

## Proposal 4

### **Alisal: Theopoetics and Emancipatory Politics**

In the search for political emancipation, one community turns to theopoetics not only to galvanize the organizing efforts of its citizens, but to articulate a greater historical struggle of the marginalized Hispanic, Chican@ and Latin@ communities. This qualitative study looks at Alisal, California, and its political struggle to emancipate itself from within the city limits of Salinas, California. The study looks at how activists, politicians, religious leaders and the popular press articulate the message of emancipation, with special attention to theopoetic undertones.

After briefly showing how theopoetics —as the destabilizing, decentering and decolonizing language —reverberates in response to the colonial situation in which the community finds itself and also acts as a poiesis, the calling forth of the new community, the paper argues that theopoetics provides marginalized communities a language to play out their contemporary struggles using spiritual, biblical and suppressed knowledges. While the paper addresses these themes within the milieu of contemporary Latin American and Latin@ theological inquiry, what distinguishes this study from previous works on theopoetics is two key components originating from the very heart of the Alisal community. The first is the study looks at not just how theopoetics is used in liberating theological discourse, pastoral practice or religious ritual, but how theopoetics evokes a plurality of religious and ethnic traditions. For example, given the community is largely Latin@, specifically Chican@ political and cultural heritage, what emerges is a theopoetics expressed in the popular press with phrases similar to “in the beginning was la raza.” This linguistic play between the biblical language introduced by European colonizers and missionaries —the poetics of John 1 “In the beginning was the word” —and the reference to “la raza,” the race, tethers the intellectual and political heritage whereby Mexican-Americans, Latin@s or more specifically, Chican@s, see themselves as neither part of the larger Anglo community in the U.S., nor do they identify as Mexicans or Latin Americans, but something other. Theopoetics is the performance through which this community announces its existence: in the beginning and one with God.

The second contribution this paper makes to the discussion of theopoetics is the clear posturing of the author —political activist, engaged in the political struggle —and the role that public intellectuals can serve in providing the language necessary for such an emancipatory politics. Though Antonio Gramsci and Walter Mignolo occupy different historical and geopolitical contexts, their discussions of the public intellectual’s role in leading a community such as Alisal will be helpful in outlining the use of theopoetics for an emancipatory politics.

The paper argues that a decolonial theopoetics simultaneously draws on the knowledge gained from colonial occupation and suppressed knowledges, for the purposes of political emancipation. This paper seeks through rigorous qualitative research to show the use of theopoetics in a public emancipation project (Alisal, California), display how such a popular theopoetics can come to help shape and galvanize a community, and articulate the role that public intellectuals can play in shaping the language of emancipation.