature of the colonized and their lack of intellectual abilities has not been unimportant for the ways that many white thinkers have read and discussed Fanon, a pattern that Lowe has described in another context as "postcolonial Orientalism" (Lowe 1991). This aspect of Fanon's work is crucial for developing an understanding of decolonization that centers practices of freedom and self-transformation as resources for overcoming some of the damages that characterize the afterlives of colonialism. The cultivation of this self-reflexive attitude is not only crucial for avoiding the harms of dogmatism that new forms of group-based political attachments can give rise to, but it is also important for engaging in the ethical work of self-formation and the cultivation of character that allows one to practice one's agency in the world beyond the hold that power has over one's subjectivity.

For Fanon, the self-scrutinizing nature of decolonial work can be situated in the history of self-criticism as a traditional institution in Africa that has enabled collective

and public engagement with social problems in African societies (Fanon 2004, 12). In this sense, we can conclude that decolonial practices of freedom include a strong reflexive element for Fanon, a dimension that is crucial for going beyond the "crude, empty, fragile shell" of national consciousness, to invent a "new concept of man" and to realize a fundamental transformation of social relations (ibid., 97). Fanon's emphasis on "introducing invention into life" and pursuing an "endless and constant self-creation" (204) can be read as an imperative for self-transformation: if in postcolonial societies, values, norms, and character are fundamentally shaped by the history of colonialism and its harms, the only way of overcoming these harms is by reinventing and redefining oneself. This decolonial imperative of self-creation shows an interesting parallel to Foucault's discussion of ethical practices in the context of homosexuality: In both perspectives, creative practices of freedom become an important avenue for overcoming the damages of oppression.

Overall, the Fanonian perspective about decolonial resistance highlights the insufficiency of the anti-colonial revolution for guaranteeing freedom to the oppressed. It shows how resistance needs to be continued after independence through engaging in practices of self-transformation that aid us in overcoming the harmful traces of colonialism upon ourselves, that is, upon our consciousness and our habits, practices, and character. While some scholars at the time essentialized these harms as part of the personality of the colonized, for example, scholars of colonial psychiatry who viewed the so-called "North African Syndrome" as a sign of the natural backwardness of the colonized (Fanon 2004, 223), Fanon's historical analysis provides us with a social critique of the historical conditions that have given rise to the damages in the present and

thereby problematizes this present. Through an emphasis on the need for education, self-critique, and self-invention, Fanon suggests a self-creating and self-transformative ethical dimension as a crucial part of decolonial resistance. While some of Fanon's analysis about self-transformation remains abstract, my discussion of Lorde's work in the next section will explore some of the more concrete challenges of interpersonal relationships affected by histories of violence.

3.2 Lorde on Anti-racist Practices of the Self as Empowerment

Some of Audre Lorde's writings offer us additional helpful tools for thinking about the empowerment of the oppressed subject from an ethical perspective, that is, an empowerment that can transform the relationship of the subject with itself and to others through establishing practices that form one's character anew and erase or diminish the hold of oppression upon the character of the racialized subject. Lorde's approach to the study of racial oppression is distinguished through its attention to internalized oppression and to the ways that oppression can transform the character of the oppressed subject and limit the possibilities for establishing a relationship with oneself and others that does not entail traces of the violence of oppression. For this reason, Lorde's work is an illuminating resource for exploring the question of how histories of racial and colonial violence limit the possibilities for ethical self-formation. Although Lorde's discussion focuses on the example of the black community in the context of the afterlives of slavery in the United States, this history is not completely separate from the history of colonialism, and as I will suggest later, the anti-racist practices of the self that are elaborated by Lorde have relevance beyond their particular context.

One of Lorde's distinctive contributions to anti-racist scholarship is her idea that anti-racist work does not entail only the critique and transformation of structures and agents of oppression but that it also requires political and personal transformation on the side of the oppressed communities. In this view, oppression does not remain only external to the subject, but it also changes one's subjectivity and leaves traces on the habits, ways of relating to oneself and one another, and the ethical and emotional scripts that define one's actions in the world. This understanding of the relationship between oppression and subjectivity is consistent with Foucault's theory of subjectivity and the idea that power plays a productive role in shaping subjectivity. If oppression is not merely external but also internalized, it also means that it might outlive the life of external social oppression and that we need distinct tools for the work of outrooting its effects upon the self. Lorde argues that although addressing the outward expressions of racism and sexism is easier, the patterns of internalized oppression need to be rooted out "if we are to move beyond the most superficial aspects of social change" (Lorde 1984a, 123). In other words, radical social change requires also radical work on self-transformation.

While the internalization of oppression is usually studied with a focus on the question of ideology and how oppression shapes the knowledge and self-understanding of subjects and might lead them to internalize socially dominant but distorted narratives about themselves, Lorde's approach is rather interested in the political generation of habits, emotions, behavioral patterns, and character traits. Despite the lack of the language of ethics in Lorde's own work on this topic and the absence of attention to the ethical dimension of her work in secondary literature, I agree with Ward (2020) that

philosophical approaches to ethics have much to learn from Lorde's writings. Reframing her analysis as an analysis about the relationship between ethical formation and oppression helps us to reflect on questions such as: How does oppression affect the habits and behavioral patterns of oppressed subjects? If habits are the basis for character formation, as virtue ethicists argue, what are some of the character traits that are produced as a result of oppression? Last but not least, what are some avenues for training our senses and emotions anew and establishing new habits that can transform one's character? If life under oppression has taken away some of our *friendliness*, as Brecht points out in the poem quoted in the beginning, what are the possibilities of bringing back friendliness despite dealing with the harsh realities of a hostile world?

In describing the effects of oppression on the character, Lorde suggests that oppression hardens us like stones (Lorde 1984b, 160*)*, a metaphor that points to how certain emotional and ethical capacities crucial to interpersonal relationships such as kindness and tenderness are affected by oppression, and perhaps also how ones' agency for ethical self-transformation becomes limited as a result of this hardening. The challenge here is about how to emancipate the subject from this hardening and from the ways it has been conditioned by oppression, and how to engage in practices that enable self-formation and cultivate a certain agency despite the effects of social conditions upon one's character. I argue that with Lorde, we can define the task of anti-racist practices of freedom precisely as the task of augmenting the capacity for ethical self-formation, a capacity that allows us to shape our character anew, define ourselves anew, and distance ourselves from harmful social norms and expectations that we have internalized and that have limited our ethical as well as our political potentials and capacities.

In her writing, Lorde takes a close look at some of the examples of the damage of oppression upon the community of black women and their interpersonal relationships. It is shown that despite the common experience of marginalization as black women, the development of bonds of friendship and solidarity among black women faces major barriers. Systems of oppression have given rise to patterns that "condemn us to the cosmetically related repetitions of the same old exchanges, the same old guilt, hatred, recrimination, lamentation, and suspicion" (Lorde 1984a, 123). Lorde looks at some of the patterns that define this lack of friendship among black women: How black women judge each other more harshly (Lorde 1984b, 145), how they remain distant and reluctant to befriend and support each other (ibid., 147), how there can be cruelty in how black women treat each other and refuse to connect to each other (146). The power of Lorde's analysis lies in how she traces these harms first to black women's relationship with themselves, and then ultimately to the effects of racism upon them, arguing that the anger that they direct against each other is misplaced and needs to be directed against white people and systems of violence.

According to Lorde, behind the harshness that characterizes some of these relationships is the lack of self-acceptance among black women themselves, which is itself an effect of the harshness directed at black women by social forces and by white people in a racist society. The external harshness is often internalized during childhood, for example when children internalize the idea that "black equals bad" (ibid., 149), and when they are dealing with the harms and damages of racism, including its effects upon their parents, inside of their own families (ibid., 146). The underlying insight in this analysis is that interpersonal relationships are shaped by our relationship with ourselves,

and if that is damaged because of various forms of social harm, the damage will also extend to our relationships with each other in our communities. The idea of the constitutive relationship between ethical self-relation and relations with others is already present in Aristotle's virtue ethics where he argues that being a good friend for others requires a certain relation to oneself characterized by self-love (Aristotle 2009, 168). While for Aristotle, the existence or absence of this self-relation is only an ethical question, one that can be traced back to the existence or absence of moral luck, Lorde's analysis suggests that we need to think about the connection between self-relation and our relations to others in a political framework that situates them in the context of histories of racial violence and allows us to see the systematic conditions under which self-love and self-acceptance might have been rendered inaccessible for certain groups of people. Lorde's reminders of a past when African women healed each other with tenderness (ibid., 152) highlight the contingency of the current damages in black women's communities and point to the possibility of transforming one's relationship with oneself and others and overcoming the present harshness.

Based on her attention to the complex internal life of oppression, Lorde's vision for social change and transformation has a strong ethical element that involves intellectual, artistic, and critical work on oneself and our communities. Because this work encompasses practices that aim to transform the self, it has a proximity to the Foucauldian idea of ethical self-practices as transformative practices of freedom that enhance the agency of individuals. Lorde's insight that internalized oppression turns the experienced harms into mistrust and anger against other marginalized subjects instead of the real sources of oppression is followed by the invitation to work on the damaged self

and to engage in practices that facilitate new ways of character formation. In Lorde's writing, the radical work on the self takes two dimensions that are related to each other: self-scrutinization, and cultivation of habits. In so far as the development of new practices is dependent upon exploring the limitations of current ones in order to ultimately contribute to an alternative form of character formation, these two are necessarily related to each other.

Self-scrutinization is the attempt to explore and acknowledge internalized oppression and the sedimentation of the effects of histories of violence in the self. While it is out of the need for survival and self-protection that the oppressed might direct their examination only upon others, Lorde argues that it is crucial to create space for self-scrutinization that ultimately provides the basis for "claiming some power over who we choose to be" and enables us to "establish authority over our own definition" (Lorde 1984b, 173). The distinction that Lorde makes between suffering and pain points to the importance of this self-reflexive ethical element for oppressed communities. While suffering is "the nightmare reliving of unscrutinized and unmetabolized pain", naming and recognizing and scrutinizing the pain enables one to transform that experience into something else, "strength or knowledge or action" (ibid., 171). By emphasizing the importance of scrutinizing suffering, Lorde's perspective suggests that self-examination does not happen merely on an analytical or intellectual level but also on the level of deep engagements with feelings, and it is through these feelings that the condition of possibility for an oppositional and felt knowledge that can guide action emerges (Ward 2020, 18).

I discussed earlier how genealogical critique performs certain ethical labor by helping to cultivate this dimension of critical self-reflection in relation to the ways that the subject is shaped by relations of power. Lorde's vision complements Foucault's in the sense of bringing to our attention the need to also turn this self-reflection towards the suffering experienced in the present. With Lorde, we can see the value of connecting the history of power relations to the present ways that the subject is shaped by power and suffering from it, in order to enable the subject to gain the agency required for self-transformation, including the transformation of the forms of consciousness, habits and character traits that are shaped by power relations. For Lorde, this ethical examination is not only philosophical and historical but also engages with one's feelings in the present through practices such as journaling (and her *Cancer Journals* are an example of that), and writing poetry, which she describes as an "illumination" that helps us scrutinize our lives (Lorde 1984, 36).

Based on cultivating this self-scrutinization and examination, a new perspective is gained that not only changes knowledge but enables the subject to change and redirect certain emotions, most importantly anger. Because it is misplaced anger that turns into hatred and creates a barrier to building community and friendship, training one's anger and re-channeling it becomes crucial. The pathologies that haunt friendships and interpersonal relationships in marginalized communities need to be understood in relation to the violence of their experienced oppression, and according to Lorde, overcoming those harms also involves changing our positionality in relation to that experienced oppression: to become (more) angry at the sources of oppression here becomes the condition of possibility of the emergence of true friendship, and the disappearance of

hostility among the oppressed. In Lorde, the ethics of friendship takes a political character in so far as true friendship is conditioned upon our politicization and the cultivation of anger against oppression. Lorde's invitation to the cultivation of tenderness as a habit, when she writes that "we have to consciously study how to be tender with each other until it becomes a habit because what was native has been stolen from us, the love of black women for each other" (Lorde 1984b, 175), can better be understood in relation to this politicization of emotions that create a space for kindness that did not exist before. In other words, the character formation that Lorde suggests is not possible without a certain emotional investment in the political.

Applying Lorde's analysis about the necessity of scrutinizing socially induced forms of suffering and redirecting the resulting negative emotions against the actual sources of oppression can also be applied to other contexts. In the context of the queer community, it seems that building solidarities and friendships that provide new collective self-definitions and new creative forms of life and challenge the framework of heteronormativity also goes hand in hand with overcoming internalized oppression, cultivating anger against the violence of heteronormativity and using that anger as a fuel for political action. This is something that remains missing in Foucault's understanding of ethical self-practices and his analysis of homosexuality and friendship specifically, and another way that Lorde's lens can enrich the Foucauldian understanding of ethics. In Lorde's work, we also see an attention to relations of reciprocity that remains missing in Foucault's work but is an important aspect of practices of freedom for oppressed communities precisely because one of the ways that the harms of oppression manifest themselves is in the damages they inflict upon interpersonal relationships. In the context

of postcolonial histories, we can think about the hostility engrained in the ethnocentric and tribalist dynamics that structure social relationships in many postcolonial societies, a hostility that can be overcome only by being scrutinized and examined and ultimately contextualized in relation to the histories of violence that have given rise to it. Additionally, by applying Lorde's analysis, we can conclude that such hostility also needs to be redirected against actual sources of oppression and inequality, for example, relations of neocolonial domination that create barriers to the growth and progress of postcolonial countries and need to be challenged. For Fanon, challenging neocolonial relations of domination is especially important because violence continues to shape international politics even after colonialism and can ultimately only be overcome through a radical redistribution of wealth (ibid., 55). It is this violence that gives rise to hostile dynamics between global powers and newly independent countries whose diplomacy he describes as "diplomacy in rage" (Fanon 2004, 37). Thinking Fanon and Lorde together, we can conclude that cultivating anger against the sources of oppression in the postcolonial context is important not only for the sake of collective political resistance but also for protecting reciprocal human relationships from the damages of oppression.

4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the transformative possibilities of ethical self-practices in the afterlives of histories of violence by exploring the relationship between critique, ethical practices, and internalized oppression. I argued that oppression leaves traces on the ethical self that call for the development of alternative ethical practices in order to enable an alternative ethical subjectivity freed from internalized oppression. My discussion of Foucault's ethical writings as critical ethics argued that Foucault's account

of practices of freedom offers a productive framework for thinking about the transformative potential of ethical self-practices for oppressed communities. The engagement with Fanon offered a justificatory account for the need for ethical self-practices in postcolonial contexts, and Lorde's analysis of internalized oppression and transformative practices added further conceptual tools for thinking about ethics in relation to the afterlives of slavery and colonialism. In the framework of critical ethics, ethical self-practices can certainly be transformative for socially privileged groups as well and not only for marginalized communities. For example, one could think about the role of ethical self-practices in working on racist and colonial affects, which I discussed in the previous chapter under colonial aphasia. I have not expanded on this aspect in this chapter not just because of my own interest in the less-explored theme of ethics for oppressed groups but also primarily inspired by Lorde's attention to positionality in relation to intellectual work when she writes that "no woman is responsible for changing the psyche of her oppressor" (Lorde 1984d, 133). In the same vein, an in-depth exploration of ethical self-practices that can transform the internalized colonial attitudes in white subjects is an inquiry that needs to be undertaken from another positionality, although my work in this and the previous chapter offers tools and resources for it.

One of the further implications of this account of ethics is that it is most helpful to think about the relationship between ethics and oppression in the context of the history of that particular form of oppression. As Foucault's account of homosexuality as friendship demonstrated, the genealogy of current relations of power destabilizes those relations and can guide us towards developing ethical self-practices that challenge the persistence and hold of those power relations upon our subjectivity, our social practices, and our

relationship to others. Similarly, both Fanon and Lorde emphasized the importance of historicizing practices and emotions that define character and interpersonal relationships in oppressed communities. What counts as transformative ethical practice cannot be defined in a social and historical vacuum but needs to be guided by the analysis of relations of power and their history. This means that ethics and social critique as the study of social power relations are inseparable. For Lorde, this is important in the case of understanding the struggles of black women in the United States because overcoming the harms of racism in the present is only possible by understanding their roots. Similarly, Fanon's critique of the colonial bias of the psychiatric discourse of the time that essentialized the traits of the colonized implies that the moral damage connected to the afterlives of colonialism needs to be situated in the context of that history in order to be problematized, challenged and transformed. Although Fanon and Lorde do not frame their attention to history as genealogical, I think both projects offer us guidelines for moving towards what can be called genealogical ethics, a critical ethics that draws its critical force from historicizing and problematizing current practices and by the development of transformative ethical practices that challenge relations of power. The link between history and ethics is also crucial to memory work or "Erinnerungsarbeit" as a collective form of engagement with the past that uncovers hidden histories, traumas, and social divisions and produces new forms of collective historical consciousness, as discussed in the last chapter. As memory studies scholars such as Michael Rothberg (2009) have argued, this is because the social conflicts and problems of the present can only be addressed through a discourse that weaves together past and present.

Some of the implications of this link between genealogy and ethics will be fleshed out in my next chapter where I discuss the genealogical critique of gendered religious practices and contrast it to an anthropological understanding of these practices that disregards the history of power relations. By focusing on the study of the gendered afterlives of colonialism, I show how genealogical critique can shed light on the relationship between current gendered practices and transnational relations of power and thereby work as a tool for postcolonial feminist critique.

CHAPTER V
GENEALOGICAL CRITIQUE AND POSTCOLONIAL FEMINISM: 'WOMAN LIFE FREEDOM' AND THE GENDERED AFTERLIVES OF COLONIALISM

1. Introduction

In September 2022 after the death of Mahsa Jina Amini, a series of protests started in Iran that centered around women's demand for freedom, and specifically freedom from compulsory hijab. During these protests, the loudest demands were the simplest ones: women's right to wear what they want and an end to the state ideologies that have deemed women's bodies a danger to the public sphere. Perhaps it was due to this simplicity that the protests gained such unprecedented support inside Iran and in the Iranian diaspora. The slogan "woman, life, freedom" powerfully brought people from very different social groups and backgrounds together. Observing (and participating in) these protests as part of the Iranian Diaspora in the United States while writing about postcolonial theory and genealogical critique, the protests seem noteworthy from many different aspects. Two of these aspects concern the state of postcolonial feminism, and feminist philosophy, and their potentials more broadly.

First, the direction of the Woman Life Freedom movement – a feminist movement through and through – shows a perhaps surprising distance from much of existing feminist thought. The Woman Life Freedom movement (from now on WLF) questions the authority of tradition and religion over Muslim women's lives and their bodies. This has come to fruition at a time when a significant portion of feminist and postcolonial

thought has challenged the universality of feminist freedom and whether (and how) it can be projected onto non-Western cultural contexts, especially in the context of Muslim-majority societies. This body of scholarship has been developed partly as a reaction to 9/11 and what Rafia Zakaria has called "the first feminist war" (Zakaria 2021). If we do not read Iranian women's participation in the WLF as a Westernized gesture, we face the question about the universality of feminist freedom again, and whether there is a way of criticizing sexism in the context of non-western traditions without falling into an epistemic (and in some cases, actual political) imperialism. So, the WLF questions the validity of the cultural relativism that is central to a significant portion of the current feminist political discourse. The WLF invites us to rethink these assumptions and render them historical, i.e., unmask their connection to a specific historical period (post 9/11), and question their legitimacy beyond that particular historical moment. I take this to be a genealogical invitation: an invitation to rethink the historicity of the cultural relativist turn in feminist thought, historicize it further, and think about what this means for the future of postcolonial feminism.

This work must proceed in connection with a second aspect of WLF. It seems to me that the WLF movement needs a more historical discourse about hijab and Muslim cultural traditions in general. The so-called postsecular turn in Western academia problematized the binary framework in which secular forms of life are viewed as modern and progressive and religious forms of life are deemed inferior and oppressive (Asad 2003; Mahmood 2005). While some of this scholarship remained inattentive to the forms of oppression happening in religious contexts, almost reproducing the binary again, the general argument about the ideological nature of the hierarchal divide between

secularism and religion (and Islam specifically) is an important one. Given that some parts of the WLF movement moved towards equating compulsory hijab with Islam as an oppressive religion, a postsecular turn in Iranian feminism seems vital and necessary but also far from our current moment. [11]

Holding together these two aspects of WLF, this chapter will build upon my work in the previous chapters to discuss the relevance of what I call "postcolonial genealogical critique" for twenty-first-century feminist thought. Postcolonial feminist scholarship has grown vigorously over the last few decades and has examined a variety of themes ranging from the lived experiences of subaltern women to global structures of oppression. In this chapter, I argue that genealogical critique can contribute to this scholarship through its method of problematization. Specifically, genealogical problematization offers a historical critique of power that allows feminist analysis to gain a critical distance from a reliance on self-consciousness. The genealogy of the gendered afterlives of colonialism provides a perspective from which the postcolonial social world is analyzed with attention to the multiplicity of power relations, and in which imperialist domination and patriarchal domination both play a role but cannot be reduced to each other. When it comes to the study of political Islam in Iran, the historical lens of genealogy allows us to situate the development of gendered ideologies in the global context of colonial modernity and recognize the relationality between them. I explore the implications of

[11] A third aspect of WLF that goes beyond the scope of this chapter but is worth mentioning. The WLF movement seems to rest on unexamined assumptions about gender. The slogan "woman life freedom" does not suggest the predefined existence of a notion of life and freedom, but it seems to rely on the category of "woman" in a way that might seem uncritical, not just in light of the advance of queer feminism in the last few decades, but also in light of the scholarship by historians such as Najmabadi (2005) who suggest that the gender binary itself is a modern colonial invention of Iranian modernity. So, looking at the WLF critically, we are confronted with another genealogical invitation, the invitation to rethink the historicity of the category "woman" and ask about what its historical contingency means for its political relevance in the present.

such relationality for postcolonial feminism in the context of Iran and I show that WLF's discourse can be seen as an attempt to decolonize anti-imperialism by problematizing the affinity between the gendered elements of Iranian anti-imperialism and Orientalism.

I begin in section 2 with a discussion of what genealogical critique contributes to feminist thought with a focus on Judith Butler and Simone de Beauvoir. Section 3 then discusses the relevance of genealogical critique for postcolonial feminism, with a focus on post-9/11 feminist discourse. It also shows the feminist political relevance of the genealogical lens for the current WLF movement by analyzing the contingent construction of hijab as a cultural element central to both Orientalist and Muslim fundamentalist discourses. In conclusion, I discuss the significance of the methodology of genealogical postcolonial feminism as a multi-directional critique that problematizes colonial and patriarchal relations of power at the same time.

2. Genealogical Critique and Feminism

In this section, I discuss the relevance of genealogical critique for feminist theory in order to prepare my later argument about the relevance of genealogy for postcolonial feminism. I start with a broader discussion of Foucauldian critique and feminism, before engaging with examples of feminist genealogical critique in the scholarship of feminist philosophers.

2.1 Foucauldian Critique and Feminism

The question of whether Foucault's work can be a productive resource for feminist theory can be responded to differently depending on *which* Foucault and *which* feminism one is talking about. In other words, the relevance of Foucault for feminism or the lack thereof depends both on one's reading of Foucault and on one's understanding of feminism.

About the first, it can be said that while it is difficult to show that a specific reading of Foucault is *the* right one, it is however quite possible to show the falsity of specific readings, especially in the early secondary literature that still struggled with understanding his work. A common misunderstanding has been that Foucault is a "postmodern" thinker who dismisses the idea of agency and resistance and advocates for relativism, a misunderstanding that is now quite rare.[12] Furthermore, one's understanding of feminism determines to a great degree one's idea about the compatibility between Foucault and feminism. In this section, I discuss how some feminist scholarship on Foucault has overcome the binary of either dismissing Foucault or celebrating him uncritically. Many scholars have offered readings that involve crucial critiques but also advocate for the use of some Foucauldian "tools."

Penelope Deutscher has advocated for a form of re-reading of philosophical texts that can bring into light the "suspended reserves" of those texts and in which "absent concepts and problems can be given a shape in potentially transformative ways within philosophical frameworks which have omitted them" (Deutscher 2017, 5). This reading enables Deutscher to use Foucault's work for her feminist scholarship about children and reproduction, themes that Foucault did not write much about. Although Foucault's work itself does not engage much with the question of women's oppression, a generous and creative reader can discover hidden resources in it that might serve feminist purposes. An example is Sandra Bartky's work on Foucault in which she points to Foucault's neglect of the role of gender in modern disciplinary practices, and also employs Foucault's theory of

[12] Two examples of the "postmodern" reading of Foucault in the feminist scholarship can be found in the work of Susan Bordo (1993) and Nancy Hartsock (2013).

discipline for narrating the history of what she calls "the modernization of patriarchal domination" (Bartky 1997, 95).

The Foucauldian argument that both subjectivity and identity are shaped by power relations has been understood to be a threat to the project of feminism by some scholars. The premise of this view is that feminism as a political project relies on some fixed notion of women's subjecthood or identity. Foucault is then found to undermine that identity essentialism. For example, Nancy Hartsock finds Foucault's poststructuralist notion of subjectivity unhelpful for feminists and asks: "Why is it that just at the moment when so many of us who have been silenced begin to demand the right to name ourselves, to act as subjects rather than objects of history, that just then the concept of subjecthood becomes problematic?" (Hartsock 2013, 158). Hartsock concludes her critique of Foucault with saying that he "fails to provide a theory of power for women" (Ibid.). Amy Allen has responded to this critique by arguing that Foucault's theory is not for women *as women* since it problematizes the gender binary, and that it can be a theory for *feminists* (Allen 1999, 48). According to Allen, Foucault's problematization of gender and gender identity should not be read as a threat to feminism but as a tool for a more radical feminism. Similarly, Jana Sawicki has argued that Foucauldian thought replaces feminist identity politics with a "politics of difference" where difference is seen as a resource rather than a threat or obstacle to resistance. According to her Foucauldian argument about feminist politics, difference "enables us to multiply the sources of resistance to the myriad of relations of domination that circulate through the social field" (Sawicki 1988).

Foucault's analytics of power not only allows for a political vocabulary that goes beyond identity politics but also brings the important insight that constraint and

enablement, domination and empowerment, are complexly intertwined (Allen 1999, 58). According to Allen, this insight allows us to move beyond some of the difficulties inherent in existing feminist discussions of power and develop an approach that can study the complex process of how disciplinary practices shape the body (Ibid.). Similarly, Ramazanoglu argues that Foucault's work on discipline can shed light on the process through which women's subordination can happen through self-discipline (Ramazanoglu 2002; Heyes 2007).

Despite these advantages, Foucault's analytics of power also has some important weaknesses that stand out to a feminist lens. Hartsock has argued that Foucault's analysis of power as ubiquitous makes it rather difficult for feminists to analyze patriarchy and its structural power hierarchy between men and women (Hartsock 2013). Furthermore, Fraser's (1985) influential work on Foucault suggests that what Foucault's theory needs but lacks are normative criteria for distinguishing acceptable from unacceptable forms of power; thus, his approach suffers from a "normative confusion", a critique I discussed in depth in my first chapter.

2.2 The Work of Genealogical Feminism

Genealogical feminism can be understood as the type of feminist inquiry that utilizes the genealogical lens for the study of gender oppression. In this sense, genealogical feminism refers to a methodological commitment in feminist critique that can be compared to other such commitments in subfields such as feminist phenomenology and social reproduction theory. Central to the genealogical methodology is the commitment to a historicized understanding of gendered oppression that aims to

show the contingency of seemingly natural and fixed identities and categories. To expand on what such a methodology entails, I will discuss the work of two feminist thinkers Judith Butler and Simone de Beauvoir, who both utilized genealogical lenses in the service of feminist critique, albeit in very different ways.

It might make sense to start with Butler since Butler's work is the more representative example of genealogical critique in feminist theory. In their now classical work *Gender Trouble* (1999), Butler uses a Foucauldian approach to argue that both gender and sexuality are formed through social power relations. Emphasizing the Foucauldian insight that power is not a merely destructive force but has productive effects, Butler argues that the category of "woman" itself is a product of hetero-patriarchy and needs to be problematized. It is only through such problematization that feminism can overcome its own exclusionary effects and become queer feminism (Ibid., 4-7). Butler describes their own method for this problematization as a "critical genealogy of gender" that unmasks the gender binary as a variable construction that has been naturalized through social relations of power (188). As they put it, "To trace the political operations that produce and conceal what qualifies as the juridical subject of feminism is precisely the task of a feminist genealogy of the category of women" (9). Butler's later work *Bodies That Matter* (2011) continues this genealogical inquiry by offering partial and overlapping genealogical efforts to establish the normative conditions under which the materiality of the body is framed and formed, and, in particular, how it is formed through differential categories of sex (12). As Alison Stone (2005) argues, although Butler's feminism is usually approached via other concepts such as their notion of "performativity", Butler's genealogical lens can offer us keys for understanding their

political thought in general. As Stone puts it, “Butler’s genealogical approach, then, opens up an anti-essentialist politics that requires that women share not common characteristics but, more weakly, series of partially overlapping characteristics and experiences” (14).

Simone de Beauvoir’s rich feminist writings have been methodologically categorized in many different ways, most importantly as phenomenological (Heinämaa 2003; Mann 2014; Oksala 2023), Marxist materialist (Kruks 2017) and genealogical (Heinämaa 2003; Srinivasan 2019; Vaccarino Bremner 2022). By turning to the genealogical elements of Beauvoir’s work, my claim is not to dismiss the other methodological dimensions of her work, but only to argue that there is merit in paying attention to the genealogical analysis that her feminist philosophical thinking offers. This is the case not only because genealogy does important work for Beauvoir’s argument about the nature of patriarchy and women’s oppression, but also because genealogical analysis is an underappreciated dimension of her work that can be of immense value for feminist theorizing today. Of course, the value of Beauvoir’s approach must also be tempered from a postcolonial perspective.[13]

One of Beauvoir’s claims in her magnum opus *The Second Sex* (2012 [1949]) is that the hierarchy between the sexes is not simply the result of our biological nature or our material mode of production. Beauvoir’s existentialist framework considers the role of both these factors but ultimately argues that these factors alone are inadequate for

[13] More full problematizing the work of Beauvoir from a postcolonial and anti-racist perspective is important but goes beyond the scope of my discussion here. For an example of such critique, see Gines, Kathryn T. "Comparative and competing frameworks of oppression in Simone de Beauvoir’s The Second Sex." Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal 35.1/2 (2014): 251-273.

understanding the nature of patriarchy. Following Heinämaa, Beauvoir's account of women's subjection is not an explanation, but a genealogy (Heinämaa 2003, 102).[14] Beauvoir's genealogical analysis of patriarchy rejects the idea of a foundation or origin of patriarchy, and distances itself from teleology (104). Instead, it highlights the role of contingency in the history of patriarchy, and the fact that the hierarchy between the sexes could have been changed throughout history, and one reason that that did not happen is that change is "troublesome" (Ibid.). Beauvoir's own feminist critique can be seen as a facilitator of such change by showing "the contingency of the currently dominant moral system, as well as possibilities for resistance and transvaluation" (Vaccarino Bremner 2022, 536).

In light of the specific feminisms of Butler and Beauvoir, but not necessarily in sympathy with all forms of feminism, I suggest that genealogical critique can be a rich resource for postcolonial feminism and its endeavor to study the gendered afterlives of colonialism. The reason for such relevance is the necessarily historical nature of the theme of postcolonial feminism: i.e., the relation between the afterlives of colonialism and gender. If this historical perspective is pursued with an eye to relations of power, that is, if it is pursued not simply descriptively but with a politically problematizing lens, it will enable us to denaturalize gender oppression and its supporting belief systems and discourses in its present forms. In the context of the anti-imperialist politics of Iran, the lack of a historical lens has often led to an essentializing view of Islam and its stance on gender issues, either as a positive view in the case of the ideology of the Islamic

[14] Given that Beauvoir is writing before Foucault, her genealogical insights need to be understood in relation to her reading of other thinkers of genealogy such as Nietzsche and possibly also Marx, if we understand Marx as a genealogical thinker, as Amy Allen (2022) argues.

government, or a negative judgment in the case of secular oppositional forces. What both groups neglect are the transnational relations of power that gave rise to specific historical interpretations of Islam that have led to the specific understanding of gender relations that is dominant in Iran today.

3. The Freedom of Muslim Women: Feminist Appropriations and Postcolonial Predicaments

What can feminist genealogical critique bring to postcolonial feminism? This section responds to this question by focusing on the imperialist appropriations of feminism as well as the anti-imperialist idea of oppositional femininity in the context of Muslim-majority countries. I start with the history and the current political character of colonial feminism, and how postcolonial feminism offers an alternative approach that goes beyond missionary and Eurocentric ways of criticizing gendered practices in other cultures. A subsection discusses 9/11 as a key moment in the history of postcolonial feminism and engages critically with some of the scholarship that respond to this period. Another subsection pays particular attention to the case of Iran and the currently existing Woman Life Freedom movement and proposes to interpret this feminist movement as an attempt to decolonize anti-imperialism. I argue that genealogical critique can show us the political and historical formation of religious and cultural practices and thereby help feminist discourse move beyond essentialist and Orientalist understandings of other cultures, shortcomings that are still present in contemporary feminist discourse, colonial and anti-colonial alike.

3.1 From Colonial Feminism to Postcolonial Feminism

In the late 1980s, feminist theory and postcolonial theory came to an alliance that has been described by Leila Gandhi as a "volatile and tenuous partnership" informed by a "mutual suspicion, wherein each discourse constantly confronts its limits and exclusions in the other" (Gandhi 2020, 83). Following Gandhi's thesis that postcolonial feminism has always been busy navigating the tensions between its two commitments, anti-imperialism and feminism, I would like to start by thinking about what can be called the current state of the unhappy marriage of feminism and anti-imperialism, to borrow an expression from Heidi Hartmann (2015). To be able to think about the possibilities of a more progressive union, it is worth taking a closer look at the historical roots of the problem.

As skillfully shown by Edward Said (1979) and others, the discourse of Orientalism – as a discourse justifying colonial domination for centuries – had an important gendered element that portrayed "Oriental" women as oppressed, imprisoned in harems and subjugated by their violent husbands and male relatives. Without bothering to offer anything close to a theory of patriarchy and patriarchal social structures, the discourse of Orientalism was rather based on a racial ontologization of "Oriental" men and women, which according to such discourse, resulted in the domination of men over women, and a backward and unfree society as a whole. Anticipating Said, Frantz Fanon discussed the racist character of such perspectives in his piece "Algeria Unveiled" (2007), where he studied how colonial powers seek to dominate cultural signs such as the veil and transform them into symbols of the backwardness of pre-colonial cultures. Such perspectives were portrayed and disseminated through books, paintings and travel

writings. For example, Europeans' reports in their travel writings about the oppressed and neglected situation of Iranian women – a report that interestingly had a heteronormative element, tracing such oppression back to the prevalence of homosexuality in Iranian society – had a key role in the emergence of the Iranian feminist discourse, as Najmabadi's historiography of Qajar Iran shows (Najmabadi 2005). One could say that this is the start of a complex history of the relationship between imperialism and feminism, one that also includes the complicity of feminists in colonial and imperialist domination, at least on an ideological level.

Leila Ahmed introduces the term "colonial feminism" to capture this relationship. According to Ahmed, colonial feminism points to "feminism as used against other cultures in the service of colonialism" (Ahmed 1992, 151). The so-called gender/culture debate can be traced back to the development of colonial feminism in Britain and other countries, where patriarchy began to be seen as a problem that only concerned other cultures:

> Even as the Victorian male establishment devised theories to contest the claims of feminism, and derided and rejected the ideas of feminism and the notion of men's oppressing women with respect to itself, it captured the language of feminism and redirected it, in the service of colonialism, toward Other men and the cultures of Other men. It was here and in the combining of the languages of colonialism and feminism that the fusion between the issues of women and culture was created. More exactly, what was created was the fusion between the issues of women, their oppression, and the cultures of other men. The idea that Other men, men in colonized societies or societies beyond the borders of the civilized West, oppressed Women was to be used, in the rhetoric of colonialism, to render morally justifiable its project of undermining or eradicating the cultures of colonized peoples (Ibid.).

An alliance that started with the interest of imperialist powers was continued through the work of many Western feminists who sided with the empire and promoted colonial feminism. Khader's (2018) work on "missionary feminism" engages with this issue and problematizes the type of feminism according to which women in Third-World countries need to be saved from their oppression by Westerners, through military intervention, cultural westernization, or other means. Missionary feminism does not belong to the past but plays an important role in the contemporary political and intellectual landscape. Sheth (2022) has suggested the term "neocolonial feminism" to describe the continuation of colonial feminism in the present, a tendency she locates primarily in the discourse of liberal feminism. Similarly, Farris (2017) has introduced the term "femonationalism" for describing the contemporary forms of the mobilization of feminist themes in the context of Western nationalist politics, especially within anti-immigration campaigns.[15]

It is in the context of this history that we must situate the impatience of some decolonial and anti-colonial thinkers with Western feminism, which has resulted either in the idea that real liberation is liberation from colonial and imperial domination, or in attempts to formulate a new understanding of women's rights based on the indigenous tradition. The latter is in itself a promising project but has often ended in hasty and defensive endeavors, such as Ali Shariati's "Fateme Fateme Ast" (1971), which is read now more as a celebration of Islamic norms of womanhood and as an attempt to create an oppositional Islamic femininity, and less as a feminist project (Moallem 2005, 91). Such

[15] Due to the limitation of space and my particular focus on postcolonial feminism and the geographical context of the Middle East, here I am not engaging with the rich and vast literature of decolonial feminism that has mostly emerged from the Latin American context.

a tendency was also reflected in many anti-colonial political groups who saw women's rights as a foreign imposition and a threat to the anti-colonial nation.

So, in sum, feminism and imperialism have been long-term allies and to some extent still are, and it is mainly thanks to decolonial and postcolonial feminist interventions that this allyship has been disrupted, and that we have started to imagine a new form of feminist discourse that breaks away from its long history of complicity with imperialist domination. A brief discussion of the beginnings of postcolonial feminism and the work of Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak will clarify the context of this disrupting move as well as of later emerging feminist hesitations in postcolonial scholarship.

Mohanty's work has criticized Western feminism for positing an ethnocentric universalism that reduces women in Third World countries to their object status and produces "a composite, singular 'Third World woman'" (Mohanty 2003, 19). She views feminist discourses as sites of knowledge production that "discursively colonize the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives of women in the Third World […]" (Ibid.). Spivak shares Mohanty's criticisms about Western feminism and its ideological production of both a reified notion of womanhood and also a monolithic and reified category of Third-World woman. According to Spivak, due to the history of the ideological appropriations of the subaltern, part of the task of the postcolonial intellectual is to track and to articulate these ideological formations into the object of investigation, and if necessary by what Spivak calls "measuring silences" (Spivak 2013, 92). In other words, Spivak suggests that the first step for giving voice to the subaltern is liberating them from these ideological formations that have doomed them to silence and have

erased their heterogeneity. Spivak's critique of these ideological formations points to the difficulty, if not impossibility, of representing the subaltern through intellectual work and scholarship. These concerns lead Spivak to remain a critic of appeals to "transparency" or the immediacy of experience (Ibid., 75).

3.2 Post 9/11 Feminist Hesitations

The historical moment of 9/11 became important for feminist discourse mainly because of the ways that the United States started to weaponize the feminist cause for its imperialist politics more bluntly than ever before. Following the logic of colonial feminism that I discussed above, the violence of U.S. imperialism was excused by the supposedly pressing need to save brown women from brown men, and from a backward culture that needed to be civilized through foreign intervention. This instrumentalization of feminism intensified during the invasion of Afghanistan, a war that Zakaria (2021) has described as "the first feminist war." Although much of white feminist philosophy either sided with this missionary feminism or ignored it to some extent, some scholars also did feminist philosophical work that criticized this appropriation of feminism. An example of this is Mann's (2014) exploration of the relationship between U.S. imperialism and masculinity from a feminist perspective. In reacting to this historical moment from a postcolonial perspective, the work of some scholars suggested that Muslim women do not need to be saved, either because they can and should fight for their freedom on their own, or because they do not need the form of feminist freedom envisioned in the West. In the following, I examine a few examples of this viewpoint.

The work of Leila Abu-Lughod (2002, 2013) and Saba Mahmood (2005, 2006) studies some questions similar to the ones discussed by Mohanty and Spivak in the context

of the post-9/11 political landscape, but interestingly, their work is not as skeptical about representing the subaltern. It rather aims to give voice to them and listen to them, as Abu-Lughod puts it (2013, 202). As anthropologists, both scholars have offered studies about Muslim women in the MENA region and have challenged mainstream assumptions in arguing that Muslim women are not as oppressed as the Western media show and as Western feminists argue. While Abu-Lughod's conclusion from this observation is that Muslim women do not need saving but they still do need freedom[16], Mahmood goes so far as to reject the latter and argue that the desire for freedom is culturally and historically conditioned and cannot be ascribed to Muslim women a priori.

Mahmood's *The Politics of Piety* (2005) is an anthropological study of Muslim women in Egypt who were engaged in the so-called women's mosque movement, and while it has a strong descriptive element, Mahmood specifies that her goal is not only offering an ethnographic account. It is also "to make this material speak back to the normative liberal assumptions about human nature against which such a movement is held accountable – such as the belief that all human beings have an innate desire for freedom, that we all somehow seek to assert our autonomy when allowed to do so, that human agency primarily consists of acts that challenge social norms and not those that uphold them, and so on" (5).

While Abu-Lughod and Mahmood's critique of "imperialist feminism" could not have been timelier and politically more necessary, it seems that in Abu-Lughod and Mahmood's work, the tension between anti-imperialist and feminist commitments – a

[16] In other words, Abu-Lughod's project does *not* suggest that Muslim women are not oppressed or are not suffering, it only suggests that such suffering has been portrayed in western media and western scholarship in reductive ways that serve missionary and imperialist goals (Abu-Lughod 2013, 223).

tension that has been a part of postcolonial studies from its beginnings, as Gandhi (2020) argues – has been resolved at the expense of women. In other words, it seems that this body of work overcorrects imperialist feminism by erasing or minimizing the problem of women's oppression in Muslim contexts. In the following, I highlight two methodological features of this work that have contributed to this tendency: its positivism or empiricism and its cultural essentialism. Later, I sketch an alternative methodology for postcolonial feminist research: one that replaces cultural essentialism with a genealogical analysis of culture, and also replaces positivism with the negativism of non-ideal theory.

Abu-Lughod's and Mahmood's commitment to the discipline of anthropology seems to have led them to empiricist and positivist assumptions about the immediacy of experience. For example, Abu-Lughod turns to the voice of Muslim women and emphasizes in her book that "we should take time to listen" (Abu-Lughod 2013, 202). What remains absent here is a self-critical analysis of the limits of representing other women's voices without appropriating and assimilating them for one's own (political) purposes. What women in certain social contexts say about their relationship to the cultural norms, whether they perceive them as oppressive and limiting or as helpful for their self-actualization, cannot be the last argument about their situation because of the problem of ideology: the self-understanding of the subjects is not immediate but is itself shaped by the relations of power and knowledge in a society, which is why consciousness cannot be the sole focus of social analysis. While earlier postcolonial feminists such as Mohanty (2003) and Spivak (1999) focused on social relations of power and discourse, the turn to consciousness in Mahmood's and Abu-Lughod's work brackets how consciousness is a product of the world around it. Such a turn not only masks the history of the transformations

that led to such consciousness, but also ignores the forms of oppositional consciousness that usually exist in the same social context: women who protest, who leave conservative religious groups, who find environments that other women adapt to oppressive and worthy of critique. We need a socially and historically situated analysis to avoid the pitfalls of naïve positivism, and to study consciousness more critically.[17] Here, I find Spivak's suggestion for "aligning feminism with the critique of positivism and the defetishization of the concrete" (Spivak 2013, 91) helpful and timely.

A second aspect of this work that is concerning is its cultural essentialism. As Mahmood states in the first chapter of her book, her main goal in this book is to problematize the idea that the desire for freedom – as defined in the tradition of liberalism in terms of individual autonomy – is universal, and to show the problematic entanglement of analytical and prescriptive projects in Western feminist thought (Mahmood 2005, 33-35). Part of the worry that Mahmood presents about the idea of feminist freedom is its possible entanglement with epistemic and cultural imperialism. The idea here is that feminism not only projects particularities of the experience of women in the West onto other cultures, but that such projection results in the erasure of those other cultures. We see that Mahmood's ethnography of the women in the da'wa movement implies a view of tradition that presents culture as static: the Islamic Revival movement, like many Muslim fundamentalist groups, seeks to return to what they regard as the core and authentic essence of Islam, which needs to be protected from Western influence. For example, Hajja Samira and Hajja Faiza, two of the women Mahmood quotes, refer to "westernization" as a great

[17] Although Foucault rejects the concept of ideology due to its presumption about the existence of an objective truth, Foucault's concept of subjectivation does work as a tool for studying social practices critically. The idea of subjectivation suggests that the beliefs and practices of subjects are shaped by historical and social relations of power and can be worthy of critique.

danger confronting Islam, and talk about the dangers of Muslims emulating Westerners and Christians, and religion having become separated from texts and scriptures (Mahmood 2005, 44-45). Mahmood's ethnographic method makes it impossible to unpack the assumptions of such perspective about Islam. By understanding the Islamic tradition as static, the danger of cultural imperialism is perceived to be so strong that it discounts the possibility of any positive influence, or what can be called *critical indebtedness* to other cultures (Ahmed 1992, 237).[18] Additionally, this perspective also discounts the role of the movements of religious reform in Muslim contexts, including the work of many Muslim feminist scholars who have argued that Islam can be receptive to feminist reform, and that Islamic verdicts ought not to be static with changing times (Wadud-Muhsin 1992; Ahmed 1992; Barlas 2002).

If we follow a genealogical analysis and shift to a historically centered analysis and study the continuities and discontinuities of this discourse with the colonial past, we can be more critical of this static picture of Islam in a way that more rigorously eschews the ahistorical and essentializing lens of Orientalism. Moallem's work (2005) on the continuities of Orientalist discourse and Islamic Fundamentalism came to the perhaps surprising conclusion that the latter is in many ways shaped by the former. This reminds one of Foucault's understanding of power and the idea that oppositional resistance can be

[18] Here I agree with Leila Ahmed's critique of the idea of return to an original Islam: "But what is needed now is not a response to the colonial and postcolonial assault on non-Western cultures, which merely inverts the terms of the colonial thesis to affirm the opposite, but a move beyond confinement within those terms altogether and a rejection or incorporation of Western, non-Western, and indigenous inventions, ideas, and institutions on the basis of their merit, not their tribe of origin. After all and in sober truth, what thriving civilization or cultural heritage today, Western or non-Western, is not critically indebted to the inventions or traditions of thought of other peoples in other lands? And why should any human being be asked to do without some useful invention, political, technological, or of any kind, because it originated among some other tribe or, conversely, be compelled to practice a custom that has nothing to recommend it or even much against it for no better reason than that it is indigenous?" (Ahmed 1992, 237).

shaped and influenced by power while at the same time opposing it (Foucault 1988). The discourse of political Islam often reproduces Orientalist ideas by appropriating them, precisely because as a political discourse, it centers around the West and opposition to Western culture. In the context of Iran, this means that the gendered elements of Iranian Islamic fundamentalism do not operate in a historical vacuum but are determined by the conditions of colonial modernity and its gendered dynamics.

Applying the same historical lens to the study of the Islamic Revival in Egypt could lead us to questions about the transnational conditions of the practice of gender norms in the lives of the women involved in the da'wa movement. Considering Mahmood's work, it can be argued that its methodological focus on Foucault's ethics and neglect of Foucault's genealogical analysis of power helps to deprive her analysis of a critique of culture and identity.[19] How radical and how disruptive such critique of identity can be for feminist thought is perhaps best seen in the example of Butler's *Gender Trouble* and her discussion of how feminism as a discourse of resistance itself is shaped by power relations such as that of heteronormative structures.[20] Postcolonial feminism can benefit from such

[19] There are also other aspects of Mahmood's work that are worth problematizing but go beyond the scope of my discussion. One aspect is worth mentioning here briefly: Mahmood's critique of feminism as a prescriptive project (2005, 187-188). While I agree with Mahmood's thesis that feminism is a prescriptive project, I think this is not so much its problem and limitation than it is its strength. That the prescriptive project of feminism does not need to presuppose an already existing desire for liberation from patriarchy is evident from many classical feminist works, most notably the introduction to *The Second Sex* by Beauvoir. In this introduction, Beauvoir distinguishes between the happiness of women and their moral freedom, arguing that feminism is not concerned with increasing their happiness, but with augmenting their moral freedom, which Beauvoir opposed in her existentialist framework to bad faith. The aim of the emancipation of women for Beauvoir, is the mutual recognition of each other as free beings. This is how acts of raising awareness known as consciousness-raising are so crucial for feminist change: they are not simply ways of awakening repressed and unrealized desires for individualist freedom but are means of a fundamental transformation to our social relations. If we understand feminism not as a metaphysical project but as an ethical one that aims to cultivate new freedoms, no ethnographic description of women's lives can serve as an argument for the fact that they do not need feminist change.

[20] Another noteworthy critique is expressed by Vintges (2012) who argues that Mahmood is missing the normative aspects of Foucauldian critique and uses only its analytical elements.

a lens in order to be able to critically interrogate its own discourse of resistance and move beyond a reliance on consciousness and uncritical defense of cultural traditions.

3.3 Postcolonial Genealogical Critique and the Political Formation of Gendered Religious Practices

The reason for the particular relevance of genealogy for postcolonial feminism is the necessarily historical nature of the theme of postcolonial feminism: i.e., the relation between the afterlives of colonialism and gender (Kerner 2017). If this historical perspective is pursued with an eye to relations of power, that is, if it is pursued not simply descriptively but through a politically problematizing lens, it will enable us to denaturalize gender oppression and its supporting belief systems and discourses in its present forms. In the context of the post-9/11 politics of gender, such an approach entails the analysis of how the appropriation of the feminist cause by the imperialist discourse contributed to women's oppression in Afghanistan (and other countries). Moreover, on the level of discourse, such appropriation exercised its power by making any radical feminist intervention difficult, if not impossible. This is because in the absence of a historically attuned lens of analysis, observers would equate the feminist discourse with its current imperialist form without being able to see its contingency and thus would find themselves unable to de-couple and separate those features. This common perspective, motivated by a commitment to anti-imperialism, leaves behind the feminist critique of culture and replaces it with a defense of cultural authenticity and nativism.

We saw earlier how for some critics of imperialism, political Islam constitutes a radically different understanding of ethics and politics than that of colonial modernity. On the other hand, the widespread Eurocentric understanding of Islamic fundamentalism

highlights the undemocratic and oppressive nature of these movements as radically different from the Western political sphere. However, an alternative – more transnational, and more genealogical – perspective will show us the relationality between colonial modernity and the anti-imperialist spirit of the beliefs and practices of political Islam. According to this third perspective, political Islam is not a return to tradition but is itself a product of colonial modernity and a reaction to it. This view has the advantage that it de-exceptionalizes Islam and Muslim-majority countries and enables us to see these movements alongside other global movements that emerged in response to the crises of colonial modernity (for example, fascist movements in Western countries).

Moallem's scholarship follows this third thesis and proposes to interpret colonial modernity and Islamic fundamentalism as two poles that exist in relation to each other. In other words, Islamic fundamentalism needs to be understood as a modern formation and a response to local and global crises of colonial modernity, and is thus similar to other forms of fundamentalism, despite the fact that the term has had othering effects visa-a-vis Muslims (Moallem 2005, 9).[21] This relationship can be viewed as genealogical relationality, in which one is shaped by the other, echoing Foucault's idea about resistance being shaped by power (Foucault 1988). In this view, political Islam, including those Islamic fundamentalist practices that are oppressive towards women, are not culturally

[21] Some scholars have criticized the use of the term Islamic fundamentalism and have argued that it implies an essentializing, demonizing and polarizing conceptual approach (Pieterse 1994, 5, as cited in Moallem 2005). In this chapter, I follow Moallem's broad (and critical) definition of fundamentalism as "a regime of truth based on discourses identified with or ordained by God (understood metaphorically or literally), which binds its observers to it" (Moallem 2005, 10). Part of Moallem's argument in this book is that fundamentalism is even present in Western feminism. Her critique of Western feminism argues that "while the literature of women of color has challenged the modernist idea of the unified self through its discussion of racial difference, the continued investment in the concept of woman as foundational to subject formation perpetuates a fundamentalist logic" (165).

authentic "Muslim" forms of life. If we go beyond the Orientalist assumption that Muslim gender norms are static and rooted in the essence of Islam, we will see that these religious cultural practices need to be historized and understood in their social and historical context.[22] Perhaps ironically, anti-imperialist resistance in the context of Islamic Fundamentalism adopts some of the ideologies of colonial modernity without truly transforming them, including the essentialist perspective (Moallem 2005). By essentializing tradition, Islamic Fundamentalism follows a logic similar to many nationalist anti-colonial movements in Africa and Asia. According to this logic, an essentialist understanding of tradition becomes the basis for differentiating oneself from the West without acknowledging how this idea of tradition is itself a product of colonialism (Chatterjee, 119-121). Adopting a genealogical perspective allows us to go beyond the binary of Islamic fundamentalism and Orientalist secular fundamentalism in our thinking and imagine the future in a way that is more than a simple reaction to power and determined by power. This is in line with the idea (discussed above in chapter three) that genealogies have *possibilising* (Lorenzini 2020) effects through which a new horizon of possibilities is opened for the subject. These possibilities can only be opened up through a problematization of the present. It is the work of genealogy to critically develop such a problematization.

Adopting this genealogical and non-essentialist perspective also makes it possible to think of feminism as an ethical project with contingent pasts and open futures. If we follow bell hooks' definition of feminism as opposition to sexist oppression (hooks 2000), the question of course remains: what counts as oppression? And how can we determine

[22] Narayan (1997) makes a similar argument in her discussion about gendered practices such as *Sati* in India that are thought to be rooted in tradition but are actually shaped by colonial influence.

that cross-culturally? I find it helpful to follow Khader in highlighting the *negativist* feature of feminism in its opposition to sexist oppression, meaning that "feminism rejects justice monism by not stating what the endpoint of gender justice looks like" (Khader 2018, 38). Khader's recourse to non-ideal theory – a form of theory that prioritizes diagnosing and responding to existing injustices, instead of theorizing about an ideal just condition[23] – allows her feminist analysis to not be based on abstract ideals about what a universal gender justice looks like, but a more contextual critique that starts from current relations of power and their harmful effects. This shift is methodologically necessary in order to conceive of the political project of feminism as an open-ended one, and as one that can be shaped from many different cultural and geographical contexts. This view helps us to critique and problematize gendered religious practices without falling into a secularist, universalist, or missionary perspective.

If we leave a monolithic view of culture behind, we can see feminist forms of consciousness-raising as examples of non-violent change that do not imply force or disrespect, but simply invite positive change. Such change does not imply cultural alienation if we acknowledge that patriarchal values or sexist norms are not the core or essence of Islam or Muslim cultures. Quite the contrary: the existence and growth of a reformist Islamic movement that has opened itself to feminist and queer critique while remaining loyal to Muslim principles (Wadud-Muhsin 1992; Barlas 2002) shows that

[23] Non-ideal theory disagrees with the view of proponents of ideal theory that we need an ideal conception of justice in order to appraise current injustices. The assumption of ideal theorists – the most important among them John Rawls – is that natural and historical conditions are favorable and the societies are sufficiently economically and socially developed to realize justice. Critics who favored non-ideal theory have criticized these assumptions and argued that ideal theory has an ideological character and hinders us from engaging with current forms of injustice. Charles W. Mills holds that ideal theory can be thought of as in part ideological in the pejorative sense of a set of group ideas that reflect and contribute to perpetuating group privilege (Mills 2005). For a summary of this debate see (Valentini 2012).

understanding feminist change as cultural imperialism is rooted in the *contingent* history of feminism and imperialism but is not a necessary consequence of feminism as such. If postcolonial feminism incorporates the view that cultural practices are historical constructs shaped by social power relations, the need for defending any form of cultural authenticity vanishes and we can move towards a critical perspective that makes space for problematizing various cultural practices based on their oppressive effects.

3.4 The Woman Life Freedom Movement and the Unfinished Task of Decolonizing Anti-imperialism

Decades after the revolution that was described by Foucault as the "perhaps first insurrection against global systems" (Afary, Anderson, and Foucault 2005), the protests against compulsory hijab that culminated in the Woman Life Freedom movement in 2022 are perhaps also a protest against that very insurrection, against a form of anti-imperialism that fights colonial and imperialist power but oppresses people – women and minorities – at the same time. These protests started in reaction to the death of the Kurdish Iranian woman Mahsa Jina Amini in the custody of the government's Guidance Patrol (*Gasht-e ershad*, also known in English as *Morality Police*) in September of 2022. Some two million people came to the streets, and the Twitter hashtag #mahsaamini broke the world record of 284 million tweets. These women-led protests mainly targeted the mandatory veiling laws in Iran. "Woman Life Freedom" ('Jin, jiyan, azadi' in Kurdish, 'zan, zendegi, azadi' in Farsi) became a slogan in defense of women's freedom of choice and bodily autonomy which brought together a variety of oppressed groups. Despite centering on women's rights, these protests had an intersectional character in contesting decades of oppression and structural violence against women, ethnic minorities and the working classes in post-

revolutionary Iran (Afary and Anderson 2023; Sadeghi-Boroujerdi 2023). As an intersectional form of resistance, the WLF movement can be understood as an attempt at cultivating practices of freedom on an everyday level and establishing alternative norms and life-practices that aim to "reclaim life" (Bayat 2023).

This movement problematizes everyday practices such as gendered dress codes in a manner that brings power in its diffuse sense into focus and creates a new discursive and practical space for a different type of postcolonial politics, one that is more *multi-directional* and inclusive. This vision challenges and goes beyond the "binary politics of anti-imperialism" that regards anti-imperialist states as progressive and radical irrespective of their internal policies (Matin 2022). It is no secret that such binary politics have been dominating leftist political discourses in the West for a long time, which is one reason why progressive movements such as WLF that stand up against authoritarian anti-imperialist governments have often struggled to find effective allyship among the left in the global north. I suggest that this binary politics is also dominant in the intellectual discourse about gendered oppression in the global south, especially in Muslim countries. The roots of this problem, i.e., the binary politics of anti-imperialism that sidelines the issue of gendered oppression, have a long history. Due to my focus on postcolonial feminism, I am more interested in a more recent expression of this phenomenon in Western academia which emerged in some of the post 9/11 postcolonial scholarship about Muslim women, most prominently in the work of Mahmood and Abu-Lughod discussed above.

As the title of this section suggests, I would like to propose that WLF can be regarded as a movement that is not only feminist but also engages with the unfinished task of decolonizing anti-imperialism. To elaborate on this argument, let me start by reiterating

the thesis offered in the last section about the continuation of Orientalism in various anti-colonial movements and the significance of this continuation for the analysis of gendered oppression in postcolonial contexts. The affinity between the gendered elements of Orientalism and those of Islamic fundamentalism is not coincidental but points us to transnational gendered relations of power and knowledge that can guide our analytical and political orientation. Here I follow Moallem's (2005) historical analysis that shows how the gendered (and as we know, misogynistic) discourse of political Islam in Iran was deeply influenced and shaped by Orientalism as a tradition of knowledge on the one hand, and imperialism as a political reality, on the other hand. In fact, the modern control of women's bodies in Iran did not start with mandatory hijab but rather with the mandatory de-veiling decreed by Reza Shah in 1936, a traumatic event in modern Iranian history that some scholars have analyzed in relation to mandatory hijab as an overcorrection and reclamation of tradition. Moallem shows how the obsession of the Iranian revolutionaries in the 1970s and 1980s with the hijab can fully be understood only in the context of the secular fundamentalism of the Reza Shah period and the Eurocentric Iranian intellectual discourse of modernism that wished to abandon tradition altogether, asking Iranian women to imitate the Western women in order to become properly civilized and save the nation from backwardness (Moallem 2005, 70). This discourse continued in the revolution of 1979 and in the 1980s, when Iranian women were burdened with the mission of saving the nation by veiling themselves. The revolutionary theorists of the 1979 revolution such as Ali Shariati were deeply influenced by the tradition of Orientalism, an influence that also shaped their thinking about the woman question (Ibid., 154). By revisiting (compulsory) hijab as a historical and political formation in relation to the history of imperialism and anti-

imperialism, we see that compulsory hijab is not a purely traditional Islamic construct but can only be understood and properly criticized as a modern political formation situated in a global context. Although the hijab has been a mechanism in the service of patriarchy (Hoodfar 2001), it cannot be regarded as simply a patriarchal practice because its social role has been shaped by a variety of other social and political conditions.[24]

Hoodfar argues that compulsory hijab was introduced by the Islamic regime in Iran "partly in celebration of its victory of the modernist state of the shah, and partly as a means of realizing its vision of "Islamic" Iran" (Hoodfar 2001, 12). But why did women have to pay the price for having an "Islamic" and non-modernist Iran by losing their freedom of choice regarding their dress code? Chatterjee's analysis of the logic of anti-colonial nationalism in Asia and Africa argues that women have always been forced to pay the price for the nation's authenticity:

> The home was the principal site for expressing the spiritual quality of the national culture, and women must take the main responsibility for protecting and nurturing this quality. No matter what the changes in the external conditions of life for women, they must not lose their essentially spiritual (that is, feminine) virtues; they must not, in other words, become essentially Westernized (126).

While anti-colonial politics permitted the use of Western science and technology (in the "material" domain), the nation's authenticity was to be found in the realm of spirituality and cultural identity, for which women were mainly responsible. If for Indian nationalism, women's roles were defined as a problem of Indian tradition in order to differentiate one's nation from the colonial West (Chatterjee, 119), in the case of Iran too, the woman question was instrumentalized in order to secure for the nation its anti-colonial spiritual identity. In

[24] It also needs to be noted that the hijab has also been used by women to express their agency and fight the patriarchy, and thus should not be reduced to a symbol of oppression. See Hoodfar (2001).

order to understand the importance of the hijab in this context, consider Sheth's analysis that hijab has not been subject to colonial modification, in the way that the Sari, or other traditional clothing has been. It has not had a chance to be domesticated by colonial powers, which is why it is still seen by observers as strange, and also still has not been fully integrated as an accepted dress code in Western societies (Sheth, Ch.4). This explains the importance of the compulsory hijab for the Islamic government: It is not merely about the oppression of women, but its symbolic meaning defines the identity and spiritual superiority (Chatterjee 1993, 120) of the nation in relation to the West in a way that cannot be find in any other medium.

In the context of the WLF, the genealogical perspective enables us to understand political Islam and its politics of gender as a result of concrete historical forces and relations of power. The lack of a historical perspective has led to an essentializing view of Islam that neglects to take into account the constitutive role of the legacy of Orientalism during Iran's experience of modernization and during the development of political Islam, and as a result turns (sometimes unknowingly) into a defense of secular fundamentalism. This perspective fails to take into consideration how controlling women's bodies had long been part of the project of secular modernism in Iran as well. Sharabi (1988) has used the term "neopatriarchy" to describe the new face of patriarchy that was a result of its marriage to imperialism in Arab countries, an analytical term that can be usefully applied to other global south contexts as well. A feminist perspective has to incorporate a postcolonial critique of those *neopatriarchal* mechanisms of secular modern oppression to remain faithful to its commitment to fighting gendered oppression. In the context of Iran, there is a long way to go to achieve this because the project of modern feminism has developed in

close alignment with secularism historically. As Najmabadi put it, feminism itself may have worked as a "veil" and as a "boundary marker for secularism of Iranian modernity" (Najmabadi 2000, 29).

Through a historicizing analysis that can be described as genealogical, Najmabadi narrates the history of the contingent boundaries between secularism and religion during Iran's experience of modernity. She focuses particularly on the role of Iranian feminism in upholding that boundary. While during the early phases of modernization, the discourse of Iranian modernists combined nationalism and Islamic views, there later emerged the sharp divide between religion and modernity with the idea of Islam as representing tradition or regression. Similarly, while earlier Iranian feminists did not shy away from using religious sources as a basis for advocating for women's rights, it was only later and particularly during the Reza Shah period that feminism, more than any other social or cultural issue, became the marker of secular modernity. In Najmabadi's words, "feminism became a screen category (a veil) occluding a historical process by which one kind of modernity was fashioned through the expulsion of Islam onto the beyond of modernity, where backwardness and religion became conflated as secularism's abject other" (Najmabadi 2000, 41). The idea of Iranian feminism as a marker of secular modernity shows an interesting parallel to the discourse of Orientalism because both equate Islam with the oppression of women. One of the challenges of problematizing gendered oppression in the context of Iranian Islamic fundamentalism remains doing so without reproducing the historically produced sharp boundaries between secularism and Islam.

In its opposition to compulsory hijab, the WLF movement has not always offered a nuanced understanding of compulsory hijab as a political and historical formation.

Various oppositional groups frame their critique of compulsory hijab as a secular argument against the presence of religion in the public sphere, while others argue that Islam is inherently oppressive to women and that the main reason behind the current oppression against women and minorities in Iran is nothing but Islam. The idea that the fight against gendered oppression requires a fight against religion in the public sphere and that the emergence of secularism will ensure the freedom of Iranian women not only neglects the central role of secularism in the oppression of Muslim women globally but also offers a deceiving promise about the future that stems from obliviousness about the past and the history of imperialism and secular fundamentalism in modern Iran. The affinity between the gendered elements of Orientalism and those of Islamic fundamentalism is not coincidental but points us to transnational gendered relations of power and knowledge that can guide our analytical and political orientation. How this orientation looks in practice is something that the Iranian public needs to find out collectively, but what can help us immensely in that process is a historical awareness about the hijab and about gendered oppression in Iran, that understands the problem of gendered oppression not simply as a result of the Islamic revolution, but rather acknowledges that the roots transcend the Islamic republic historically and geographically. The intersection of the global and local in the context of feminist struggles in Iran requires us to bring these terrains into dialogue and acknowledge them as "complementary spaces of struggle", as Tafakori argues in her analysis of campaigns against gender oppression in Iran (Tafakori 2021).

The Woman Life Freedom movement has still a long way to go to become a truly postcolonial feminist movement. So far it has not been radical enough in its critique of imperialism, a problem that goes beyond the scope of this chapter. However, in its bold

gesture to stand up against the oppressive gender politics of the anti-imperialist Islamic government in Iran, WLF contributes to a certain radicalization of the anti-imperialist discourse. This is because WLF problematizes the rarely acknowledged reality of the continuation of orientalism in anti-imperialist politics, especially when it comes to gender issues. As such, WLF can be regarded as an invitation to adopt a more intersectional and multi-directional approach to decolonial politics, one that does not rely on cultural authenticity and nativism but moves towards a more heterogenous understanding of subject positions in anti-imperialist contexts beyond the binaries of religion and secularism.

If imperialism and anti-imperialism have both produced essentialist discourses about Muslim women and have both generated political realities that have been oppressive towards women, one way to respond to this problem is by creating discourses (and subsequently, political realities) that embrace the heterogeneity (Spivak 2013, 79) of women in Muslim-majority countries and challenge the identarian wish to locate the cultural authenticity of the nation in women's dress code or behavior. These discursive practices would encompass both scholarship and activist work that challenge the present by inviting us to move towards what David Scott has called "an ethos of agonistic respect for pluralizations of subaltern difference" (Scott 1999, 224). But the call to embrace heterogeneity remains an empty invitation if it does not entail an understanding of the drive to homogenization and essentialization that has shaped our vision for centuries. The historicizing perspective of genealogical critique opens a new horizon for our understanding of gendered oppression in postcolonial contexts.

4. Conclusion: Genealogy, Postcolonial Feminism, and Multi-directionality of Critique

In this chapter, I discussed the implications of genealogical critique for studying the gendered afterlives of colonialism. The example of the Woman Life Freedom movement in Iran helped to shed light on the continuation of the histories of Orientalism and imperialism in the present, even in anti-imperialist contexts such as contemporary Iran. Furthermore, I suggested that the WLF can be regarded as a movement that invites us to problematize the legacies of Orientalism in our feminist theorizing, including the essentializing and homogenizing lens that has shaped academic scholarship about Muslim women until today. Reconsidering this scholarship – including the post 9/11 feminist discourse in the global north – in light of the WLF can help us historicize and provincialize it and explore the possibilities that WLF offers for expanding our discourse about gendered oppression in anti-imperialist contexts. In general, the discourse about the freedom of Muslim women in the global north academia needs to acknowledge its own geopolitical context and the difficulty of theorizing about global phenomena while being positioned in the centers of power. In the context of feminist philosophy, the one-sided attention paid to the racialization of the hijab that ignores the possible oppressive elements of the hijab as a cultural practice in some global south contexts such as Iran is an example of this shortcoming (see for example, Sheth 2022 and Al-Saji 2010). One way we might be able to overcome this shortcoming is by giving more space in our work to transnational political practices that take place beyond the borders of global north.

Rethinking feminism in this way can help us move towards I would like to call, following Dhawan (2013), multi-directional critique, a mode of critique that engages with multiple relations of power. Dhawan uses this idea for complicating the relationship

between postcolonial critique and queer critique and argues that "critique, when engaging with solely one dimension of domination, risks reproducing violence" (Dhawan 2013). The multi-directionality of critique follows from the reality that we are confronted with multiple forms of oppression in the real world, and as far as the postcolonial feminist agenda is concerned, imperialism and gendered oppression are two forms of (analytically distinguishable, but in the real world often intersecting) oppression that are irreducible to each other.

We can think of the resistance of the WLF movement as an invitation to a feminist philosophical analysis that bases the need for feminist critique of religious cultures and forms of life not in the abstract skepticism about religion, non-Western cultures, or Islam as such (as it has often been assumed in the discourse of missionary feminism), but in the actuality of the critical practices and local forms of resistance. Here again, Foucault's idea about local forms of resistance as catalysts for recognizing and understanding relations of power is helpful (Dreyfus 1983, 217). If we take the voices of local activists and advocates for social justice and their demand for freedom seriously, it becomes evident that feminist freedom does not lose its relevance only because it is instrumentalized by Orientalist and imperialist discourses. Perhaps the better way of being anti-imperialist feminists is by acknowledging that imperialism is not all-encompassing, that its discourse is not the only speech in the world, and that we have other voices to listen to.

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