

**WHAT TO DO AFTER THE 'DEATH OF GOD'? : AN ANALYSIS OF
RESSENTMENT AND SOCIAL/POLITICAL EXCLUSION**

An Undergraduate Research Scholars Thesis

by

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ABSTRACT

What To Do After the ‘Death of God’? : An Analysis of Ressentiment and Social/Political Exclusion. (May 2015)

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This project proposes a critical perspective on the emancipatory project outlined by Gianni Vattimo and Santiago Zabala through the lens of two main problems: (a) *ressentiment* and (b) social/political exclusion. In working within these two problems, I argue that one should have caution in considering Vattimo and Zabala’s project because their Eurocentric ideals create several problems for social/political emancipatory thought.

In order to elucidate the limitations of Vattimo and Zabala’s ideas, I suggest a return to Vattimo’s main theoretical source, Friedrich Nietzsche, and a careful reconstruction of Vattimo and Zabala’s construction of the category of the “weak.” Thus, I claim that the failure of Vattimo and Zabala’s emancipatory project is directly linked to a misreading of Nietzsche’s philosophy and the essentializing of the category of the “weak,” which leads their project in a direction that creates a distortion of the social/political situation they wish to describe. This leads Vattimo and Zabala to endorse an emancipatory strategy that in fact promises to exacerbate the social/political problems they aim to address.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this research to my parents, Humberto Jesús González Vásquez and Maryuri Tibisay Núñez de González, and my mentor, friend, and professor Scott Whiting Austin, who recently passed away. Their encouragement and example helped to motivate me during the process of writing this project.

Le dedico esta investigación a mis padres, Humberto Jesús González Vásquez y Maryuri Tibisay Núñez de González y a mi mentor, amigo y professor Scott Whiting Austin, quien recientemente falleció. Sus ánimos y ejemplo me ayudaron a motivarme durante el proceso de escribir este proyecto.

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I am also indebted to my mother, Maryuri Tibisay Nuñez de Gonzalez, for instilling in me, since I was a little kid watching her work to get her Ph.D., a passionate desire for academic work and

discipline that has resulted in this work and, hopefully, many more in the future. Thanks are owed to my father, Humberto Jesus Gonzalez Vasquez, who has been so influential throughout my life as a role model and inspiration. My life would be dull and oblique without his presence and warm, caring affection that has given me all of the joys a son could ever hope for. Without a doubt, there are countless individuals who have, in some way or another, contributed to this project without even knowing it. To them, I would like to extend my gratitude as well. Finally, I am indebted for the influence and inspiration that I receive from my country, Venezuela, in shaping who I am and developing the sense of concern and interest that fuel this research. Without the experiences of living for approximately half of my life in Venezuela and the United States, I would have not had the ‘borderland’ (and unique) perspective to critically take on this task of understanding this hybrid situation.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This project was initially drawn out as an attempt to find common ground that would enable the discussion of a philosopher from Europe (Jürgen Habermas) and one from Latin America (Paulo Freire). My focus in that project would have been identifying the different ways these philosophers supplement each other's thought and, then, argue that one could form a synthesis of their respective positions in order to create a sensitive model for understanding social/political realities in both *loci*. One of the other thinkers that I would have used in that project is Walter Mignolo. Specifically, it was his concept of 'borderland gnosis' that drew me to his thought in an attempt to create that fertile 'third ground' in which Habermas and Freire could converse with each other. However, thanks to a trip to my local bookstore, I came across a copy of *Hermeneutic Communism: From Heidegger to Marx* by Gianni Vattimo and Santiago Zabala and, after looking at the table of contents and seeing a section referring to Hugo Chávez and Venezuela, I knew that my project had immediately changed.

The fundamental task for me in reorienting my project around Vattimo and Zabala's concept of 'hermeneutic communism' was to try to find the ways in which it could be linked to the previous project I had in mind. In this process, I came across a quotation that, to this day, still strikes me: "Now that God is dead and the absolute truth is not credible anymore, love for the other is possible and necessary¹." With this idea, Vattimo and Zabala draw from the Nietzschean phrase: "God is dead" (i.e. our metaphysical truths are no longer credible). This, in turn, leads Vattimo

¹ Gianni Vattimo and Santiago Zabala, *Hermeneutic Communism: From Heidegger to Marx* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), p. 111-112.

and Zabala to develop the “political project” of hermeneutics in *Hermeneutic Communism* as “the only philosophy that reflects the pluralism of postmodern societies... where achievements are not measured in relation to truth but rather in relation to others².” Vattimo’s idea to develop a political sensibility to the hermeneutical project is present in one of his solo authored books, *A Farewell to Truth*, where he argues that, “as long as truth is conceived as *adaequatio*, as correspondence to a given (a datum) objectively present, the danger of political Platonism never goes away³.” According to this quote, truth must be conceived as something other than a mere given — an objective fact — in order to avoid falling into the dangers of authoritarian models of domination. The hermeneutical framework is seen as a useful “political project” that allows for both truth as something other than an objective standard *and* an area for emancipatory radical politics to occur due to its emphasis on interpretation and contempt for authoritarian frameworks. Thus, Vattimo and Zabala’s aim is to focus on a discourse of truth that is understood as an aperture of spaces for the “construction of consensus and civic friendship; [since] it is these that make truth, in the descriptive sense of the term, possible⁴.”

For Vattimo and Zabala, it is in discourse *qua* aperture that one can enact a love for the Other that was not possible under a discourse *qua* correspondence. This is due to the fact that Vattimo understands the presence of metaphysical truths under the Heideggerian notion of “*Ge-Stell*, che traduciamo in italiano con *im-posizione*⁵.” The relevance that the *im-position* (i.e. the forcing-upon) of metaphysical truths has is that these help legitimate the organization of a “society [that]

² Ibid., p. 79.

³ Gianni Vattimo, *A Farewell to Truth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), p. 3.

⁴ Ibid., p. 9.

⁵ Gianni Vattimo, *La Fine della Modernità* (Milano: Garzanti, 2011), p. 48. [Ge-Stell (framing), which we translate into Italian as im-posizione (im-position); All translations in footnotes will be my own translations unless otherwise stated]

must direct itself according to truth (the existing paradigm), that is, in favor of the strong against the weak⁶.” The reason why the strong are favored in this imposition of metaphysical truths is because “they are the only ones that have the tools to know, practice, and impose it⁷.” Thus a ‘love for the Other’ is only possible under a non-oppressive structure of truths and ideals — a ‘democratic’ structuring of different and conflicting interpretations, which means keeping in mind the “impossibility of declaring once and for all the primacy of one interpretation over others⁸.”

In addition to their theoretical work, Vattimo and Zabala include several applied examples of ‘weak’ or hermeneutic communism in order to bridge the enduring gap between theory and praxis. They take their examples directly from the surge of Leftist democracies in South America (among which are Venezuela, Ecuador, Brazil, and Bolivia). Through this fountain of ‘political renewal’, Vattimo and Zabala argue that the governments of Hugo Chávez, Rafael Correa, Luiz Inácio ‘Lula’ da Silva, and Evo Morales “represent a political alternative to the global capitalism of framed democracies”⁹. Thus, the goal of a project such as ‘hermeneutic communism’ is to provide a framework of emancipatory politics that focuses on the ‘discharges’ of global capitalism — i.e. all of those individuals who are forced into slums and constitute the marginalized members of societies — in sum, Vattimo’s concept of the ‘weak’.

In this project, my intention is to critically interpret Vattimo and Zabala’s ‘hermeneutic communism’ by focusing on three main tasks. Firstly, I will contest their interpretation that the

⁶ Vattimo and Zabala, *Hermeneutic Communism*, p. 12.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., p. 106.

⁹ Vattimo and Zabala, *Hermeneutic Communism*, p. 122.

transition from what Nietzsche calls the ‘Death of God’ to love for the Other is inherently emancipatory and immediate. In order to do this, I will pay careful attention to Nietzsche’s parable of the madman to show that Nietzsche does not identify the ‘Death of God’ as inherently emancipatory. In addition, I will proceed to draw some insights that Nietzsche develops in *On the Genealogy of Morals* which suggest that for there to be a transition from the ‘Death of God’ to love for the Other, humans must transform themselves before love for the Other is possible. For convenience, I will refer to this moment of transformation as the *twilight interval*, which designates Nietzsche’s desired potential ascent of humankind. Thus, I argue that Vattimo and Zabala misconstrue the twilight interval from the construction of their project. Secondly, I would like to propose a critical perspective on Vattimo and Zabala’s hermeneutical project of inclusion. I understand an ethico-political project of inclusion (e.g. love for the Other) to be predicated on the inclusion of all individuals in a given society — both ‘oppressors’ and ‘oppressed’. Thus, I will argue that Vattimo and Zabala’s attempt to think of the ‘oppressed’ as essentially ‘weak’ or ‘poor’ trivializes the concept of the ‘oppressed’ and leads them towards a project of exclusion. I will, then, tie my first two points together in order to argue that Vattimo and Zabala’s misreading of Nietzsche’s ‘Death of God’ and their apparently exclusionary project will lead to the expression of *ressentiment* that creates a barrier for any type of social/political understanding and action. Finally, I argue for the use of Paulo Freire’s concept of *conscientização* as an alternative to Vattimo and Zabala’s hermeneutic project since it helps avoid the lacks/limitations that are identified in their project and will provide a positive and constructive proposal in order to transition from the ‘Death of God’ epoch towards love for the Other.

CHAPTER II

WHAT DOES ONE DO AFTER THE ‘DEATH OF GOD’?

In order to understand the perspective from which Vattimo and Zabala develop their ‘hermeneutic communism’, it is crucial to describe Nietzsche’s idea of the ‘Death of God’. Despite Nietzsche’s numerous iterations of the ‘Death of God’, his most prominent elaboration of this idea is developed in *The Gay Science*. Nietzsche begins his discussion of the ‘Death of God’ by describing a scene that occurs in the middle of a marketplace in which a madman cries out “I seek God! I seek God!”¹⁰. At the outset, Nietzsche distances himself from the madman parable by maintaining not only the anonymity of the madman and the crowd, but also of the individual narrating the scene. The crowd, described as atheists, begins to laugh and mock him. The madman then looks at the crowd and tells them “Whither is God? ... I will tell you. We have killed him”¹¹. After a long monologue, the madman describes all the questions that surge from the ‘Death of God’ that focus on how we are supposed to cope with this event. In response, the crowd remains silent and stares at him in amazement, not being able to respond to any of his queries. The madman, seeing the reaction of the crowd, throws his lantern down and tells them that he has come too early and that this event has not reached the ears of men — they themselves have done the deed, yet are the most distant from it.

Nietzsche’s description of the ‘Death of God’ is interpreted as a description of what Nietzsche saw as the expression of nihilism in European civilization. It is because we do not know how to cope with the ‘Death of God’ that we will potentially desire the ‘will to nothingness’ [der Wille

¹⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), p. 181.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

zum Nichts], which is the desire to not want to will anything at all¹². The madman's premature arrival is seen to reflect the idea that, in order for the 'Death of God' to have meaning and not result in the 'will to nothingness', the crowd must respond to the event. This idea is present in Heidegger's notion that one either lives before the death of God or one lives in its precarious aftermath¹³. In addition, we see this idea present in the madman's response since he diagnoses the crowd as not having heard of the event (i.e. not having completely understood it) and, thus, the event becomes and remains empty until the crowd presents tentative responses to the queries posed by the madman.

In light of this reading of Nietzsche, Vattimo and Zabala construct the 'Death of God' as an emancipatory event in which the metaphysical truths that we, as a civilization, once believed are now put into question. Vattimo in his book *Fine della Modernità* writes, "per Nietzsche tutto il processo del nichilismo è riassumibile nella morte di Dio¹⁴." Despite the fact that the 'Death of God' is a move towards nihilism, Vattimo¹⁵ is clear that this is an *active* nihilism as opposed to reactive — "as a sign of *enhanced spiritual strength*... [Rather than] as a sign of the *collapse and decline of spiritual strength*¹⁶." Vattimo and Zabala argue that, in a post-'Death of God' civilization, one either falls into the nostalgia and enforcement of authoritarian imposition of metaphysical truths, or into the project of hermeneutics in which a space is open for the

¹² Daniel Conway, "Revisiting the Death of God: On the Madness of Nietzsche's Madman." *Acta Kierkegaardiana* 4 (2009): p. 106.

¹³ Ibid., p. 110. See original reference, Martin Heidegger, "The Word of Nietzsche: God is Dead," *The Question Concerning Technology*, trans. W. Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 61.

¹⁴ Vattimo, *La Fine della Modernità*, p. 28. [for Nietzsche the whole process of nihilism can be summarized in the Death of God]

¹⁵ I would like to make note of the fact that I am referring to his corpus as a single author when I mention Vattimo by himself (in contrast to the collaboration between Vattimo and Zabala). However, the criticism that I apply to Vattimo's solo project applies to Vattimo and Zabala's joint project and vice versa.

¹⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), p. 17.

contestation of interpretations. With this declaration, they both believe that the transition from the 'Death of God' to a hermeneutic model is seamless and immediate, especially Vattimo, who argues that,

Like the death of God, the end of metaphysics is an event that cannot be ascertained objectively, one to which thought is called to respond. It is an event that transforms the existence of the person who receives the announcement—or which is entirely constituted by this transformation¹⁷.

By arguing that the 'Death of God' (which Vattimo sees as analogous to the end of metaphysics) is an event that transforms the existence of the person, Vattimo indicates that the event in itself is capable of transitioning humans to a different way of being. The question remains, what would this transition look like? Vattimo describes it as "Dio muore in quanto il sapere non arriva alle cause ultime... si Dio muore si perde l'imperativo della verità — e ciò perché le condizioni di esistenza sono ormai meno violente; meno patetiche¹⁸." This description seems to align with Vattimo's desire to develop a philosophy that "given the dissolution of metaphysics, it seems to me that the only supreme principle to be propounded... is the reduction of violence¹⁹."

To claim that the 'Death of God' entails an event that leads to the reduction of violence is uncontroversial. However, the leap (of faith?) Vattimo and Zabala make from this event to the expression of a genuine *caritas* (love, charity, kindness) seems to not be possible. In fact, it seems that, while both helpful and influential, the Heideggerian notion of the end of metaphysics

¹⁷ Gianni Vattimo, *After Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), p. 13.

¹⁸ Vattimo, *La Fine della Modernità*, p. 32. [God dies insofar as knowledge does not arrive to a final cause... if God dies, the imperative of truth is lost — and this is why the conditions of existence are now less violent; less pathetic]

¹⁹ Gianni Vattimo and Santiago Zabala, "'Weak Thought' and the Reduction of Violence: A Dialogue with Gianni Vattimo." *Common Knowledge* 8, no. 3 (2002): p. 455.

as a gloss on the ‘Death of God’ encourages the misreading that Vattimo prefers. What Nietzsche wished to emphasize was that metaphysics would end only when the ‘will to truth’ has been exposed as untruthful and unscientific (and even this is doubtful since we are prone to self-deception). Thus, whereas Heidegger and Vattimo equate the ‘Death of God’ with the “devaluation of the highest values,” Nietzsche points to one value in particular — Truth — that has not yet been devalued, and which therefore survives the ‘Death of God’. Vattimo’s conclusion obviates the fact that just because we find ourselves in a period of the ‘Death of God’, does not mean that all values have been devalued. Therefore, a less violent and pathetic condition does not give us a basis for assuming that this condition will inherently lead to genuine *caritas* since the ‘will to truth’ is still present in our discourses and interactions. In addition, Vattimo and Zabala argue that, with the presence of a space of contestation between interpretations, there will be a preference for *caritas* that will be expressed in the attempts to come to consensus about the interpretations that are being contested. However, in my view, this seamless transition and immediate emancipation are founded on their misinterpretation of Nietzsche’s ‘Death of God’. Accordingly, I will argue that Nietzsche’s parable shows that the transition is not seamless, but rather uncertain in duration. In addition, I will provide evidence that Nietzsche suggests that morality (i.e. human-to-human interaction) will not change immediately after the ‘Death of God’. In doing so, I will emphasize Nietzsche’s focus on transformation as the only possibility for changing the way humans interact.

***Ressentiment* and the Transition from pre- to post-‘Death of God’ epoch**

Before delving into the transition from the ‘Death of God’ to love for the other, it is appropriate to discuss another fundamental concept within Nietzsche’s philosophy. Nietzsche’s philosophical

aim, in addition to the overcoming of nihilism, is to overcome (or neutralize) the *ressentiment* that humans encounter in Christian morality. This project is most clearly articulated in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, where Nietzsche develops the genealogy, or lineage, of moral concepts (such as ‘Good’ and ‘Bad’) in order to identify our moral prejudices. In developing this genealogy, Nietzsche formulates two concepts that inform the rest of his genealogical project, ‘slave morality’ and ‘noble morality’. Nietzsche’s first reference of *ressentiment* occurs when he identifies the beginning of the slave revolt in morality as the moment when “*ressentiment* itself becomes creative and gives birth to values”²⁰. Thus, while noble morality is defined by its affirmation of values and the world, slave morality is always reactive because it is always created out of the negation of that which is different from it. In this sense, noble morality engenders its standard of ‘Good’ by affirmation, while slave morality posits its standard of ‘Good’ by negation, by identifying the ‘Evil’ and only then constructing a ‘Good’ in reaction. I have explained Nietzsche’s conception of *ressentiment*, which is a fundamental concept to my argument and will be valuable in the following discussion on the event of the ‘Death of God’ and what it signifies.

It is clear that, because of the crowd’s amazement with the madman, that the crowd is unaware of the event of the ‘Death of God’ (even though they are atheists!). This interpretation is affirmed by the fact that the madman describes his venture into the marketplace as premature — he came too early — because the crowd does not truly understand the implications of the ‘Death of God’. Thus, the ‘Death of God’ cannot be construed as immediately emancipatory since we do not truly understand the implications of this event. In order to elucidate our lack of understanding

²⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), p. 36.

this event, it is necessary to see that humans have been acculturated since the origins of civilization to need a God. The necessity for God is what provided a center and a basis for most human structures and ideologies throughout numerous time periods of history. Hence, our lack of understanding of the implications of the 'Death of God' is linked to what we had become through acculturation. As yet, and for an indefinite period, we will experience the 'Death of God' as a permanent loss of meaning and significance. We may regroup in its aftermath, we may survive and eventually thrive, but we will do so under the tragic conditions of this permanent loss. Now that I have discussed *ressentiment* and our understanding of the 'Death of God', I will use this as evidence to show that Vattimo and Zabala's seamless transition actually constitutes a leap (of faith?) that is not accounted for by a faithful reading of Nietzsche's 'Death of God'.

In analyzing the connection between what we had become and our lack of understanding the implications of the 'Death of God', one can see that for there to be any change in our understanding, there would have to be an analogous change in what we have become. In the quote presented in Chapter I, Vattimo and Zabala assert that the transition from the 'Death of God' to love for the Other is seamlessly developed by an immediate transformation in humans. Vattimo even claims that, "given the dissolution of metaphysics, it seems to me that the only supreme principle to be propounded... is *the reduction of violence*"²¹. However, in my argument, I have identified a connection between what we had become and our understanding (or lack thereof) of the implications that follow the 'Death of God'. If one accepts that one has to become different than one was (i.e. to change our perception that God is a necessary center), then it follows that the transition from the 'Death of God' to love for the other cannot come

²¹ Gianni Vattimo and Santiago Zabala, "'Weak Thought' and the Reduction of Violence: A Dialogue with Gianni Vattimo," p. 455.

immediately. Thus, Vattimo and Zabala's conception is flawed because it suggests that after the 'Death of God', one can immediately activate the possibility and necessity of love for the Other without changing what one had become. As a short aside, I would like to clarify that Vattimo and Zabala are right that love for the Other is possible. But it is far from clear that this possibility necessarily follows. Rather, love for the Other is possible in the sense that it is not impossible. This being said, we arrive at an interpretation of Vattimo and Zabala's point that clearly diverges from their proposed intention of promoting love for the Other.

As Vattimo paraphrases, "Dio è morto, ma l'uomo non se la passa troppo bene"²². This quote is simply a reminder of the catastrophic consequences of the 'Death of God' as loss of meaning and significance. Because we are in this state, the association among individuals cannot change unless there is a (will to) change (rather than a will to nothingness) in what those individuals have become. To give into this nihilistic sentiment, that is, to remain in a state of complacency and nullity, is to fall into the permanent consequences of the 'Death of God'. In order for any positive proposal to survive the deadly grip of the 'Death of God', there must be an expression of the will in individuals that combats and is able to defeat our gravitation towards a will to nothingness. If this is true, then Vattimo and Zabala's project constitutes a leap that, instead of clarifying the outlines of an emancipatory project, of a will towards something, is tantamount to a leap (of faith?) that cannot be accounted for in social/political affairs. A genuine (as opposed to a false) transition and expression of love for the other (*caritas*) would require us to have succeeded in cultivating this capacity within ourselves. In what follows, I will describe the dangers of *ressentiment* in a project that does not address the transition towards a genuine expression of love for the Other.

²² Vattimo, *La Fine della Modernità*, p. 39. [God is dead, but man still is not doing too well]

Nietzsche believes that we have learned, under the regime of Christian morality, to express a false *caritas* that only serves to mask our *ressentiment*. By so doing, Nietzsche argues that we care for others only inasmuch as they can either distract us from the emptiness of our own souls/selves or to bring others down to our miserable level. This means that any project of emancipation that argues for a genuine *caritas* will inevitably fail if it does not address the false *caritas* that we are used to and will continue to express unless we change ourselves. Some would argue that this seems to be an awfully pessimistic point of view of individuals. However, I would like to point out that since this is all we know — that is, this is what we have historically learned to do — it would be strange to expect us to be able to suddenly do something radically different from what we were used to doing without a recreation of history and an extensive retraining (or relearning) in genuine *caritas*. Therefore, Vattimo and Zabala risk re-producing the very problem they wish to address by not being attentive to the importance of transition and the danger of *ressentiment*, since they urge us to extend what is in fact a false and toxic love toward others. We can respond to their demands and perform a love toward others — it will be our immediate reaction — but, as I have previously stated, it will not end well for those who are already excluded and disenfranchised. In fact, it will only serve to reinforce and exacerbate existing exclusions and injustices because there is no will to change the current state of affairs in which we find ourselves in due to the fact that we are still under the jurisdiction of pre-‘Death of God’ values. In what follows, I will provide an alternative to this leap (of faith?) by offering an account that recognizes the need for and demands the development of an intermediate stage of transition that would be able to provide the opportunity for humans to retrain themselves in order to shift from the values that remain in a ‘Death of God’ epoch toward genuine *caritas*.

Becoming Other than what One Was: The Twilight Interval

In this section, I will propose an alternative to Vattimo and Zabala's leap (of faith?) that humans will transition from the 'Death of God' to a state of genuine *caritas*. In my view, the focus is not so much on a seamless and immediate transition. Rather, I believe it is beneficial to recognize and demand an intermediate stage of transition that would allow individuals to become other than what they were in order to move towards (or through) a "twilight interval". In doing so, I will draw on the earlier connection I made between understanding the 'Death of God' and becoming different than what one was. I believe that, by focusing on this process of becoming other, it is clear that we are in no position whatsoever to muster the genuine expression of *caritas* in the immediate aftermath of the 'Death of God', which Vattimo and Zabala believe is possible and necessary. What we know about ourselves is that we will believe that our expressions of *caritas* are genuine, even when they are not. Yet another aspect of the 'Death of God' is our increased susceptibility to self-deception (i.e. we believe that our expressions of *caritas* are fueled by love for the other when in fact they are illustrations of *ressentiment*). Thus, an analysis of the possibility of a transition into a "twilight interval" needs to bear in mind these aspects that are linked to the event of the 'Death of God' in order to combat the dissonance produced by our false love and self-deception.

For Nietzsche, our psychology and way of being with others have taught us to *not* love the Other because, through *ressentiment*, we prevent ourselves from loving each other by the continuation of the dichotomy of slave and noble morality. In his discussion of herd morality, Nietzsche believes that after the concession that belief in God has vanished, the *gregarious instinct* will

begin to dominate²³. In the presence of herd morality, we deny and are intolerant of the existence of difference (i.e. all those individuals that are exceptions to the herd's rule) because "the herd feels the exception, whether it be below or above it, as something opposed and harmful to it"²⁴. This means that our herd morality — this gregarious instinct — does not allow others' achievements to dwarf our own since any type of difference to that of the herd is immediately excluded as detrimental to the organization of a homogeneous unit. Thus, in order for an alternative to be proposed, such as genuine *caritas* rather than an authoritarian imposition of metaphysical truths, we would have to 'unlearn' our previous way of being together, that is, this gregarious instinct of excluding difference. Specifically, 'unlearning' our previous way of being together would entail the overcoming of *ressentiment*. If this 'unlearning' does not occur, then our relations will always be influenced and permeated by *ressentiment* due to the fact that it is all we have 'learned' to do. Thus, following Nietzsche, the transition to a state of love for the Other needs to be prefaced by an overcoming of *ressentiment*, which in Vattimo and Zabala's project is absent. By doing so, Vattimo and Zabala construct their alternative of 'hermeneutic communism' on the misreading of the implications drawn by Nietzsche regarding one's transition from the 'Death of God' to the possibility of genuine *caritas* and lead us down a troublesome path.

One could imagine Vattimo and Zabala responding to my argument and critique by stressing the freedom that is achieved by individuals after the 'Death of God' since there are no longer any metaphysical constraints on our persons. Despite this seemingly correct reading of the 'Death of God', we are still left wondering what Nietzsche envisages for the event of the 'Death of God'. Part of the problem we encounter here is that the event of the 'Death of God' does not mean an

²³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, p. 157.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

occurrence or incident *sensu stricto*. Rather, it means a gradually unfolding transition whose contours and magnitude remain unknown to us and cannot be immediately known to us because we have to go through the process of responding to it and we have not yet reached that stage. In the alternative reading that I have laid out, I believe one can see that, for Nietzsche, the event is one that reveals to us what we are. This gradual unfolding of events that follows the ‘Death of God’ serve as mirror to the individual who is willing to look into it. There is no doubt that some will not want to see themselves in this mirror, but the mirror is still there. Thus, if the ‘Death of God’ reveals to us what we are, in order for there to be a transition from this state to one of *caritas*, it seems that one would have to become other than what one was for there to be a change in the way we relate to one another. This is simply to say that, if the ‘Death of God’ symbolizes a change from one period to another, then the adequate response that must be initiated is that of an intermediate stage of becoming other than what we were (i.e. “twilight interval”). It is crucial that one understands this point because one cannot conceive of an alternative to *ressentiment* without changing what one has become, since the expression of *ressentiment* has been ingrained in us from a historical perspective and, thus, we have to change *our* history before we can change the history of a whole epoch in an analogous form. In order to further illustrate this thought, I will highlight what the transition would look like in a social/political context.

If we are content with having a leap (of faith?) from the dismantling of structures of oppression to love for the Other, then we have to also be content with the persistence of *ressentiment* and the potential for instability. Vattimo acknowledges this critique because “such a dissolution of any ground or foundation, which in itself ‘brings freedom’ ... insofar as it also dissolves any authoritarian archaic principle, runs the risk of hardening itself into a new form of

foundationalism, into a new metaphysics”²⁵. With this quote, we are able to see that it is precisely this ‘lack of ground’ that creates a vacuum for the imposition of a new, absolute ground. This is the danger that Nietzsche saw as well by saying that Truth was the only value that is still in place after the ‘Death of God’.

In order to prevent this new foundationalism from occurring, Vattimo suggests that hermeneutics constitutes “a powerful corrective against the foundationalist aberrations of nihilism”²⁶. Once again, he neglects the need for change in who we are and who we have become. It is indubitable that we have a new tool, hermeneutics, which we should learn to use and use well, since it has the potential for opening up the space of contestation and allowing everyone’s voice to be heard. But, before this is possible, we have to respond the following question: where is the will to embrace this new tool? This is to say, where is the will to something (in this case, hermeneutics) that struggles against our inner desire of a will to nothingness? We cannot use, in the meaningful sense of the word, a tool for which there is no will to embrace it. This is as absurd as saying that we will use dialogue when we, in fact, embrace war. Even though this problem is quite salient in our discussion, Vattimo insists on describing the hermeneutical project as one that is guided by respect for an individual’s choice and allows for the plurality of interpretations, in which no interpretation is privileged and these are decided by consensus. However, this does not address the discernment of a limitation in the hermeneutical project that arises from the assumptions that the transition from fixed metaphysical truths to a plurality of truths will be immediate and

²⁵ Silvia Benso, "Emancipation and the Future of the Utopian: On Vattimo's Philosophy of History." *Between Nihilism and Politics: The Hermeneutics of Gianni Vattimo*. Ed. Silvia Benso and Brian Schroeder. (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2010), p. 207. In addition, see Gianni Vattimo and Santiago Zabala, *Nihilism & Emancipation: Ethics, Politics, and Law*, trans. William McCuaig (New York: Columbia UP, 2004).

²⁶ Ibid.

emancipatory and that there is a willingness to use the hermeneutic model. We are still accustomed to the need for a center (which was God) and, therefore, the results of this new structure will be predictable because we have remained what we were, even if the structure or the rules of the game have changed. There can be a host of different strategies and models to choose from, but the fact of the matter is that individuals are still caught in grasp of the will to nothingness. I would like to emphasize that this is not to say that a hermeneutic model will prove to be emancipatory and will lead us towards love for the Other. Rather, my point is that the hermeneutic model (and any other model) will fail insofar as we have not developed a will to embrace this tool — a change in our way of being that makes us other than what we were. Thus, in order to change the way in which individuals relate to each other, it is not enough to change the structure in which they participate; there must also be an analogous change in the persons they have become hitherto.

CHAPTER III

THE VIOLENT ESSENTIALIZATION OF THE OPPRESSED

In continuing with my project, I would like to turn to the question of social/political exclusion in Vattimo and Zabala's hermeneutic communism. In this section, I will propose a critical perspective on Vattimo and Zabala's hermeneutical project of inclusion. By this I mean their attempt to present "Chávez, together with his allies... [as] an alternative and a model we could follow"²⁷. By presenting these South American presidents as models, he holds them as the standard for a project of inclusion and redemption since they are the ones addressing the 'weak' in the best way possible. Thus, I will proceed in this chapter by defining the parameters of an ethico-political project of inclusion. By doing so, I will use the example of a project of inclusion (e.g. love for the Other) that Vattimo and Zabala are offering in their hermeneutic model. I will argue that an ethico-political project of inclusion is to be predicated on the inclusion of *all* individuals in a given society — both 'oppressors' and 'oppressed'. In addition to this claim, I will assert that Vattimo and Zabala's attempts to think of the 'oppressed' as essentially 'weak' or 'poor' does violence to the concept of the 'oppressed', in that the concept becomes reductive, which leads them towards a project of exclusion. In the progress of developing my critical position against Vattimo and Zabala, I will also make a parallel critique of a prominent South American philosopher, Enrique Dussel, through the use of another South American philosopher, Santiago Castro-Gómez, and his project of 'liberation philosophy' that shares some similarities with Vattimo and Zabala's project.

²⁷ Vattimo and Zabala, *Hermeneutic Communism*, p. 132.

On the Violent Essentializing of the Oppressed

In *A Farewell to Truth*, Vattimo writes that, “the essential motivation of the struggle for liberation is the effort to give a voice to those who didn’t have one before, as Walter Benjamin wrote”²⁸. This is how Vattimo construes the focus of this social/political project, as one that is primarily focused on allowing those who have been shunned from dialogue to be able to enter into the space of dialogue with others and be able to assert their existence. In this sense, I see no source of controversy since it is without a doubt the motivation of any emancipatory movement to focus and promote the inclusion of those groups of individuals who have been excluded from the space of dialogue. However, if we read between the lines of Vattimo’s discourse, one sees an implicitly (and, eventually, an explicitly) exclusionary rhetoric. In an interview with the Venezuelan newspaper *Correo del Orinoco*, Vattimo, in discussing the meaning of Marx’s concept of the ‘proletariat’, says, “El mundo esta hecho de esto: de excluidos, de excluidos que presionan las fronteras, de fronteras que intentan esforzarse para excluirlos. Yo lo veo así. *Los buenos pobres y los ricos malos*”²⁹. Thus, Vattimo introduces his exclusionary rhetoric by asserting that “los pobres no siempre son buenos... [pero] los ricos siempre son malos”³⁰.

With his declaration, Vattimo is clearly asserting that the poor are the ones that are excluded from dialogue. This is, by no means, a controversial statement or argument. The controversy occurs when Vattimo creates the concept of the ‘weak’ or ‘poor’ as ‘those without a voice’ and from the fact that he demonizes the Other *qua* rich as essentially evil. By asserting the rich as

²⁸ Vattimo, *A Farewell to Truth*, p. 118-119.

²⁹ Gianni Vattimo, “El futuro es de los débiles porque los débiles son los que no tienen todavía nada que defender,” *Correo del Orinoco* (Caracas, Venezuela), Jun. 29 2014. Emphasis my own. [The world is made up of these: of the excluded, of the excluded that pressure the borders, the borders that consciously attempt to exclude them. I see it in this manner. The poor [who are] good and the rich [who are] bad.]

³⁰ [The poor are not always good... [but] the rich are always bad.]

essentially evil, Vattimo presents a project whose rhetoric implies that the only salvation possible is through the redemption of the poor — that is, the ‘good’. Thus, he is essentially going against the hermeneutic model that is based on dialogue between groups and classes. In what follows, I will argue that Vattimo and Zabala’s intentions are to silence the rich, since they are evil and cannot contribute to the cause of liberation. In addition, I present some of the problems that are produced by this romanticized version of the ‘poor’ as redeemers of humanity by looking at Dussel’s ‘liberation philosophy’, which falls into the same fault as Vattimo and Zabala’s project of hermeneutic communism.

The first point of critique that can be formulated by Vattimo and Zabala’s romanticized version of the ‘poor’ is that it proves to be a reductive point of view. Instead of attempting, in a postmodern fashion (in which Vattimo and Zabala believe we are operating) to transcend the essential categories of ‘good’ and ‘evil’, we see a mere re-production of these categories to justify a project of exclusion. This is to say that, Vattimo and Zabala adhere to the belief that we are in the post-modern condition (i.e. all of the meta-narratives for essentially defining a group as ‘good’ or ‘evil’ have no value), yet they still apply this to the ‘poor’ and ‘rich’ classes. By doing this, Vattimo and Zabala argue that the redemption of society cannot proceed through dialogue with the rich because they are essentially ‘evil’ — incapable of asserting the ‘good’ that belongs solely to the poor. This seems to create a problem in the consistency of what they proclaim to adhere to. As believers of the post-modern condition and of the hermeneutic model, it seems quite ironic that they fall into an absolutist ‘good’ and ‘evil’ framework as well as a non-dialogic that relies on the demonization of the Other. I have explained the contradiction (or, at least, the clash) between Vattimo and Zabala’s postmodern belief system and their current project in

‘hermeneutic communism’. Now, I would like to focus on the non-dialogical framework that they end up ascribing to because of the demonization of the rich *qua* ‘evil’.

In demonizing the rich, Vattimo and Zabala are making not only a qualifying (*calificador*) statement but also a disqualifying (*descalificador*) statement. This is to say, by demonizing the rich by their class and qualifying (*calificando*) (or categorizing) them as ‘evil’, Vattimo is, in one way or another, disqualifying (*descalificando*) them from dialogue. What this means is that Vattimo is saying they are inadequate to enter into dialogue with the ‘poor’ since they are essentially ‘evil’. If it is the case that the rich are essentially ‘evil’, then that means they cannot bring anything ‘good’ to the space of dialogue, since to be rich is to be evil. It is even comical to think that, in this sense, Vattimo and Zabala *could* construct a transition in which all individuals would have to become other than what they were (e.g. the rich must become ‘poor’) and then love for the Other would be possible. However, the fact of the matter is that Vattimo and Zabala do not want to take this course of action. Rather, they want to remain within the binary of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ — the modern notion that there were absolute ideals that upheld these concepts — without realizing that they are contradicting their other self-assumed positions. Thus, instead of promoting a space of dialogue so that the hermeneutic model could take place in a postmodern setting, where consensus would be built around the rich and the poor dialoguing freely about what the ‘good’ is, Vattimo and Zabala relegate this task only to the poor since they are the bastion of ‘goodness’ and hence disqualify (*descalifican*) the rich (essentially, the Other in there binary) to non-participation in dialogue.

In describing these two problems that are the result of Vattimo and Zabala's romanticized notion of the 'poor', I would like to remind us that this is not the first time a romanticized version of the 'poor' has been used to justify a supposedly inclusionary, yet implicitly exclusionary, project. I will proceed to describe another attempt to romanticize the 'poor' done by Enrique Dussel, one of the leaders of what is called 'liberation philosophy'. My critique of Dussel will focus on the critique elaborated by Santiago Castro-Gómez in his book *Crítica de la razón latinoamericana*, which proves to be an ambitious project that attempts to criticize some of the foundational schools of thought in Latin American philosophical history. Thus, I will use this debate between Dussel and Castro-Gómez to elucidate a response that I will carry through in this chapter by interweaving it with similar questions and critiques made toward Vattimo and Zabala's position.

In *Philosophy of Liberation*, Dussel develops a sketch of what a liberation philosophy (that is to say, a philosophy whose main goal is the liberation of individuals) would look like. In the section discussing the transition from phenomenology to liberation, Dussel relies heavily on the use of Levinas' concept of the 'face of the Other' as a calling and provocation in order to demand responsibility for this Other. However, Dussel's writing deviates from Levinas' use of the concept in an interesting manner. Dussel describes the provocation of the Other as a process in which they "reveal themselves as others... in all acuteness of their exteriority when they burst in upon us as something extremely distinct, as nonhabitual, nonroutine, as the extraordinary, the enormous ("apart from the norm")—the poor, the oppressed"³¹. Thus, according to Dussel, the Other is only truly Other by presenting him/herself as essentially poor or oppressed. This is seen throughout this section of *Philosophy of Liberation*, since Dussel makes use of several images and representations of the 'poor' and the 'oppressed'. Another interesting thing to note in

³¹ Enrique Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1985), p. 43

Dussel's re-interpretation of Levinas is that the concepts of the 'poor' and the 'oppressed' are used as if they were equivalents or analogous. This, as I explained in regards to Vattimo and Zabala's project, presents us with a series of difficulties for those who ascribe to a project of dialogue, liberation, and love.

I have proposed to argue against the romanticized version of the 'poor' that is present both in Dussel's and in Vattimo and Zabala's project. Nonetheless, for the time being, I will continue to focus on Dussel's conflation of the 'poor' and the 'oppressed' into a single category. In addition to Dussel's conflation that the Other always presents him/herself as poor/oppressed, he creates another distortion of another concept, in this case, 'liberation'. In discussing the roads to liberation, Dussel is very clear that it "implies the taking over of power by the popular classes in order to organize "social formation""³². Liberation is construed as coming exclusively from the popular classes (i.e. the poor). Because it seems that there is no guarantee that an immediate seizure of power by the popular classes will lead to a better model, it is curious to note that liberation is to be achieved by the *taking over of power*. In order to justify this point of critique, Dussel relies on the romanticized notion that the popular classes are by definition 'good' since they are "the best guarantee and the least contaminated nucleus of the new humankind"³³. Through this interpretation, Dussel is offering us the *myth of originary purity* that wants to argue for a class or group in society that does not have or re-produce the harmful vices of a decadent society. Not only does Dussel hold this point of view, but Vattimo also agrees with this statement by referring to the 'weak' or poor as the group that "todavía no tiene nada que defender"³⁴. In

³² *Ibid.*, p. 76.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

³⁴ See the title of the previously cited interview in *Correo del Orinoco* given by Vattimo. [Still does not have anything to defend.]

order to critique this contention, I will proceed by discussing how this claim is negligent to the effects of *ressentiment* that play a fundamental role in the interactions of the poor/oppressed for Dussel. This can be clearly perceived in the fact that there is *no* gesture toward recognizing something such as a ‘universal working class’ in Dussel or Vattimo and Zabala. The wealthy are excluded from the outset for both of their projects and are excluded ‘justly’ because they are oppressors (i.e. essentially ‘evil’). In this framework, there is no incentive/impetus toward reconciliation, which would seem as a necessary condition for a genuine *caritas* to occur. Rather, this project merely sets up the binary that allows for the oppressors to be demonized and perceived as contributing nothing to the discussion between oppressors and oppressed, making the reconciliation between ‘oppressors’ and ‘oppressed’ more difficult and allowing for violence, injustice, and oppression to occur under different names and forms. It is, in this sense, that, by presenting *ressentiment* as an unsolved problem, I will argue that this romanticized version of the ‘poor’ or ‘weak’ fails to provide a plausible emancipatory alternative.

In discussing the ethos of the dominator, Dussel makes a crucial point concerning the effects of this ethos on the dominated. By asserting its ethos, whether by imperialism or dependence, the dominators subjugate and exert force upon the dominated. The effect of this is that “the oppressed bring upon themselves a psychic self-poisoning in response to the violence they suffer”³⁵. With this quote, Dussel wishes to illustrate the effects that *ressentiment* has over the ‘oppressed’. Since the ‘oppressed’ are powerless against the unlimited and abusive power of the ‘oppressors’, their only response to this oppression and subjugation is the poisoning of the mind (i.e. their mentality). In this sense, Dussel’s quote reminds us of Nietzsche’s numerous descriptions of *ressentiment* as venomous and corroding. As a matter of fact, they both share the

³⁵ Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, p. 56.

idea that this *ressentiment* and self-poisoning is a direct result of the weak's impotence since "it is impossible for the weak to exercise the desired act of revenge against the strong"³⁶. Through this impotence, the oppressed arrive at a state of "resentment as autorepressive introjection of power, which, not being turned against the dominator, poisons as it settles into the one dominated"³⁷. As I have previously mentioned, this conception of *ressentiment* seems to resonate perfectly with the conception that Nietzsche gives us when describing the characteristics of slave and noble morality. In fact, Nietzsche states that the birth of slave morality begins when *ressentiment* becomes creative, that is to say, "the *ressentiment* of natures that are denied the true reaction, that of deeds, and compensate themselves with an imaginary revenge"³⁸. The nature of *ressentiment* for Nietzsche is the fact that it is seen as the 'slaves' only response to the 'nobles' and as a way of feeling powerful. This, in many ways, is related to Nietzsche's concept of 'the will to power' since the will must express itself in some way or form because, if it does not express itself externally, then it will begin to be expressed internally. In a certain sense, this internal expression of the will in the 'slaves' is the *ressentiment* that poisons their thought and creates the demonization of the 'nobles'. Thus, Dussel gives us a reiteration of Nietzsche's conception of *ressentiment* by describing one of the consequences of domination. The importance of this Nietzschean reiteration lies in the fact that Dussel clearly states that, once the dominated 'sublimate' this resentment into various values (such as patience, obedience, discipline, among others), "the resentful oppressed of yesterday become the dominators of today, they present as virtues their old vices mystified"³⁹.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, p. 36.

³⁹ Dussel, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

Dussel's overlooking of the problem of *ressentiment* in regards to the romanticized notion of the 'poor' as the emancipatory class *par excellence* seems to be a significant problem. Despite characterizing the popular class as the least contaminated group, the fact is that they still remain contaminated by the ethos of the dominator and the legacy of subjugation; no matter how isolated from 'decadent society' they are or appear to be. This would not be a problem if Dussel formulated a solution to the *ressentiment* that contaminated the popular classes. However, we are not presented with a solution in either Dussel's or Vattimo and Zabala's project. Rather, we see an omission of the problem altogether that is due, to a greater or lesser extent, to the romanticized notion of the 'poor' and the 'oppressed'. In order to provide the critical perspective on this issue that I had outlined at the beginning of this chapter, I will present Castro-Gómez's critique of Dussel in order to create a parallel critique of Vattimo and Zabala's project.

In an attempt to understand the apparent contradiction in Dussel's project, Castro-Gómez presents us with the following claim:

Ciertamente, la filosofía latinoamericana del siglo XX, en su versión historicista y liberacionista, hizo una fuerte y merecida crítica al eurocentrismo de Marx y de Hegel. Pero cegados por un tercermundismo romántico, algunos filósofos de la liberación optaron simplemente por invertir los papeles: en lugar de mirar todo el acontecer humano desde el punto de vista de los conquistadores, decidieron mirar las cosas desde lo que ellos llamaron "el reverso de la historia", esto es, desde el punto de vista de los conquistados y oprimidos. Aparece aquí de nuevo, pero

invertido, el motivo ilustrado del “sujeto de la historia”, solo que este honor ya no les corresponde a los opresores sino a los oprimidos.⁴⁰

As Castro-Gómez tells us, a critique of Eurocentrism as a romanticized center of civilization is appropriate insofar as one does not fall into the same mistake by reversing the role and appealing to a romanticized ‘Third-Worldliness’. If we carefully recall the description of the romanticized notion of the ‘poor’, we see that Dussel falls into this romanticized ‘Third-Worldliness’ by appealing to *‘la clase popular’* (the popular class). Dussel, then, is guilty of proceeding in the same manner as Castro-Gómez’s criticism of twentieth-century Latin American philosophy describes. However, it is curious to see that Vattimo and Zabala also fall into the romanticized ‘Third-Worldliness’, but with a clear difference: they are European philosophers and are not from the ‘Third World’. I will explore this interesting aspect of a romantic ‘Third-Worldliness’ in Vattimo and Zabala’s project by taking Castro-Gómez’s criticism in a more abstract form that is not limited to the specific Latin American experience.

By extending Castro-Gómez’s criticism, I will go so far as to say that those philosophers who construct their projects as emancipatory and revolutionary by appealing to this reversal of roles, facilitated by a romantic ‘Third-Worldliness’, lead to neither liberation nor revolution of the *status quo*. In regards to liberation, we cannot call a project truly emancipatory if the romantic

⁴⁰ Santiago Castro-Gómez, *Crítica de la Razón Latinoamericana* (Bogotá: Editorial Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, 2011), p. 35. [“To be sure, twentieth-century Latin American philosophy, both the historical and the liberationist school, carried out a strong, appropriate criticism of Marx and Hegel’s Eurocentrism. And yet, blinded by a romantic “Third-Worldliness” which in those days was much the fashion they ended up by simply inverting the traditional roles: instead of looking at all of human endeavor from the point of view of the conquerors, they decided to look at everything from the perspective they called “the backside of history,” i.e., from the point of view of those conquered and oppressed.” See translation in: “The Challenge of Postmodernity,” *Latin America and Postmodernity: A Contemporary Reader*. Ed. Pedro Lange-Churión and Eduardo Mendieta. (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2001), p. 142.]

‘center’ of European civilization is replaced by the romantic *barrios* of Venezuela or the *favelas* of Brazil. One must point out that the construction of an absolute, modern self is no different from an absolute, *popular* self. Both were, have, and are being used to justify an inclusionary project that inevitably ends up in a ‘justified’ exclusion of a group or sector of individuals. To a certain extent, our globalized world gives us a significant lesson in regards to the situatedness of thought and liberation. It seems, at the very least, careless to believe that emancipation and liberation is essential to a specific type of ‘subject’. In addition, the notion of emancipation and liberation being essential to a specific geographical location is equally absurd. Thus, the fault of Vattimo and Zabala, who praise Latin American democracies as emblems of ‘hermeneutic communism’, lies not only in a spatial reversal of the absolute (i.e. Latin America, or the ‘Third World’ as the unique location for revolution and redemption) but also in a reversal of the perception of the subject in terms of the absolute (i.e. *el campesino*, *la madre de barrio* or *el chico de barrio* as the new faces of redemption as ideal subjects). It is, in this sense, that Dussel, with his romanticized version of popular classes, the ‘poor’, and the ‘oppressed’, does not attempt to “decentralize the Enlightenment subject but rather to replace it with another absolute subject”⁴¹. This reveals a hidden or implicit agenda in Dussel’s project, since he doesn’t want to get rid of the idea of an absolute subject. Rather, Dussel’s real intention is to place *el campesino*, *la madre de barrio* or *el chico de barrio* as the new model subjects that will lead humanity toward salvation.

I agree with Castro-Gómez’s conclusion (albeit for a different reason than Castro-Gómez) that “it is not possible to look back nostalgically upon a decapitalized culture (or “popular culture”),

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

as Dussel wants”⁴². My reason for believing that it is erroneous to look back nostalgically upon a decapitalized culture is based on the fact that even if a reversal to a ‘popular culture’ would be possible, the environment would still be permeated with the mechanism of *ressentiment* that will inevitably poison and create a more pernicious effect upon society. Without addressing the problem of *ressentiment*, we will remain within the confines of a spectrum of harmful and masochistic values that will only promote hatred and spite. In order to propose a truly redemptive and emancipatory model, we would have to undo or ‘un-learn’ the harmful vices that the dominant and oppressing class has enacted and, essentially, taught the ‘oppressed’. Thus, we see that an attempt to romanticize the poor will lead to the overlooking of the problem of *ressentiment* and, without properly addressing this concern, we will never be able to enact a genuine and beneficial *caritas*. In what follows, I will proceed to make an analogous critique of both Dussel’s and Vattimo and Zabala’s attempts to romanticize the ‘poor’. In addition, I will develop in greater detail the extent to which they enact violence to the concept of the ‘oppressed’ by attempting to romantically define the ‘oppressed’ as essentially ‘poor’ or ‘weak’ so as to suggest a move towards a non-essential concept of the ‘oppressed’.

Towards a Non-Essential Concept of the ‘Oppressed’

In the attempts to develop an emancipative project, one must be careful with the constructed terminology used to define the ‘oppressed’ class. Vattimo, as we have seen, is elaborating his project in order to emancipate the ‘weak’ (whom he defines as ‘poor’). This construction is similar to the one we find in Dussel’s project where the terminology of the ‘poor’ is used as an umbrella term for all those who fall into ‘*lo popular*’ and the ‘oppressed’. However, as I have argued in the previous section, we see neither Vattimo nor Dussel developing a truly

⁴² *Ibid.*

emancipatory project because they fail to pay due attention to the problem of *ressentiment* and the exclusion produced by their construction of an absolute subject in the name of the 'poor' and the 'weak'. By overlooking these essential problems, both Dussel's and Vattimo and Zabala's projects are left incomplete and with the potential to fuel pernicious effects that will act as obstacles to the emancipatory goal it has in mind. In order to highlight this issue, I will proceed to use Nietzsche's project to critically interpret Vattimo and Dussel.

In Nietzsche's project, we see an attempt to propose an overcoming of 'slave morality' in order to transition to a 'noble morality'. Nietzsche's elaborate description of the genealogy of morals shows us that he wants us to become aware that we will remain in a poisonous environment if we stay within the parameters of a 'slave morality' (in that which he called 'decadent society'). If we were to use Nietzsche's genealogical project to interpret Vattimo and Zabala's or Dussel's, we arrive at the conclusion that the latter are merely reproducing a 'slave morality' while asserting that it is actually emancipatory. One of the reasons for this is that, by asserting the weakness of '*lo popular*' as a strength, they are producing *ressentiment* towards the 'strong'. This is not an attempt to disdain the 'weak' but is rather a claim for a different understanding of morality that is not based on a reactionary mindset but an action-oriented one. I want to clarify that both Vattimo and Zabala's and Dussel's morality is reactionary insofar as they posit their 'weak morality' or '*valores populares*' as a way of negatively defining their project against what they both perceive as the distorted values that occur in a modern, technological capitalistic society. The problems that arise from a purely reactionary morality are multiple since they do not assert a positive project that would be the search for a morality that does not *need* to refer to an outside in contradistinction, but rather one that is immanent and comes from within the society,

group or community. In continuing this discussion, I would like to focus on a specific issue that will shed light on the problems that arise from *ressentiment* and exclusion.

The main issue that comes from Vattimo and Zabala's reactionary project is that he assumes that the 'weak' do not have a voice. The problem here with universality is illuminated by the binary that Vattimo and Zabala's project constructs. By creating the binary of 'strong' and 'weak', Vattimo and Zabala are relying on the assumption that the 'strong' do have a voice which is authentically their own. However, the conflict lies in the fact that this binary of 'authentic voice' and 'inauthentic voice' is not so clear-cut as Vattimo and Zabala presume it is. Thus, I would like to claim that neither class has an authentic voice. The voice of the ruling class is more powerful (since it is favored by the mechanisms and structures of power in society), perhaps also 'more educated' (since the type of education they receive is deemed 'legitimate' over other types of educations), but it cannot be deemed authentic. I will proceed to further explain in this in the following chapter in more detail, but, for the moment, I would like to argue that the binary that Vattimo and Zabala set up to make the distinction between the 'weak' and the 'strong' ends up ignoring the fact that neither of them have a voice that can be deemed authentically theirs.

The question of the 'voice' is particularly problematic when attempting to develop an emancipatory project because it leads to Vattimo and Zabala feeling that he must speak *for* the 'weak' and the 'oppressed'. By appealing to this idea, Vattimo does not *free* them inasmuch as he is leading them to wherever Vattimo and Zabala believes the 'weak' should go according to *their* specialized knowledge. I would like to contest their need to speak for the 'weak' and the 'oppressed' by claiming that, in order for a project to be emancipatory (i.e. *for* the people), one

of the important questions one must ask, which Vattimo overlooks, is whether the voice of the ‘weak’ is *heard*. In addition, one must ask whether the voice of the ‘weak’ is *unified* or *fragmented* since this will be important for the type of terminology one can use to attempt to define the oppression of the ‘weak’. My critique of Vattimo and Zabala’s position, then, is that, by assuming that the ‘weak’ do not have a voice and that they are unified, they impose a Western standard of understanding oppression that does not fit with the experience of certain ‘oppressed’ groups in the ‘periphery’. When dealing with oppression, especially in what is called the ‘periphery’, ‘Third World’ or ‘Global South’, one must guide oneself through a principle that is important if one does not want to impose Western standards or be insensitive to the oppression of the people, namely, that groups do *not* have a unified oppression since they are manifested by a myriad of factors (e.g. race, economic status, gender, and so on). Thus, to affirm that the oppression suffered by the ‘weak’ is unified is to do a sort of violence and injustice that leads to a false portrait of their oppression. In this sense, we see that, as we had previously identified a nostalgia for an absolute subject, Vattimo is not opposed to mastery *per se* precisely because he wants to be the new master; he is opposed only to the current and past masters, whom he vilifies.

In order to adequately do justice to the ‘oppressed’, one must begin by acknowledging and being sensitive to the different factors that are involved in their oppression. This means that one needs to understand their oppression as a multiplicity in order to achieve a realistic picture of all of the complications that are present in the ‘oppressed’. What we see, then, in Vattimo and Zabala’s project is the attempt to unify and speak for the ‘weak’, which leads Vattimo and Zabala to the traditional role of *master* that does not hold great prospects for an emancipatory project since it is contra to their purported aspirations. In order to further elucidate the problems that Vattimo and

Zabala fall into, we must be attentive to the influence of another Nietzschean concept that plays a fundamental role in the construction of this traditional role, *contempt* [*Verachtung*]. In this sense, Vattimo and Zabala are occupying the position of the ‘priest’, in Nietzschean terms, since they want the weak to flourish, but they want them to flourish on the terms that they as intellectuals define. The most overt way that Vattimo and Zabala define this type of flourishing of the ‘weak’ is by means of a *retributive justice*, which involve the ‘weak’ in avenging themselves against the strong. However, Vattimo and Zabala do not really want the ‘weak’ to enact revenge to regain dignity, but it is important to note that it is *the priest themselves* who want revenge and want to manipulate the poor in order to enact this revenge. Thus, Vattimo and Zabala share the priest’s attitude toward the weak, the slaves, which is one of contempt [*Verachtung*]. That is, the priest looks down on those whom he helps, and his help is not meant or intended to prevent him from looking down on them. In this sense, Vattimo and Zabala want to lead the poor insofar as they adopt the voice that they want to impose on them. For the voice that they already and always have had in expressing their experience of oppression, Vattimo and Zabala have only contempt. This contempt is precisely the type of violence that is enacted unto the oppressed by Vattimo and Zabala. This essentializing move is simply serving the oppressed to Vattimo and Zabala on a silver platter because, if the oppressed were to accept Vattimo and Zabala as their new leaders, the contempt would not evaporate; it would only grow.

By shedding light on Vattimo and Zabala’s project, we arrived at the conclusion that they aspire to fill the traditional role of the master and they set themselves up for this role by claiming to be the ‘voice of the voiceless’. As I previously stated, this role of the ‘voice of the voiceless’ is very problematic because it is based upon the misconception that the ‘weak’ do not have a voice,

rather than asking whether the voice of the ‘weak’ is heard or unified. By assuming the ‘weak’ as voiceless, Vattimo and Zabala merely construct this role for themselves as the masters of the voiceless ‘weak’. I argue that Vattimo and Zabala resort to this because of the *contempt* [*Verachtung*] they feel towards the previous leaders of the ‘weak’. In wanting to be the ‘voice of the voiceless’, Vattimo and Zabala want to present themselves as the ‘benign leaders’ of the weak who will speak for them because *they* know their best interest. Thus, what we perceive in Vattimo and Zabala’s project is a discussion of the oppression of the ‘weak’ mainly to the extent that they want to set themselves up as their emancipator. In fact, they are related to the ‘oppressed’ not by means of any caring or loving preoccupation for their situation; rather, they are related by *contempt* [*Verachtung*], which, according to Nietzsche, is what ruling classes naturally feel toward the lower orders of any society. This would clarify why any attempts at self-emancipation of the ‘weak’ fall out of favor with Vattimo and Zabala, since *they* want to be their emancipator. Therefore, we see an inauthentic preoccupation for the ‘weak’ since they are tied to Vattimo and Zabala’s personal ambition to become their emancipator. Once we are able to see the role *contempt* [*Verachtung*] plays in Vattimo’s project, especially in *Hermeneutic Communism*, we see them emerge as a priestly type, since they attach conditions to the emancipation they deliver. On the one hand, the oppression of the ‘weak’ only serves as a means for Vattimo and Zabala’s glorification. On the other hand, and more seriously, they present a project of conditional emancipation, which, according to both Nietzsche and Marx, is no emancipation at all (as we will see in Chapter IV). Conditional emancipation is merely the transition from one master to another unless all forms of oppression can be combatted and the light of emancipation can be shown without any conditions attached to it. These problems that arise from Vattimo and Zabala’s emergence as priestly types due to their *contempt* [*Verachtung*]

will prove to be very important when we attempt to construct a positive, constructive project to counteract these harmful effects.

I have explained the role that *contempt* [*Verachtung*] plays in Vattimo and Zabala's project since they fall into the same oppressive role as the traditional oppressors by setting themselves up as the 'voice of the voiceless' that only cares about the 'weak' to the extent that they are a means for their glorification. So, we were able to elucidate that an emancipatory project that does not take into consideration the powerful Nietzschean concepts of *ressentiment* and *contempt* [*Verachtung*] falls into numerous types of problems that one has to deal with in order to transition towards an emancipatory state. It need not be mentioned that we are unable to express any genuine sense of *caritas* as long as two of the main motors motivating these social/political emancipation theories are *ressentiment* and *contempt* [*Verachtung*], since, as I previously mentioned, we have already experienced time and time again what this looks like throughout history. Thus, the results will be familiar to us since there has been no *radical* shift in power, understanding, morality, and so on. In continuing to illuminate the lacks/limitations of their respective projects, I suggest that we further analyze the motivations behind Dussel's and Vattimo and Zabala's theoretical frameworks.

In Dussel's project, we are presented with the idea that the 'poor' are the revolutionary class *par excellence* because they are the least contaminated class in society. He argues that only the least contaminated class will allow for the 'purest' reconstruction of our norms and, thus, vindicate society. This project would seem to be less controversial than that of Vattimo and Zabala; however, this is only on the surface of Dussel's argument. When one is able to fully elaborate

Dussel's claim, one is exposed to his idealism and naïveté. His naïveté is due to his romantic notion of the 'poor'. By constructing the 'poor' as the revolutionary class *par excellence*, Dussel seems to forget the fact (that he even mentions), which is the fact that we are not in a vacuum where some are more or less pure. We have to begin our discussion of the 'revolutionary class *par excellence*' by acknowledging that, by merely being born into any given system, we are already actors complicit in our own oppression and we are brought to internalize and re-produce oppression as a 'normal' part of our society. Thus, in order to overcome this problem, we need to discard the myth of the '*noble savage*' and the innocence of the 'oppressed' through the myth of originary purity if we want to propose radical and progressive actions in favor of the 'oppressed' that are not based on the assumption that they are 'voiceless'.

Following Dussel's romantic view of the poor, we arrive at the role *ressentiment* plays in his project. Dussel firmly acknowledges *ressentiment* as being a problem for those repressed sentiments that the 'poor' feel such as, when/if they come to power, that they will be the 'oppressors of tomorrow' since they have internalized the feelings of hatred and spite towards the rich. However, the mere acknowledgment of this fact will *not* solve the problem of *ressentiment*. This is due to the fact that, by maintaining the naïve and romantic picture of the poor, Dussel overlooks the multiple reasons why the 'poor' would actually want to cling onto their *ressentiment* in any situation. As Nietzsche diagnosed, the 'weak' would be reluctant to relinquish their *ressentiment* since this is the only feeling of power and self that they achieve. Thus, there is a deeper issue at play when the 'weak' retain their *ressentiment*, namely, it provides them with the opportunity to feel in a position of control and assertiveness. In a certain sense, the attractiveness of *ressentiment* is linked to the fact that it is the only form of expression

that they have had available to them. It is possible, as I will argue further, that if the ‘weak’ were to un-learn their *ressentiment* when aided in becoming aware or conscious of their situation, they could find alternatives to *ressentiment* that do not involve this reactive and poisonous attitude towards the Other. In what follows, I will proceed to elucidate this alternative to *ressentiment* and *contempt* [*Verachtung*] in the attempt to present a possible solution to the problems that are present in Dussel and Vattimo and Zabala.

As we have seen throughout this section, when dealing with social/political exclusion, we have to be careful in our analysis since *ressentiment* can exert a great deal of influence. By having a closer look into Vattimo and Zabala’s (and Dussel’s) project, we were able to identify certain problems that are a result of *ressentiment* and others that were related to *contempt* [*Verachtung*]. In Vattimo and Zabala’s case, we see that their emancipatory project is constructed through *contempt* [*Verachtung*] that reduces the oppression of the ‘weak’ to the condition of being ‘voiceless’ and unified such that Vattimo and Zabala must come as the voice and emancipators. The influence of *contempt* [*Verachtung*] is that Vattimo and Zabala have contempt not only for the past leaders of the ‘weak’, but they also have animosity and disgust towards the ‘weak’ themselves. This is problematic because an emancipatory project such as ‘hermeneutic communism’ cannot be guided by *contempt* [*Verachtung*] since this leads them to assume that they are the ultimate voice and expression of the needs of the ‘weak’ when there is no convincing reason to believe that they are due the role that they want to enact. In the case of Dussel, we see the recurrence of the myth of the ‘*noble savage*’ and originary purity, where Dussel takes the poor as the revolutionary class *par excellence* that will vindicate society as a whole since it is the least contaminated class. However, I argued that this is a naïve view that

overlooks the overwhelming influence that *ressentiment* and the structures of society play in our complicity with our oppression. Since structures do not discriminate against anyone, we see that *no one* is free from their influence and, as such, all individuals will be beings that have only learned to re-produce and internalize their oppression. Additionally, Dussel does not see how this, coupled with the presence of *ressentiment*, which he clearly acknowledges, will lead to a venomous arrangement of society. Therefore, if we are to have any hope of overcoming *ressentiment* and other related sentiments like *contempt* [*Verachtung*] and the social/political exclusion that will ensue, we need to look at an alternative that will have neither assumptions that the ‘weak’ are voiceless or unified nor a romantic view of the ‘poor’.

In order to move towards a non-essential concept of the oppressed that will have neither harmful assumptions nor a romanticized representation of them, I suggest that the Brazilian philosopher Paulo Freire and his concept of *conscientização* posit a solution. The idea that we are somewhat complicit in our structures of oppression is given credence, as I previously stated, by the fact that we are in constant contact with these structures since birth that only serve to teach us to internalize and re-produce our oppression as ‘normal’. Thus, in following with the discussion I had in Chapter I, we need to emphasize the *un-learning* of our habits because, since they are internalized and normalized, they serve solely as tools that re-produce our structures of oppression. By *un-learning*, we achieve a plausible possibility of emancipation since it is by acknowledging and inspecting our commonly-held habits that one moves towards a critical perspective as opposed to a naïve one. This critical perspective counteracts the naïve one, found in Vattimo and Zabala’s project that implies a seamless transition from oppression to liberation due to our ‘post-modern era’. Before fully elaborating the importance of Freire and

conscientização, I believe it will be helpful to further explain why Vattimo and Zabala's model of a seamless transition proves to be inadequate for the complicity we have with our structures of oppression.

CHAPTER IV

CONSCIENTIZAÇÃO AND LIBERATION

In assessing Vattimo and Zabala's model, I believe it is adequate to begin with a discussion that is present in the issue of aid given by 'developed' countries to 'underdeveloped' countries. This issue, which is discussed by Freire in a footnote⁴³ to *Education for Critical Consciousness*, is the difference between '*asistencialismo*' and '*promocionalismo*'⁴⁴. Even though we assign a positive value to both of these forms of aid, Freire, and I, believe that there is a key difference between them. In my case, I would like to focus on the etymology of the words in order to clarify the full depth of the meaning in both cases.

The word '*asistencialismo*' is composed by the word *asistencia* — to assist — that suggests the presence of a person (an aide), without whom no aid is possible. Thus, we perceive '*asistencialismo*' along the spectrum of a permanent and paternalistic form of aid because the presence of the aide is indispensable for any progress towards a better situation and hinders the dynamic for change that would bring the recipient of aid out of his dependency. This is precisely what we achieve in Vattimo and Zabala's project (and, to a lesser extent, in Dussel), namely, a paternalistic form of aid that is founded upon the hopelessness of the 'weak'. It is precisely because Vattimo and Zabala perceive the 'weak' as voiceless and hopeless that they believe the only solution to their predicament is through a form of '*asistencialismo*'. Therefore, they occasionally slide into the temptation of paternalistic and dependent aide that merely serves the

⁴³ For original footnote, see: Paulo Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013): p. 118, f 12.

⁴⁴ My translation for the terms *asistencialismo* and *promocionalismo* are 'aid in the form of assistance' and 'aid in the form of promoting action'.

aid rather than the person in need of aid. In order to propose a truly emancipatory project, we require a form of aid that is not founded upon dependency or paternalism. For this reason, I argue that only an aid in the form of '*promocionalismo*' will be able to obviate the problems that I have outlined in Vattimo and Zabala's paternalistic and dependent project.

In the same way we made clear the full meaning of '*asistencialismo*', we now proceed to elucidate the full meaning of the word '*promocionalismo*'. The etymological root of '*promocionalismo*' is the word *promoción* — to promote — that advocates or incites a call to action. Thus, through '*promocionalismo*', the emphasis is on the movement or transition towards a different state of affairs that has to be validated by an action that *transcends* the mere presence of the aid. It is in this way that one finds a clearer path that goes beyond a paternalistic or dependent frame of aid since one promotes an aid that tries as hard as it can to displace the aid in favor of the people receiving the aid such that the people become the center of action for the movement towards a better state of affairs. As the common saying goes, one should not merely give fish to a hungry person; rather, you should teach this person how to fish. In this sense, '*promocionalismo*' follows this same type of principle because it does not want to create a link of dependency for the person receiving aid. To give a concrete social/political example, one need only imagine the impact of having a better educational system in these countries located on the 'periphery' instead of merely buying more of the product their country exports, which does nothing for them and does not help them rise from their situation. Therefore, we clearly see the kind of limitation that is contained in Vattimo and Zabala's emancipatory project. In the next section, I would like to focus on Freire's concept of *conscientização*. By focusing on this concept and some other refined points of Freire's general philosophical project, we approximate a more

comprehensive and elaborate solution to the problems that afflict the oppressed. In so doing, a reading of Freire's philosophical project, allows us to construct an alternative that ameliorates the problems of *ressentiment* and social/political exclusion, since, in this context, *conscientização* is the critical process that allows for the transition and transformation of a dependency-preserving aid into dependency-eliminating aid. This critical process is achieved because the emancipative praxis comes from the individuals themselves and their collective action rather than by being guided by a paternalistic donor. Thus, we need to develop the concept of *conscientização* and the specific model for liberation that it can provide for us in our endeavor.

***Conscientização* as a Model for Liberation**

In order to see the importance of a process such as *conscientização*, we must develop Freire's ideas on this topic. Freire describes the role of *conscientização* for a society in transition as a "development of the awakening of critical awareness."⁴⁵ This is to say, *conscientização* "will not appear as a natural byproduct of even major economic changes, but must grow out of a critical educational effort."⁴⁶ Thus, in Freire's philosophical project, we receive a completely different point of view than Vattimo and Zabala's emancipatory project. Firstly, Freire acknowledges that society will not transition into a new "condition" or "state" unless a process of critical awakening occurs. As we recall the discussion of Vattimo and Zabala's seamless and immediate transition from the 'Death of God' towards *caritas*, we see that they do not acknowledge or accommodate for such a critical awakening in the individuals that compose society. However, in Freire's philosophical project, we see that the conditions of society can change, the structure of society

⁴⁵ Paulo Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness*, p. 15

⁴⁶ Ibid.

can change, but without this process of critical awakening through *conscientização* (which, as an aside, also proves to be a willingness to embrace a transformative process) nothing can be achieved to move towards a condition of *caritas*. Therefore, We can immediately put this in contrast to Vattimo and Zabala's project of an immediate transition due to being in the postmodern condition (or post-'death of God') where love will be the immediate and emancipatory response.

Secondly, and more importantly, Freire is explicit about the fact that no single event is enough to move individuals out of a "condition" or "state." The importance of Freire's point is illustrated in the unviability of Vattimo and Zabala's project, since it is constructed on the idea that the 'death of God' is an event such that it will produce a shift in our epistemological, metaphysical, and ethical configurations, and leads us into a postmodern condition. Along with Freire, but adding onto his argument, I would claim that the case *could* be made for an event that serves as a transition to a different "condition" or "state." However, we cannot fall into Vattimo and Zabala's pseudo-immediate and pseudo-emancipatory project, since it sees this event as enough to create the shift in particular individuals. I want to clarify that one could construct, like Heidegger, the notion of a pre- and post-'death of God'. However, this doesn't seem to be particularly helpful due to the fact that it leads to the misrepresentation that Vattimo and Zabala are using. Rather, we need to understand that we are in the postmodern condition, but we still need to make the analogous shift on the particular level of the individuals that are living in this condition without fully understanding the borders of these new epistemological, metaphysical, and ethical configurations that come as a consequence from the 'Death of God', that is, the 'devaluation of all values' that means there is no center (God) to reorient our values.

A project that focuses on a process of transition rather than immediate emancipation can be understood as taking into account the various expressions of oppression. I will elucidate by showing Freire's engagement with Erich Fromm's seminal text *Escape from Freedom*. As Freire describes, "perhaps the greatest tragedy of modern man is his domination by the force of these myths and his manipulation by organized advertising, ideological or otherwise."⁴⁷ In this quote, we can appreciate the importance of identifying the different shapes and forms of oppression that can be exerted upon individuals. Thus, we can immediately identify the two most prominent expressions of oppression: *external* and *internal*. In order to fully develop this idea, it would be beneficial to look at the quote that Freire uses by Erich Fromm:

[Man] has become free from the external bonds that would prevent him from doing and thinking as he sees fit. He would be free to act according to his own will, if he knew what he wanted, thought, and felt. But he does not know. He conforms to anonymous authorities and adopts a self which is not his. The more he does this, the more powerless he feels, the more is he forced to conform. In spite of a veneer of optimism and initiative, modern man is overcome by a profound feeling of powerlessness which makes him gaze toward approaching catastrophes as though he were paralyzed.⁴⁸

In this quote we can fully appreciate Fromm's analysis of the two expressions of oppression that we identified previously (external and internal). It is one thing for an individual to be subjugated by an external (physical or not) agent through the imposition of certain actions, and another thing

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 5

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 6. For original reference, see: Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom* (New York: Owl Books, 1994), p. 254

for an individual to be dominated by his internal consciousness, which imposes standards, values, and norms on one's own self. I do not want to suggest that external and internal forms of oppression are separate in the sense that they are two *divergent* expressions. Rather, these two forms of oppression are *implicitly* linked, since the imposition that is performed by an external agent leads to a justification for the internal imposition on an individual or vice versa. Thus, I argue that, due to the link between internal and external oppression, in order to *effectively* propose an alternative to oppression, one must address both forms of oppression. If one were to not address either one or the other forms of oppression, then one is being irresponsible in constructing a theory of liberation, since this theory would liberate the individual in only one aspect, but leave another factor that could eventually lead to a reversion to the original oppression.

Through our analysis of internal/external oppression and *conscientização*, we see that Freire's philosophical project of liberation proves to be a better model than Vattimo's. Despite Freire's completely distinct philosophical context, I believe we can formulate a rough comparison between both projects of liberation. In formulating a theoretical framework in the postmodern era (i.e. post-'death of God'), we need to be conscious of the transition that I previously outlined earlier in this section. Thus, since the postmodern condition means that we are experiencing an epistemological, metaphysical, and ethical shift, we need to be aware that an understanding of this condition not only rests on the macro (or molar) level but also on the micro (or molecular) level. This means that Vattimo and Zabala's project cannot assume the postmodern condition as a given for all individuals since there is no attempt on their behalf to acknowledge that which even Nietzsche acknowledged, that is, that there are certain individuals who still live in the

shadow of God (without fully understanding the consequences of the ‘death of God’). In addition, and perhaps more importantly, one must ask the question: *what* kind of oppression is Vattimo and Zabala’s project addressing? By answering this question, we will reach a firmer understanding of the *lacks* within their project of ‘hermeneutic communism’. In their project, we see a multitude of references to external oppression (whether it be the bourgeoisie and elites in the United States, neoliberal policies, among others) but without *any* mention to the *internal* expressions of oppression. Therefore, it is clear that my preference for Freire’s model relies on the fact that it focuses on the shift that needs to occur within the individual before we are able to talk about a transition in their way of being and the specific reference to the internal oppression which carries on from the pre-‘death of God’ era that is not addressed by Vattimo and Zabala. That is to say, that Vattimo and Zabala believe that the elimination of external oppression will lead naturally and immediately to the elimination of the internal oppression. However, the elimination of external oppression only *begins* the process of eliminating internal oppression. Thus, we must strive to look for the ways of initiating the elimination of internal oppression in order to move towards the complete liberation of the individual.

Reading Dussel, Vattimo and Zabala, and Freire through *Conscientização*

In this section, I will focus primarily on the reading that Dussel makes of Freire’s philosophy. I propose to do this with the intent of elucidating Dussel’s mistakes. My claim is that Dussel’s mistakes are linked to his romanticized vision of the ‘poor’ as “ideal subjects.” I will proceed to argue that Vattimo and Zabala’s ‘hermeneutic communism’ must undergo the same criticism due to their romanticized vision of the ‘weak’. Finally, I will propose a critical reading of Freire’s

philosophical project by identifying the shortcomings and exclusiveness of his ‘oppressor’/’oppressed’ model.

Dussel reads Freire’s pedagogy as one that is not focused on the *external* oppression or constraint that is enacted by the teacher or the psychoanalyst. In fact, Dussel acknowledges Freire’s groundbreaking shift from the external conditions of oppression to the internal conditions. This is because Freire “realized that education is not possible without the self-education of the learner in the *process of his or her own liberation*.⁴⁹” Thus, in this interpretation, Freire’s innovativeness is due to his ability to perceive the dual nature of oppression in the sense that it is not sufficient to only analyze and address external conditions, but that internal conditions are just as important when one is proposing a model of liberation. As a matter of fact, this critical element of Freire’s pedagogy is what Dussel identifies as Freire’s main goal. In addition, Freire’s aim is to “educate the victims in the very historical, communitarian, and real process through which they abandon their condition as victims.⁵⁰” Once again, we see Dussel’s argument insisting on the need for this *pedagogical action* to educate the *victims* but not the *perpetrators*. It is precisely this binary, which we will explore in our critique of both Dussel’s and Freire’s position, that will elucidate the exclusiveness and reductive nature of their respective projects.

⁴⁹ Enrique Dussel, *Ethics of Liberation: In the Age of Globalization and Exclusion* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), p. 311

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* p. 312

For our critical interpretation of Dussel's analysis of Freire's pedagogy, I believe it is important to focus on the development of the binary that Dussel constructs from Freire's project. By taking Freire's idea that "education begins from the "reality" *in which the learners find themselves*,⁵¹" Dussel follows his project of a "philosophy of liberation" in which the perspective must be from the point of view of the oppressed. This leads Dussel to argue that the oppressed are the learners *par excellence* since it is they "who need to be educated like nobody else."⁵² In this statement, we see a gross naïveté in Dussel's approach by assuming that it is 'those without education' who need to be educated in order to attain a critical consciousness of their "reality." Is this to suggest that 'those with an education' (i.e. the elites, the bourgeoisie, and so on) underwent a 'correct' education? Did their education not reinforce the power structure and their dominant and privileged position? If this is the case, it is absurd to think that *only* the oppressed (i.e. 'those without education') are the ones who need to be educated like nobody else because the elites (i.e. 'those with education') also require an 'education like nobody else' if we are to expect them to move towards understanding both their privileged and dominant position and the plight and suffering of the oppressed. By elucidating Dussel's approach and posing provocative questions, we arrive at the conclusion that the need for learning is universal, even if the lessons are specific to classes. Thus, not all pedagogy will be formulated in an analogous way across different groups but all groups have the need to have some type of pedagogy to learn, relearn, and unlearn the different vices that contribute to the violence, injustice, and oppression that they either initiate or endure.

⁵¹ Ibid. p. 314

⁵² Ibid

Conscientização becomes, under Dussel's interpretation of Freire, a key component in the struggle for the liberation of the oppressed. In fact, Dussel believes that "the oppressed need to make use of theoretical, explicative reason, which, in turn, must be oriented by the criteria provided by the economic and political content... [And] it must also be governed by critical reason."⁵³ However, the same critique that was applied above is valid here as well. In what meaningful sense can economics and politics take place if it is supposed to be relegated to a specific class? There is no justice being done when the previously 'oppressor' class is excluded from economic and political decisions. Thus, the 'oppressor' also requires education and *conscientização*, as well as the theoretical reason that comes from it in order to participate in economic and political situations in a way that does not re-produce their oppression. Dussel even has a quote in this section that says,

Conscientization is... a process which involves a critical insertion *into history*. It implies that all human beings must assume their role as *subjective makers* and remakers of the world; it demands of human beings that they create the conditions for their existence *with the materials that life offers them*.⁵⁴

This quote makes clear that, despite the fact that teaching the 'oppressors' to 'un-learn' their way of being is a severely difficult task, an emancipatory project cannot be based on anything less than *all* individuals assuming their positions as transformers of their "realities" and situations. Those philosophers or thinkers who propose a project of liberation for any class or group cannot address my critique with the idea that these emancipatory projects cannot be utopic, because that is precisely what they *must* be. It is when someone like Dussel formulates a project from the

⁵³ Dussel, *Ethics of Liberation*, p. 316

⁵⁴ Dussel, *Ethics of Liberation*, p. 317. For original reference, see: Carlos Torres, *La praxis educativa de Paulo Freire* (Mexico City: Gernika, 1992).

“underside” that we fall into this nostalgic and romantic notion of the ‘oppressed’ that is willing to perpetuate injustices as long as they are done in favor of the ‘oppressed’ in order to ‘balance’ the score. If we are to stick to a utopic project of liberation, then we are obliged to formulate it in such a way where there is no re-production of violence or injustice due to essential concepts that will be exclusive and reductive to the needs of specific groups in society, regardless of their previous standing in the power structure.

Through this reading of Dussel, I have been implicitly suggesting a critique to Vattimo and Zabala’s project as well, since it relies on this same nostalgic and romanticized picture of the ‘weak’. However, Vattimo and Zabala’s project of liberation is in worse standing than Dussel’s since they do not even acknowledge the importance of a transition but believe that the scales of power need to be tipped towards the side of the ‘weak’ since they are the ‘victims of history’ and deserve to be avenged. That the sentiment of their project has good intentions cannot be denied. But, one must keep in mind that it is these same good intentions that lead to a project fueled by *ressentiment*, which in turn produces more social/political exclusion. A project promising liberation and justice cannot be blinded by the romantic and nostalgic view of avenging the ‘weak’ or the ‘oppressed’ because this leads to a partiality on the side of a group where, in fact, no specific group should be preferred since the objective is the liberation and attainment of justice for *all* individuals. Their intentions may be described as ‘good’ in some abstract sense of the term, but their intentions are also naïve, and naïveté, in politics, never yields desirable results. As a matter of fact, it usually leads to the exacerbation of the problems they are trying to address because they are not cautious and meticulous enough to attempt to fully grasp the social/political reality they wish to change.

Lastly, as outlined in the beginning of this section, I will propose a critical interpretation of Freire's 'oppressor'/'oppressed' model. I argue that Freire's 'oppressor'/'oppressed' binary is controversial but this model can be salvaged in some sense. The purpose of this critique will be to find a way to transcend Freire's binary, not by completely obliterating it, but by trying to find expressions of fluidity that would give it a dynamic expression, instead of a static one. Or, we try to actively construct the conditions for a transition in which we avail ourselves of the binary opposition only under the condition that we have a concrete plan for retiring the opposition over time. The opposition thus remains temporary, transient, and historical rather than permanent, static, and natural. Through this critique, we will be able to explore both a model for 'mapping out' oppression and a process of *conscientização* (which we will further develop in the last section of this chapter) that will give us enough tools to rehabilitate the problems identified throughout this work in Vattimo and Zabala's 'hermeneutic communism'.

A possible way of critically perceiving Freire's 'oppressor'/'oppressed' model is to take into account the fact that any power system is constructed on the poles of the 'haves' and 'have not' (access to power). In this sense, the 'oppressor' (in my case, the 'haves') and the 'oppressed' (the 'have not') are not necessarily a fixed, static state since their positions on the poles of the power system are not always the same. That is to say, there can be and *are* multiple power relations with multiple centers of power. As a matter of fact, history has elucidated numerous examples and events in which the power has shifted from the 'haves' to the 'have nots' and vice versa. However, the point is not to go and detail each time these events occurred; rather, we are

interested in the conclusions we can extrapolate from these shifts and the way they improve our understanding of society and politics in general. Once we do this, we arrive to the conclusion that there is no *specific* group, class, and so on, that is *essentially* linked to being an ‘oppressor’ or ‘oppressed’. I would like to clarify that this is not a gross error or mistake on my behalf since I am by no means arguing that specific groups are not *historically* in the position of the ‘oppressed’ or as ‘oppressor’. My claim rests solely on the fact that these groups that are *historically* determined are not *essentially* determined. If we are able to accept the conclusion that I have drawn from an analysis of the power system, then I believe we have enough grounds to say that the power system is involved in a *dynamic* and *fluid* process of structuring. Of course, with this analysis, we are still called to be cautious in our embracing of this type of model. Nevertheless, it seems that this model is also an appropriate one for understanding the complexities that go into oppression and the construction of a power system more generally. Therefore, I will proceed to apply this critique of Freire’s ‘oppressor’/’oppressed’ model to his larger philosophical project of liberation, which will serve as an excellent way to transition into the last section of this chapter.

Freire’s *conscientização* takes on a different tone once we realize that his ‘oppressor’/’oppressed’ model can be interpreted in a different sense. If my claim is taken seriously, then we must re-evaluate Freire’s overall project of liberation in order to respond to the equivalent shift we have made in his understanding of oppression. The project that Freire develops in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* can be seen as taking up a theme that is central to ‘liberation theology’, namely, the ‘preferential option towards the poor’. Thus, it is easy to see how the association between the ‘oppressed’ and the ‘poor’ is made. However, I would like to

think that there is a deeper way of understanding Freire's project that does more justice to his view. In a very important sense, Freire is a true revolutionary (in the full sense of the world) since he is one of the first theoreticians who perceived the importance of understanding the delicate relationship that links the 'oppressor' and the 'oppressed'. Due to his sensibility in this issue, Freire was able to construct a project that was aware that one could not save the 'oppressed' at the expense of the 'oppressor'. In order to liberate one, it was necessary to liberate the other as well, since his project is focused on humanization, and the creation of an emancipated subject cannot occur for some and not for others. It is *this* side of Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* that I would like to explore as a viable alternative for a 'twilight interval' that would allow individuals to critically comprehend their situation and be able to un-learn their previous habits and vices in order to transition towards love.

Conscientização as an Alternative for the 'Twilight Interval'

As developed in the previous sections of this chapter, we have been able to perceive the relevance and importance of a process of *conscientização* when it comes to discussing liberation. In one section, we discussed the potential of *conscientização* as a model for liberation by showing the *active* process it involves in emancipating individuals from both *internal* and *external* bonds. Clearly distinguished from Vattimo and Zabala's project, Freire was able to give us an important awareness that the struggle for liberation is incomplete unless we address both expressions of oppression. In addition, we were able to elaborate this process of *conscientização* in order to critique not only Vattimo and Zabala but also Dussel and even Freire. The main goal in presenting this critique was to elucidate the type of binaries that each project attempts to set up

in order to justify some sort of exclusionary project, and by this elucidation to liberate both the oppressed and the oppressors (the ‘weak’/’strong’ and the ‘poor’/’rich’). Thus, in this final section, I would like to connect some of the points we made in the previous chapters in order to argue that *conscientização* is an alternative for the transition towards a ‘twilight interval’ that would allow individuals to liberate themselves *and* be able to genuinely express love towards others.

Despite the monumental task that I have set before me, I believe that there are many aspects of Freire’s concept of *conscientização* that have not been fully explained (due to the specific perspective of each chapter). In this section, I would like to develop all of the contours of Freire’s *conscientização* in order to propose a positive project contra Vattimo and Zabala’s negative and reactive project. However, I would like to always remain critical and to elucidate the lacks/limitations of Freire’s project so as to be able to deal with the problem of *ressentiment* and social/political exclusion in the best way possible.

Freire’s concept of *conscientização* is most clearly discussed in his seminal text *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. This book is seen as a project that will aid in the development of *praxis* (that is to say, theory *and* action) that is *with* and *for* the oppressed⁵⁵. In order to commence my analysis of Freire’s concept, I would like to begin with the *status quo* that informs his whole project (i.e. the state of the oppressed). So, before Freire begins discussing *conscientização* as a model for

⁵⁵ The distinction that Freire makes between ‘for’ in the sense of ‘in the name of’ or ‘in place of’ is important since Freire, and I, mean ‘for’ in the sense of ‘in the benefit for’ without any appeal to paternalistic intentions.

liberation, he makes it clear that one has to take into consideration the fact that society's power structures are against the oppressed. The experiences of the oppressed have been of violence, exploitation, and injustices at the hand of the oppressors. It is precisely this experience of the oppressed that has enabled the oppressors to enjoy their privileged and dominant status. The oppressors have thus implemented these experiences in the structures that make up society so as to *maintain* their position of power over the oppressed. This interpretation has been standard and correct when dealing with questions of oppression and subjugation since we even find this discourse to be reminiscent of the description of Dussel's project in Chapter III. However, there is an important point that must be *emphasized* since Dussel recognizes this fact but proceeds to build his whole framework while seemingly ignoring this crucial point, due, in no lesser degree, to his romantic vision of the 'poor'. Freire makes this point by saying that,

In order for this struggle to have meaning, the oppressed must not, in seeking to regain their humanity (which is a way to create it) become in turn oppressors of the oppressors, but rather restorers of the humanity of both.⁵⁶

Dussel and Freire are both clear in their statements that acknowledge the fact that the oppressed tend to adhere to their oppressor. Despite the fact that they both approach it from different angles, since Dussel thinks this adherence is due to *ressentiment* while Freire believes that it is because the oppressed have learned this from the oppressors as the only way of being, one can unite both reasons in order to explain this phenomenon since this problem has multiple factors that influence it and cannot be reduced to a single answer. In Chapter III, we mentioned Dussel's identification of the potential for *ressentiment* in the 'poor' without properly expanding on this point, which can, perhaps, illuminate the importance of Freire's thought and the critique we

⁵⁶ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Penguin, 1996), p. 26

applied to Dussel via Castro-Gómez. It will prove to be beneficial if we remember the critique that Castro-Gómez makes of Dussel's project since he says that "la crítica de Dussel a la modernidad no logra cortar la cabeza del rey, sino cambiar su lugar, poniéndola en donde estaban los pies."⁵⁷ Thus, Castro-Gómez wishes to critique Dussel along the lines of not enacting a *radical* change to the power structures since it remains intact and the only real change is that the oppressed take the seat of the oppressors and vice versa. If this is the case, then Dussel has not only failed to respond to the problem of *ressentiment* in the 'poor' but has basically enabled them to become oppressors due to his romantic vision of them as being the bastions of virtue. As we will see, this provides us with a host of significant problems that we must address.

Before proceeding to the concept of *conscientização* in a more direct fashion, I believe we need to critically identify an initial point of limitation in Freire's project that, when further discussed, will reveal Freire's revolutionary understanding concerning the 'oppressed'. In order to proceed, I would like to present the following quote:

Although the situation of oppression is a dehumanized and dehumanizing totality affecting both the oppressors and those whom they oppress, it is the latter who must, from their stifled humanity, wage for both the struggle for a fuller humanity; the oppressor, who is himself dehumanized because he dehumanizes others, is unable to lead this struggle.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Castro-Gómez, op. cit., p. 39. [Dussel's critique of modernity does not achieve the beheading of the king, but instead changes its place, putting it where the feet were]

⁵⁸ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 29.

There is a sense in which Freire's words seem reminiscent of Dussel's romantic vision of the 'poor' since Freire believes that those who must lead the struggle for liberation are those from 'under' (i.e. the oppressed). But, I would like to argue that there is a slight and subtle difference between Dussel and Freire's vision of the oppressed. We can see in Freire's project the characteristic of a 'preferential option for the poor', which has been used to describe the project of liberation theology. In a similar way to liberation theology, Freire does not want to posit the 'oppressed' (or 'poor') as an *absolute* subject who must be chosen *at the expense* of others, but instead that the struggle must initiate from the position of this group since it is only from the bottom up that we can construct a 'foundational' change. This 'preferential option for the oppressed' we see in Freire's project is immediately supplemented by the fact that "both they [the oppressed] and the oppressors are manifestations of dehumanization.⁵⁹" In this way, Freire does not posit the 'oppressed' as the uncontaminated group that is chosen due to its "virtuousness." Instead, we arrive at a subtle but significantly different from Dussel's violent imposition of a romantic absolute subject.

In this context (addressing Freire's 'preferential option for the oppressed'), we are able to fully provide the contours of *conscientização* as an alternative for the 'twilight interval'. As we identified in Chapter I, this concept of 'twilight interval' is an idea drawn from Nietzsche's thoughts of a period that signals the ascent of humankind. In the development of this project, we identified at the end of Chapter II that a 'twilight interval' would have to be conscious of the need for transformation of individuals (i.e. 'un-learning their previous habits that made them fall prey to *ressentiment* and other harmful vices of our past). It is in this sense that *conscientização*

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 30.

provides its clearest expression of a potential for liberation and a transition towards a ‘twilight interval’, since Freire’s pedagogy is focused on two main characteristics: the acknowledgment of one’s situation; and the critical action that must be enacted in order to transform our reality. Therefore, with these two main characteristics in mind, I will argue that *conscientização* provides the adequate model for the transition towards a ‘twilight interval’ that will enable us to overcome the problems of *ressentiment*, social/political exclusion, and the possibility of genuine love.

The construction of a model towards liberation is a very difficult project for any individual. We have already been able to expose the lacks/limitations in prominent philosophers such as Vattimo, Dussel, and even Freire. However, the task at hand in this project is not to declare in any way or form that these projects are, by that matter, not valuable. In fact, my challenge is to try to incorporate the positive elements in all of these projects and to address the lacks/limitations in their respective projects by appealing to different positive and constructive approaches that can be applied to the problems at hand. The starting point for this positive alternative is the importance of Freire’s ‘oppressed’ in contra to Vattimo and Dussel’s absolute, romantic subject (the ‘weak’ and the ‘poor’).

Through Freire’s revolutionary understanding of the ‘oppressed’, we are able to move towards what he considered to be the ‘correct method of liberation’ that consists in dialogue “not [as] a gift bestowed by the revolutionary leadership, but the result of their own *conscientização*.⁶⁰”

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 49.

Thus, we have the appearance of two main positive proposals in Freire's quote, which are avoiding the demonization of the 'oppressor' by appealing to *dialogue* (that is, the horizontal interaction between subjects as opposed to the vertical imposition of subjects) and not falling into the trap of the 'revolutionary intellectual' that speaks *for* the 'oppressed' since it is through their own *conscientização* that the 'oppressed' move towards their liberation and *not* as a result of the intellectual's task. Through these two positive proposals, we arrive at ways to address the problem of *ressentiment* since we can deal with expression of this state of mind in both the 'oppressed' and the intellectual (as we mentioned in chapter III with Dussel and Vattimo and Zabala). In the first case, the 'oppressed' no longer define themselves *negatively* in reference to the 'oppressors' since it is through *conscientização* that they see their praxis as actually contributing to the construction of a positive self. Through the second case, we see that the 'revolutionary' can no longer appeal to the demonization of the 'oppressor' since the 'correct model of liberation' will have to develop itself in dialogue. Despite this not being as strong of an argument, the second part of Freire's critique to the intellectual's task is more revealing of proposing a positive response to *ressentiment*. Freire's second critique is that the intellectual can no longer understand himself as the catalyst for the liberation movement of the 'oppressed', since this relegates the 'oppressed' to a lesser role and does not acknowledge that they are the motors of their own change.

One can also identify Freire's positive contribution in response to the problems posed by social/political exclusion. In this sense, I will be expanding more on the point made by Castro-Gómez in reference to the radical transformation of power structures. Freire is aware of this same sentiment in Castro-Gómez since in the liberation movement the "solution is not to "integrate"

them [the ‘oppressed’] into the structures of oppression, but to transform that structure so that they can become “beings for themselves”.⁶¹” To construct a project that sees the ‘oppressed’ as ‘marginal’ and outside of society is to not do justice to the problems that they experience. Their experience is not one outside of the structures of society since it is precisely these structures that contribute to the violence, exploitation, and oppression they endure. Thus, the solution to this problem is not to put the ‘oppressed’ in the same seat in which the ‘oppressor’ sat in since this will merely perpetuate and re-produce the oppression for those who were in privileged and dominant positions before and, if Freire’s model is taken seriously, will simply be another expression of dehumanization of the ‘oppressed’. As Freire reminds us, “human beings are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection.”⁶²” Thus, one cannot silence the ‘oppressors’, because to silence them would be to re-produce and create the same subjection to which the oppressed were relegated.

Our attempts to change the structure aim to create a shift in our understanding of the structures of society that will permit dialogue of humans *qua* subjects. This is to say that we cannot deny others their word. A serious, positive alternative to social/political exclusion is not based on justified exclusion so as to promote a ‘better’ condition after exclusion is enacted once more. Rather, following Freire and Castro-Gómez, it begins by acknowledging that power structures are to blame for the current arrangement of oppression and that we must shift our understanding of power relations and the way they are structured in society if we are to have any hopes of transitioning towards a ‘twilight interval’ — a better condition.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 55.

⁶² Ibid., p. 69.

Finally, we are able to identify the positive contribution that Freire offers us in understanding the transition towards a ‘twilight interval’ that will be able to lead us to a genuine expression of love.

I would like to direct our attention to the following quote in order to elucidate this point:

Authentic liberation — the process of humanization — is not another deposit to be made in men. Liberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it.⁶³

In this quote, we can appreciate the contours of Freire’s positive alternative to Vattimo and Zabala’s seamless transition towards a condition of liberation and love. The transformation of the self is the only way to truly emancipate oneself since we are able to actively disengage with our harmful vices and engage in the construction of alternative ways of being. If we were to rely on Vattimo’s mere announcement that “God is dead” and that love is now possible and necessary, then we are working in what Freire calls the “banking method” of pedagogy (that is, Vattimo merely deposits the idea of liberation without a constructive project that will lead us in the direction of liberation). Thus, with *conscientização* as authentic liberation — as praxis — we are able to un-learn our vices that we carry from the pre-‘death of God’ epoch and we can, through our transformative action, change ourselves by acknowledging our situation and context so as to learn different ways of being such as love. In this case, love would not be a false expression since it would be accompanied with a transformation of the self that will attempt to reduce and, eventually, eliminate all dissonance that can be produced in the person that was previously taught to resent and express false and venomous love. It is only with our action that we can

⁶³ Ibid., p. 60.

produce liberation. *Conscientização*, as understood by Freire, is exactly this action since this is no mere theoretical invention but one that is done *with* and *for* the people.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

In order to put a close to this project, I would like to have a few closing remarks that relate to what has been laid out in the development of this work. Firstly, I would like to emphasize the historical re-reading of Nietzsche that was accomplished in this thesis. It seems that we are easily drawn to understanding ourselves as being ‘post-modern’ or inhabiting a ‘post-modern’ condition without really understanding, delineating or even caring about the consequences and characteristics that follow the ‘Death of God’. Thus, going back to Nietzsche as a historical source allowed one to see that to be in the post-‘Death of God’ epoch means absolutely nothing insofar as one has not *responded to* the event of the ‘Death of God’ and, if, as Nietzsche says, we still live in the shadow of God, or obstacles such as our stubborn psychological habits (i.e. even if one were to ‘prove’ that ‘God is Dead’, we would not believe it to be so). What this means, in more concrete terms, is that our responding to the ‘post-modern’ condition (i.e. the post-‘Death of God’ epoch) depends on our understanding of ourselves and the way we need to change many of our psychological habits in order to ‘adjust’ to the fact that God is no longer center, that there is no absolute or ultimate foundation for the justification of our values.

Secondly, I would like to focus on Freire’s concept of *conscientização*, which proved to be indispensable in the attempt to try and escape the powerful vacuum that remains even after ‘God is dead’. As I described throughout this work, we saw the nostalgic and frequent recurrence of an absolute ‘subject’ or ideal in the projects of Dussel and Vattimo and Zabala. It is important to not forget Nietzsche’s proclamation that all values have been devalued except for Truth. Under this

realm, then, we see that it is only natural for philosophers of liberation such as Dussel and Vattimo and Zabala to fall for the traps of absolute and ideal notions, since they are also susceptible to the charms and temptations of the vacuum that the ‘Death of God’ leaves in our minds. To put in an illustrative way, borrowing some terminology from French philosopher Gilles Deleuze, what we see then is that a de-territorialization (i.e. the erasure of the territory that used to be occupied by God as the ‘Master Signifier’, which gave meaning to all the other signified) was immediately followed by a re-territorialization (i.e. the re-appropriation of the ‘Absolute’ via other forms such as the absolute subject of European modernity and Latin American philosophy). This means that we have yet to shake off the remnants of what the ‘Death of God’ signified for our transition into the ‘post-modern’ condition. I see this as a call to continue investigating into the epistemological shifts that need to occur in individuals in order to finally respond and, in some way or another, ‘adapt’ (in the sense of coming to term with) the fact that ‘God is dead’.

Finally, I would like to describe the influence that Castro-Gómez’s *Crítica de la Razón Latinoamericana* had on the development of the previous two chapters. To a certain degree, there is some overlap between his project and mine. Thus, in a form of auto-criticism, I would like to look at one of the prominent reviews of Castro-Gómez’s book written by Eduardo Mendieta. From this review, I would like to focus on Mendieta’s use of Spivak’s famous postcolonial question: “Can the subaltern speak?” Without a doubt, every postcolonial (or decolonial) philosopher/thinker must keep Spivak’s profound question in mind when formulating any type of theoretical framework, specifically, when one is dealing with the question of the representation of the ‘subaltern’ (to use Spivak’s term).

Spivak's question, as Mendieta describes, suggests the "reto de aprender a no representarlos (*vertreten*) mientras que aprendemos a representarnos (*darstellen*) a nosotros mismos."⁶⁴ This has profound implications for any project, such as mine, since the true challenge is to *not* represent the 'subaltern' and, *at the same time*, to learn how to represent us. As I previously mentioned, I humbly believe that my project is following the same critical vein as Castro-Gómez, in the sense of criticizing those who desire to speak *for* the 'subalterns'. However, a significant difference between Castro-Gómez and myself is that I have focused on the European theorists, Gianni Vattimo and Santiago Zabala (primarily), although I also include a short criticism towards Dussel's project (echoing Castro-Gómez).

Regarding the development of critical projects concerning post or decolonial thought, I believe Mendieta is right when he states that "cuando pretendemos representar a todos, nosotros abrogamos para nosotros la función de hablar por todos en términos de nuestro propio patrón mientras que ocluimos donde estamos nosotros mismos."⁶⁵ The challenge for philosophers/thinkers who theorize these problems, then, is to not try to hide the position from which we are approaching our project. There is no innocent position since, as I mentioned earlier in this thesis, one does not exist in a 'non-contaminated zone'. We are all guilty, in one way or another. Thus, we simply ought to elucidate our crimes and what we are guilty of. In my case, I would like to situate my thought on 'the border' (*la frontera*). This is due to the fact that my personal, existential experience has been a *hybrid* one. I was born in Venezuela but I came at an

⁶⁴ Eduardo Mendieta, "La alterización del otro: La *Crítica de la razón latinoamericana* de Santiago Castro-Gómez," *Revista Iberoamericana* Vol. LXIII Num. 180 (Jul-Sept 1997), p. 527. [The challenge is to learn not to represent them (*vertreten*) while we learn to represent us (*darstellen*) to ourselves.]

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* [When we aspire to represent on behalf of all, we abrogate for ourselves the function of speaking on behalf of all on our own terms and patterns while we occlude where we, ourselves, are at.]

early age to the United States of America. It wasn't until my early teenage years that I was able to return to my native land. Therefore, I am neither from here nor there (*'no soy ni de aquí ni de allá'*), as I have been described before and have related to others in this similar situation. This uprooting is by no means a curse. Rather, this critical distance from both places has allowed me the privilege of inhabiting a space of plurality or multiplicity that informs my critique.

With Mendieta's critiques in mind, I would like to reiterate the preliminary nature of my project, although I consider that it is one that should be taken seriously. I am aware that there are various fertile grounds to explore for the formulation of a positive project (beyond what I have proposed with my reading of Freire's *conscientização*). Mainly, I have in mind Walter Mignolo's concept of *'borderland gnosis'* (*'pensamiento de frontera'*) as a way of finding a hermeneutics that is able to appreciate the hybrid spaces that occur in postcolonial thought. The idea of using Mignolo's concept is influenced by one of Castro-Gómez's conclusions in *Crítica de la Razón Latinoamericana*, which is the idea that we cannot produce theories from essential, nostalgic, romantic and absolute standpoints, whether it is due to the fact that 'God is dead' or because of the spread of the globalization process that leads to the interlinking of previously distanced and separated cultures and groups. I firmly hold to the idea that we have to find new ways of thinking and working in these hybrid spaces as forms of resistance and power that are based on a constructed identity rather than a unified, *a priori* one.

The last point on which I would like to put a (tentative) close to this project is that my critique of Vattimo and Zabala and Dussel are not done with the goal of destroying their respective theoretical frameworks. Rather, my goal is to find ways of elucidating the spaces that can be/are

not being theorized and provide a way of thinking about these potentialities/lacks. It is through this hybrid space that I am pointing towards that we can initiate the required dialogue for those future generations, of whom many, like me, are from neither here nor there (*'no son ni de aquí ni de allá'*) and who want to contribute to a discourse that proclaims and promotes these hybrid formulations and differences that imbue and penetrate our sense of 'identity'.

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