
MISSION IMPOSSIBLE: THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN THE THEOLOGY OF JOHN D. CAPUTO

*A CRITICAL REFLECTION FROM THE POSTCOLONIAL SUB-SAHARAN AFRICAN
PERSPECTIVE OF ACHILLE MBEMBE*



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A Research Assignment submitted to the University of Stellenbosch

Date: 11th of September 2017

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*In loving memory of my grandma Dinie Meijers,
a theologian at heart,
an activist for women's rights,
and a woman ahead of her time.
It is a privilege to be a theologian in memory of her,
and to walk the roads she was never able to take.*

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INTRODUCTION

This research assignment is the result of my studies over the last year in both the Netherlands and South Africa, and as such this research represents a certain ‘in-between’ that characterized many of my experiences both on a sociological, cultural, and theological level. In the fall of 2015, I made the decision to come to Stellenbosch in South Africa for the final year of my Master’s in Theology. Little did I know that this choice would also influence my academic and theological interests. While in The Netherlands my main interest was in philosophy of religion and postmodern theology, I experienced a shift during my stay in South Africa. The daily life in South Africa confronted me with the country’s specific history of the apartheid regime and the (church) struggles against apartheid, and moreover, with the complexity of the problems of the current South Africa in which injustice is visible everywhere and in which many of my encounters revealed stories of struggles against poverty, racism, paternalism, sexual orientation, and corruption. These stories influenced and altered me, it invoked in me an interest in Black, postcolonial, and feminist theology. The current study reflects this development and relates to both an interest in postmodern theology and postcolonial theory.

During my studies, I had read some of the works of the U.S.A.-based postmodern philosopher and theologian John D. Caputo (1940) and it was my wish to continue studying his work. Caputo, who as a student was trained in the Catholic theology and philosophy of Aquinas and who simultaneously was introduced to mysticism, developed in graduate school an interest in existentialism and phenomenology that drew him to the study of the German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889-1976).¹ It was the studying of Heidegger that initiated his lifelong academic endeavour to overcome metaphysics. For Caputo, this endeavour, however, does not shut the door to theology, instead, “the overcoming of metaphysics opens again the God-question and [...] the scriptural question concerning the coming of the kingdom”.²

Within the work of Caputo there are traces of a variety of philosophers and theologians to be discovered: “a certain destiny of thought-opening by Nietzsche, announced by Heidegger, developed by Levinas and Derrida, reminiscent of Kierkegaard and figured within the Catholic tradition through theologians as different as Peter Damian and Thomas Aquinas, Caputo writes of a Christianity refigured for postmodernity.”³ However, I would like to argue with Graham Ward that Caputo’s

¹ John D. Caputo, *Hoping Against Hope; Confession of a Postmodern Pilgrim* (Fortress Press; Minneapolis, 2015) 24.

² John D. Caputo, ‘The Poetics of the Impossible and the Kingdom of God’, in: Graham Ward (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Postmodern Theology* (Blackwell publishers; Oxford, 2001) 469.

³ Caputo, ‘The Poetics of the Impossible and the Kingdom of God’, 470.

thinking is decisively, however not conclusively, influenced by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) and his philosophy of deconstruction.⁴ Derrida's work showed an interest in language, deconstruction, and poststructuralism, and shifted during the 1980s towards an explicit interest in the combination of deconstruction and the theological, with a specific focus on negative theology. It was this combination that shaped and inspired the philosopher Caputo and which eventually led to his Luther-styled 'coming-out' as a theologian in the introduction of *The Weakness of God* in 2006.⁵

It was in the (re)reading of Caputo's more recent theological works in the South African context that several themes were unexpectedly highlighted, like: his key interest in the deconstruction of power structures, the call for justice that is released in the event of God, and the impossible mission to establish a kingdom of God which belongs to the nothings and nobodies of this world.⁶ Caputo argues that the kingdom of God follows a poetics of the impossible, which surprises and contradicts the calculations and power structures of this world. Based on 1 Corinthians 1:27-29, he shows how the prophetic concern of God neither follows the wisdom of the wise nor the power of the strong but instead sides with the foolish and weak.⁷ This theo-poetics of the kingdom of God in his theology resonates in many ways with liberation and postcolonial theology.⁸ Most importantly, these theologies share the objective that theology should follow Jesus in siding with the weakest and marginalized of this world and diversify or deconstruct the power structures that sustains the sovereignty of the most powerful of this world. This shared objective stands in sharp contrast with the universality of the theological and philosophical discourses of modernity, in which the marginal was excluded. Nonetheless, important differences become visible in the starting point and methodology of these theologies. While Caputo's theology arose in the wake of the postmodern deconstruction of Derrida as a reaction to philosophical modernity in the West, the critical attitude of postcolonialism originates in the practical realities of the poor and the oppressed people in former colonial countries. Thus, while postmodern theology and postcolonialism align in objective —a critical or deconstructive attitude

⁴ Ward classifies the work of Caputo under the heading 'Derrideans' in: *The Blackwell Companion to Postmodern Theology*, 467.

⁵ "I confess I have a weakness for theology [...] Hier stehe ich [...] I have never been able to resist theology, even as I have never had the immodesty to presume that I could get as far as theology" in: John D. Caputo, *The Weakness of God; A Theology of the Event* (Indiana University Press; Bloomington, 2006) 1.

⁶ The kingdom of God in the work of Caputo is not a kingdom of Kings, an area that is ruled by a royal or godly monarch. Instead, the kingdom of God is broken down like the body of Christ into the sacred anarchy of the crucified, therefore, this study will write kingdom without a capital letter. This choice to write kingdom without a capital letter is also in line with the more recent theological publications of Caputo.

⁷ Caputo, 'The Poetics of the Impossible and the Kingdom of God', 470-471.

⁸ As Vuyani Vellem has argued, the difference between Black liberation theology and decolonization of theology is none existent, Black liberation theology is decolonizing theology. in: Vuyani Vellem, *The Decolonization of Theology: An Epistemological Challenge and opportunity* (a lecture in honour of the John Mbiti-conference at the University of Stellenbosch held on the 19th of August 2016).

towards the power structures at work in theology with the aim to diversify the discourse— the difference in the context and methodology will be the tension field in which this research is conducted.

THE RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

So far, the work of Caputo has found reception in the field of philosophy, theology, and philosophy of religion in the Western world. It has found its way into the works of postcolonial theorists, philosophers and (postmodern) theologians, amongst others Susan Abrahams, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Richard Kearney, Joeri Schrijvers, and Catherine Keller. Most of the reception on Caputo's work, however, focuses either on his philosophical work or on the post-theistic theological reception on Caputo's image of God. This study, however, moves in a different direction. As I was formed and informed by the postcolonial context of South Africa, it made me realize that there seems to be no engagement of Caputo's *theological* work with a context outside the Western postmodern discourse. By reflecting on Caputo's theological work from the critical sub-Saharan African postcolonial perspective of the Cameroonian-born philosopher and political theorist Achille Mbembe (1957) —a Research Professor in History and Politics at the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research (WISER) which is part of the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa— this research sets out to bridge this gap. This is for two reasons: firstly, because during my time in South Africa I began to see conjunctions between the deconstructive kingdom of God and Mbembe's postcolonial perspective. Secondly, I think that the engagement with perspectives outside the Western horizon is important, because the reconstruction of the kingdom of God that Caputo proposes seems to be limited to a reconstruction in a Western context.

Therefore, the objective of this study is to critically reflect on the deconstructed kingdom of God that Caputo envisions and to problematize his language of deconstruction in the encounter with the postcolonial sub-Saharan African perspective offered by Mbembe. That starts not by simply giving an additional perspective(s), but by asking different hermeneutical questions and employing a different methodology. By using a feminist standpoint methodology, the awareness will grow that location influences our understanding of the world and equally also our understanding of the theo-poetics that Caputo proposes. For Caputo, theology is defined not so much by its theory but rather in the deconstruction of theology into a practice; theology is ultimately the doing of "works of

mercy” to realize the kingdom of God.⁹ But, whose practical reality are we dealing with here in regard to the deconstructed kingdom of God that Caputo proposes? Who is the ‘we’ on the receiving end of the call and who are the subjects receiving those works of mercy?¹⁰ In the encounter with the voices coming from a sub-Saharan African postcolonial perspective as voiced by Mbembe, this research wants to critically engage with the theology that Caputo proposes, to gain new understandings of the deconstructed kingdom of God and to see if this kingdom is as deconstructed as Caputo claims it to be.

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

The research problem revolves around the deconstructive language of Caputo’s kingdom of God in relation to the postcolonial sub-Saharan African context. In this study, the emphasis is on the ambiguity that surrounds deconstructive language for understanding the kingdom of God as a kingdom that sides with the nothings and nobodies of this world. On the one hand, it could be argued that deconstructive language is a powerful fit for speaking about a kingdom of God in a postcolonial context as it regards its function to auto-deconstruct traditional power structures and reality. But on the other hand, it could be argued that this deconstructive language—which arose from a dominant Western postmodern discourse—reflects in its origin and in the employment of Caputo’s examples the limitations of the Western context. In other words, while Caputo’s deconstructed kingdom of God averts to power structures and explicitly sides with the powerless of this world, the voices, and realities of those who are powerless and outside the Western world are remarkably absent in his theology. Therefore, working from the postcolonial sub-Saharan African context, this study not only problematizes the absence of ‘powerless’ voices in Caputo’s theology, but also adopts a critical attitude towards the fact that Caputo’s theopoetics is rooted in the context of the ‘powerful’ Western discourse of postmodernism. This in view of the fact that, according to The World Bank, sub-Saharan Africa is home to half of all the extremely poor of this world.¹¹ Thus, by outlining a sub-Saharan African postcolonial context described by Achille Mbembe, this study will look both at the potential and the problems of Caputo’s theology within postcolonial contexts. Accordingly, the main research question will be: What are the contributions and problems of Caputo’s deconstructed kingdom of God, in relation to the postcolonial perspective of Mbembe?

⁹ Caputo argues that “theology wanes into theopoetics and the theopoetics waxes into theopraxis.” in: John D. Caputo, *The Folly of God* (Polebridge Press; Salem, OR, 2016) 119-124.

¹⁰ Caputo, *The Folly of God*, 122-127.

¹¹ <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/overview> (accessed 30th of March 2017).

THE APPROACH OF THIS STUDY

To answer the main research question, the focus of the research assignment will be on Caputo's theopoetics of the kingdom of God. In the careful study and exploration of Caputo's theological oeuvre —*The Weakness of God* (2006), *What Would Jesus Deconstruct* (2007), *The Insistence of God* (2013), *Hoping Against Hope* (2015), and *The Folly of God* (2016)— further understanding will be gained as to what Caputo means when he speaks of the deconstruction of the kingdom of God, the theopoetics of the kingdom as well as theopraxis. Secondly, the critical reflection from the perspective of Achille Mbembe will be based on his books *On the Postcolony* (2001), *Critique of Black Reason* (2017) and some of his journal and newspaper articles. Finally, because Caputo speaks of the theopoetics of the kingdom of God and not of the theology of the kingdom of God, this study will not just write, reason, and give argumentation on his theology, but it will join in his poetic approach to the kingdom by starting each chapter with a poem.¹² The poem will introduce the theme of research in that chapter, remind the reader of the limitations of theological writing and at the same time root this study in different South African poetic voices.

The first chapter of this study will outline the research methodology —a feminist standpoint methodology— in a systematic way. Since both time and space in a research assignment are limited, the chapters that will cover Caputo's understanding of the kingdom of God will focus on what I consider to be the three central features in Caputo's understanding of the kingdom: the idolatry of reality, time, and the body. In the second, third and fourth chapters, each feature of the kingdom of God will be researched separately. The fifth and final chapter of this study will put forward the critical sub-Saharan postcolonial perspective by Mbembe and reflect onto Caputo's theopoetics of the kingdom of God from the context of postcolonial sub-Saharan Africa. In the conclusion, the researched features of Caputo's kingdom of God and its critical evaluation by Mbembe will be summarized, and this will result in an answer to the main research question in the conclusion and an assessment of the implications of this conclusion for further understanding the work of Caputo.

Lastly, I want to make a remark concerning the research ethics of my own position as a researcher. I am a White female with a privileged upbringing in The Netherlands, something which will be reflected in my work. My time living and studying in South Africa has influenced and changed me without a doubt and has broadened my horizon in a very meaningful way. If anything, it has taught me that identity —including my own identity— is highly contested ground. However, it is my sincere conviction that this constant tension between context, identity, power structures, and theological

¹² Caputo, *The Folly of God*, 93.

research, is not only the site of struggle but can also be the site of fruitful (theological) research. By embracing the given tension of my 'in-between' position as a researcher in different contexts, I hope to contribute in a positive way to the diversification of the current discourse.

CHAPTER 1 – A FEMINIST STANDPOINT METHODOLOGY: VOICING THE DISADVANTAGED

a.

*Between you and me
how desperately
how it aches
how desperately it aches between you and me*

*so much hurt for truth
so much destruction
so little left for survival*

where do we go from here

*your voice slung
in anger
over the solid cold length of our past*

*how long does it take
for a voice
to reach another*

in this country held bleeding between us

Antjie Krog, *Country of Grief and Grace*¹³

This chapter will put forth the framework that is being used in this study: a feminist standpoint methodology. The choice for a methodology is not only the choice for an academic approach but also a choice regarding the focus. In choosing the methodological framework of standpoint methodology this study made the choice to focus on people in marginalized and disadvantaged positions. The rest of this chapter will explore the exact content of a standpoint feminist methodology, how the choice for this methodology is connected to the gospel, and finally how this methodology relates to the postcolonial sub-Saharan context.

¹³ http://www.poetryinternationalweb.net/pi/site/poem/item/5392/poem_english (accessed 22nd of August 2017).

1.1 AN INTRODUCTION INTO A STANDPOINT FEMINIST METHODOLOGY

Standpoint feminist methodology arose from the discourse of feminist theory and feminist theology in the 1970s and 1980s. It was developed to diversify academic discourses by actively acquiring female experiences and accordingly integrating them into academic theory. Feminists argued that there was a need for such a methodology which acquired experiences of women, because in the male dominated academic world the female experience was often missing. Instead, the male experience was taken as “universal and generic for all”.¹⁴ Based on the universalization of the male experience, feminists concluded that there was a relation between positions of power and the production of knowledge:¹⁵ “Standpoint researchers believe that an individual's actual location in the social and physical world and the work that s/he does there shapes her/his understandings [...] that people in locations of relative power have an interest in maintaining their position, and that they are supported by the dominant institutions and discourses.”¹⁶

Although these early feminists made way for the female voice within academics, simultaneously they also faced critique from feminists who had a different cultural, geographical, or racial background. This critique focused on the limitations of the female voice that was articulated by these early feminists, which only represented the White and Western female experience. At the forefront of the women who objected were Latin-American feminists and African-American feminists; both groups questioned the universalization of the White female experience by pointing out that the expressed female voice was deprived of their own experiences. It turned out that the female experience, just like the male experience, was engraved with differences —historical, geographical, economical, racial, sexual— which implied that *the* female experience could not be universalized. Therefore, the critique on the universalization of the female voice had revealed that the power to produce knowledge is not only affected by gender difference, but it is also influenced by a whole range of power differences between cultures, gender, sexuality, economic positions, race, and geographical locations. Under the influence of such critique, feminist standpoint theory developed into a methodology that focused not solely on gender differences, but was critical of all universalizing tendencies that adhered to dominant power structures. Thus, feminist standpoint methodology developed into a methodology that was not just restricted to acquiring the female experience;

¹⁴ Kwok Pui-Lan, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology* (Westminster John Knox Press; Louisville, KY, 2005) 22.

¹⁵ Sandra Harding, ‘Introduction: Standpoint Theory as a Site of Political, Philosophical, and Scientific Debate’ in: Sandra Harding (ed.), *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies* (Routledge; New York, 2004) 1.

¹⁶ Mary Jo Neitz, ‘Feminist Methodologies’ in: Michael Strausberg and Steven Engler et al (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion* (Routledge; Abingdon, 2011) 55.

instead, it aimed at gathering all kinds of experiences of marginalization and oppression with the aim to diversify the dominant power structures that produce knowledge. This makes feminist standpoint methodology particularly fitting for the postcolonial experience, because as the theologian Kwok Pui-Lan argued: “The challenge of the white feminists is not radical enough if they only wish to replace and step into the subject position of white men, without being conscious of their complicity in the colonizing project.”¹⁷

1.2 STANDPOINT FEMINIST METHODOLOGY & POSTCOLONIALISM

Let me further clarify what is meant with the ‘postcolonial experience’. Overall, it can be said that the term ‘postcolonial’ is ambiguous and is used in a wide variety of ways within different discourses. In general, however, according to the theologian R.S. Sugirtharajah, a distinction can be made between ‘post-colonial’ and ‘postcolonial’, namely when ‘post-colonial’ is written with a hyphen it generally indicates “the historical period aftermath of colonialism”.¹⁸ Conversely, when ‘postcolonial’ is written without hyphen the term refers both to “a reactive resistance discourse of the colonized who critically interrogate dominant knowledge systems in order to recover the past from the Western slander and misinformation of the colonial period” and the continuing interrogation of “neo-colonizing tendencies after the declaration of independence.”¹⁹ The emphasis of this study is on the latter understanding of ‘postcolonial’, although such an understanding can never be completely disconnected from the historical timeframe.

The interpretation of the term postcolonial displays that the discourse of postcolonialism is not so much about offering a comprehensive theory of the postcolonial experience but more about “a collection of critical and conceptual attitudes”.²⁰ This attitude of criticism in postcolonialism serves, in the words of the postcolonial theorist Edward Said (1935-2003), as life-enhancing, because it is “constitutively opposed to every form of tyranny, domination and abuse, its social goals are non-coercive knowledge produced in the interests of human freedom.”²¹ It is in this critical attitude that the relevance of the methodology of feminist standpoint theory for the postcolonial experience appears, because this methodology actively acquires and engages with the experiences of marginalized people in its aim to integrate ‘missing’ voices into the academic discourse. Consequently,

¹⁷ Pui-Lan, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology*, 23.

¹⁸ R. S. Sugirtharajah, ‘Charting the Aftermath: A Review of Postcolonial Criticism’, in: R.S. Sugirtharajah (ed.), *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader* (Blackwell Publishing; Malden, MA, 2006) 8.

¹⁹ Sugirtharajah, ‘Charting the Aftermath’, 8.

²⁰ Sugirtharajah, ‘Charting the Aftermath’, 9.

²¹ Edward W. Said, *The Word, the Text, and the Critic* (Harvard University Press; Cambridge, MA, 1983) 29.

this study in its engagement with the postcolonial sub-Saharan African experience utilizes the interpretation of Patricia Hill Collins (1948), which says that a feminist standpoint methodology is “a tool for talking about how dominant groups maintain their power in part through control over culture and knowledge production.”²² This interpretation of feminist standpoint methodology by Hill Collins can be summarized in what she calls ‘intersectionality’, a term which is defined by her as “the study of interlocking matrices of oppression”.²³

1.3 FEMINIST STANDPOINT METHODOLOGY & THEOLOGY

Assuming that, also in theological hermeneutics intersecting power structures are at work, the choice to use feminist standpoint methodology in this study is “the choice to work for the disadvantaged rather than for those in power”.²⁴ This choice was instigated by my own formation in feminist hermeneutics as a theological student, which made me aware of the complexity and diversity of human experiences connected to the difference in location. This awareness of diversity formed me, it brought me to South Africa and made me try to ask the questions not yet asked, listen to voices not yet heard and search for experiences not yet told. However, the choice for this methodology is not just academic *spielerei* according to my own preferences; instead it is the choice to follow the example set by Jesus in the gospel. As a systematic theologian, it is the choice to follow Jesus, who during his life sided time and time again with those who were outsiders and without power: women, the poor, the sick, the imprisoned, foreigners, the servants and the corrupt.²⁵ On the grounds of Jesus’ attitude and the proclamation of the kingdom of God as summarized in the key gospel text of Matthew 25: 31-46, it can be concluded that Jesus’ himself, and the kingdom he proclaimed openly, is avert to the power structures of this world in its ethical appeal to care for those who are considered powerless in this world. Thus, following the ethical appeal of the gospel, this systematic theological research will join up with feminist standpoint methodology to identify and give voice to the powerless of this world in theological knowledge, thereby, opening and furthering the hermeneutical process.

In the context of postcolonial sub-Saharan Africa —which is the context that this research engages with— the interpretation of such a biblical ethical appeal cannot be disconnected from the

²² Neitz, ‘Feminist Methodologies’, 59.

²³ Hill Collins actively reveals that the working of power structures is not one-dimensional —but intersecting— and shows simultaneously the influence that location has on human beings. in: Neitz, ‘Feminist Methodologies’, 59.

²⁴ Neitz, ‘Feminist Methodologies’, 55.

²⁵ See the work of the founding father of Liberation Theology Gustavo Gutierrez (1928) who claimed that God loves everyone equally but has a preference for the poor.

history of colonialism and the current post-colonial struggles for land, identity, economic justice, and cultural survival.²⁶ In the discourse of theology, the European colonization of Africa gave rise to missionary programs that brought European theology to Africa. Part of these missionary programs was to transfer a normative framework of how theology should be done. Christian theology became a synonym for European theology, enclosing within itself a specific methodology, as well as theories, categories, doctrines, and practices, which could be distinguished from the 'other' African theologies. Until this day, both in African academia and churches, the European or Western way of doing theology has remained dominant, considering the African way "exotic at best, unprofessional at worst."²⁷ In other words, the power structures at work in theological knowledge are not only expressed in the absence of those voices who are considered powerless, but also, in the employment of "logical dichotomies and abstract individualism" and the "objectification" of people.²⁸ In which humans of flesh and blood become the abstract 'other', without a body or a voice. People become 'things' that are worthless and who "have no ability to act on their own behalf".²⁹ During the years of Apartheid in South Africa, it was Steve Biko (1946-1977) who described such a reduction of people: "The blacks are tired of standing at the touchlines to witness the games that they should be playing. They want to do things themselves and all by themselves."³⁰ It can be concluded that, neither the absence of powerless voices, nor the reduction of people into 'other' voices that belongs to the universalization of the experience of the powerful —the colonizer, the White female, the White male etc.— is corresponding with the above described redemptive and inclusive tone of Jesus and the kingdom of God that he proclaims in the gospel. Nevertheless, it seems impossible to do justice to all the different voices in the world when it comes down to academic (theological) knowledge. Therefore, this research interprets academic (theological) knowledge as what the sociologist Donna Harraway (1944) called "situated knowledges". Situated knowledges views knowledge as embodied and argues "for thinking in terms of scientific knowledge as partial and located visions brought into conversations with each other and contributing to a strategically diverse discourse."³¹

²⁶ The postcolonial feminist theologian Musa Dube explains that in sub-Saharan Africa "biblical interpretation is intimately locked in the framework of scramble for land, struggle for economic justice and struggle for cultural survival. Biblical interpretation remains wedged between Western and African history of colonialism, struggle for independence, post-independence and the globalization era." in: Musa W. Dube, Andrew M. Mbuvi, and Dora R. Mbuwayesango (eds.), *Postcolonial perspectives in African biblical interpretations* (Society of Biblical Literature; Atlanta, 2012) 4.

²⁷ Emmanuel Yartekwei Amugi Latrey, *Postcolonizing God: An African Practical Theology* (SCM Press; London, 2013) 118.

²⁸ Neitz, 'Feminist Methodologies', 56.

²⁹ Neitz, 'Feminist Methodologies', 56.

³⁰ Steve Biko, *I Write What I Like* (Picador Africa; Johannesburg, 2004[1978]) 17.

³¹ Neitz, 'Feminist Methodologies', 58.

1.4 FEMINIST STANDPOINT METHODOLOGY IN THIS STUDY

In line with Harraway, this study will methodologically search for embodied and situated knowledges. That means first of all, that this research will have a particular interest in bringing stories of embodied humans who are in marginalized positions in conversation with the theological knowledge that John D. Caputo offers. According to Caputo “the more Jesus-inspired thing to do today, in my opinion, is to translate the gospel’s commitment to the poor into an effective public policy that would actually implement an evangelical imperative, to come to the aid of the weakest and most defenceless people in society, above all the children.”³² Nonetheless, the physical experiences and stories of the weakest and most defenceless people are for the most part lacking in his description of the deconstruction of the kingdom of God. Hence, this study is interested in the encounter between the physical suffering and experiences of the weakest and most defenceless people in postcolonial context and the deconstruction of the kingdom of God as described by Caputo.

Secondly, feminist standpoint methodology argues that the location in the world shapes our understanding, which in this case applies to Caputo’s understanding of theology. Therefore, the awareness in this research of the Western and postmodern situatedness of Caputo’s theology, has formed an incentive to reflect on the consequences of this situatedness. This will be done by using the ‘outside’ perspective of the postcolonial, and more specifically that of the South African based scholar, Achille Mbembe. In reading the theology of Caputo, as informed by the postcolonial discourse as described by Mbembe, this study aims “to diversify the discourse” surrounding Caputo’s theology and “to create knowledge that empowers the disadvantaged” and relate such research also “to public debates.”³³ Consequently, this study by no means aims to give *the* reception of Caputo’s understanding of the kingdom of God, since as Harraway has pointed out all knowledge is partial and located, but nevertheless, it does set out to critically analyse the implications of power structures at work within the theology of Caputo. To research if and to what extent Caputo’s theology is “a European crafted idol [...] in the image of the philosophies, anthropologies, intellectual and emotional preference of Europeans.”³⁴ In conclusion, this study is an attempt to diversify the reception of Caputo’s work by bringing it into conversation with African postcolonial theory and to explore to what extent there are power structures at work in Caputo’s theopoetics of the kingdom of God.

³² John D. Caputo, *What Would Jesus Deconstruct?* (Baker Academic; Grand Rapids, MI, 2007) 93.

³³ Neitz, ‘Feminist Methodologies’, 64.

³⁴ Latrey, *Postcolonizing God*, 125.

CHAPTER 2 – WHAT IS THE REAL? ON THE RELATION BETWEEN GOD AND REALITY

Things that seemed real could sometimes be just pretend, and things that seemed just pretend could sometimes be real. It was hard to keep that in your mind all the time, especially when you were still small. But it was important to try, because if you didn't you could easily get confused. You could even get an accident, like the tiny bird he held in his small hands now. It had thought it was flying through sky, but it had flown into a sheet of glass instead, a windowpane that was showing it just a picture of the sky.

Gaile Parkin, *When Hoopoes go to Heaven*

The focal point of this chapter is the exploration of the real in the work of Caputo. Arguably, this seems a very unnecessary philosophical and theoretical question, as our relationship with reality seems to come naturally. Unless there is something pathologically wrong with a human-being, we do not walk around questioning the reality of our daily lives. Caputo largely agrees with this position as “reality does not wait for our consent.”³⁵ Nevertheless, the question of ‘the real’ in relation to human reality remains more complex in the work of Caputo. Specifically, because this study discusses the kingdom of God, of which the reality in this world has always been debated and questioned in the history of theology. Firstly, the problem of the real, is a problem of terminology, as a distinction between ‘the real’ and ‘reality’ should be made. When speaking in daily life about reality we usually refer to a phenomenological reality, the sensible existence of our life-world around us. This interpretation of reality should be separated from the real, which in continental philosophy refers to the ‘other’ as everything and everyone ‘other’ defined as *tout autre*. Caputo interprets the ‘other’ theologically, namely the ‘other’ as the event that stirs in the name (of) God.

That immediately brings on the second problem, because as we meet the ‘other’ in reality we experience natural proximity but also distance.³⁶ As the otherness of the ‘other’ always causes an unbridgeable distance, the epistemological problem arises how a subject can know anything about the ‘other’. This search for objectivity about the really real, and specifically of God, has caused fierce debates in the history of philosophy, mainly in the discourses of epistemology and metaphysics. Since Caputo stands within a certain tradition of continental and postmodern philosophy, he argues that metaphysics as a theory of everything has lost all credibility. Nevertheless, as we shall see, Caputo does not ignore this epistemological problem himself, but moves in a different direction to solve it. Thus, this second problem resolves around the relation between the really real and our life-world, the

³⁵ John D. Caputo, *The Insistence of God* (Indiana University Press; Bloomington, IN, 2013) 181.

³⁶ Caputo, *What Would Jesus Deconstruct?*, 44.

reality. While these two terms should be separated, nevertheless they are related, as without a relation to reality the really real would be meaningless to us. This relation has been interpreted in different ways in the history of philosophy and theology, but for Caputo specifically the perspective of classical theology is problematic. Therefore, Caputo will contrast his own weak theology against that of classical theology, which ever since St. Augustine placed God as the perfect 'other' outside our corrupted human reality into a perfect 'other' world above.

As has been said, the continental understanding of the 'other', which is the foundation for Caputo's understanding of God, is specifically suspicious of the metaphysical structure of the God of religion. Metaphysics makes the 'other' into an idolatrous real, as Caputo states in quoting his favourite theologian Paul Tillich (1886-1965).³⁷ This half-blasphemous and mythological concept of the existence of God against which Caputo speaks out "reduces us to a situation in which we are not saved by the power of God; we need to be saved *from* the power of God."³⁸ As according to Caputo, proving or claiming the existence of a theistic God is nothing more than making God the object of conditioned, subjective imagination and the will to power. This resistance against the objectification of the real, is not just a concern of philosophy of religion but has a biblical background since idolatry runs against the first of the Ten Commandments in the Bible: "You shall have no other gods before me"³⁹. Thus, against this kind of 'strong' theology, Caputo proposes his 'weak' theology of the event. Not only to deconstruct the theistic God of strong theology but to simultaneously release the event inside the name (of) God.

This forthcoming chapter, therefore, discusses three questions: (1) Why Caputo resists traditional theological understandings of the real; (2) Which alternative understanding of the real Caputo offers; (3) How Caputo understands the relation of the real and reality, specifically in relation to the kingdom of God? The answers to these questions will be revealed by tracing the philosophical and theological genealogy of Caputo's interpretation of the real and its relation to the reality of our life-world. The roots of Caputo's deconstructive interpretation of the real are a complex interplay between the Protestant/Jewish/Deconstructive principle, which respectively refers to the thought of the theologian Tillich and the Jewish philosopher Derrida. Accordingly, the understanding of both Tillich and Derrida will be set out in separate paragraphs, to return at the end of this chapter to Caputo's own interpretation of the real.

³⁷ "The idol or false God [...] is the God of power, the Supreme Being, the *deus omnipotens*, half-blasphemous and mythological. in: Caputo, *The Folly of God*, 32.

³⁸ Caputo, *The Folly of God*, 32.

³⁹ Exodus 20:3, New International Version (NIV).

2.1 PAUL TILlich: THE REAL AND REALITY

In Tillich's awareness of the real, an almost platonic distinction is made between the 'seemingly real' and the 'really real'. As a result, the hypothesis that will be discussed in this paragraph is: that the distinction between the 'seemingly real' and the 'really real' is the result of Tillich's interpretation of the epistemological problem concerning the real, and the consequent relation between the real and reality. The starting point for Tillich is the realization that the epistemological process does not always deliver the truth but sometimes also idolatrous truths, as "judgements can grasp or fail to grasp reality and can, accordingly be true of false. [...] There must be an explanation of the fact that reality can give itself to the cognitive act in such a way that false judgement can occur [...] the reason is that things hide their true being."⁴⁰ Therefore, Tillich makes the distinction that underneath what is 'seemingly real', there is a deeper truth of the power of being, *ousia*, which Tillich calls the 'really real'.⁴¹ With this distinction Tillich does not lapse into a solipsistic position; on the contrary, as Tillich does not argue that the seemingly real is unreal but simply that it is deceptive with regard to the really real. Thus, to explain why the epistemological process does not always lead to the truth, specifically in theology, Tillich finds the solution in the separation between the seemingly real and the really real. Or in other words, God as the really real reflects a deeper structure of truth which ontological reason tries to grasp, but as reason is actualized in the subject-object structure of reality it can be deceived by the seemingly real.

By way of explanation why this distinction between the seemingly real and the really real is necessary, this paragraph will first explore two problems in the epistemological quest for God: Firstly, the priority of reason over revelation in the epistemological process, and secondly, the loss of the ontological approach in preference of the cosmological approach in philosophy of religion. Regarding the first, according to Tillich the usage of the Hegelian binary of reason and revelation in theology, shows a one-sided focus on reason in the epistemological quest for God that neglects revelation. Reason means, for Tillich, both the classical ontological concept of reason, as "[...] the structure of the mind which enables the mind to grasp and to transform reality" and the technical concept for reason as "[...] the capacity for reasoning."⁴² Technical reason is for Tillich an instrument that should be used next to ontological reason, but the actualization of ontological reason is "not a matter of technique but of 'fall' and 'salvation'".⁴³ When Tillich speaks of 'fall' and 'salvation' he refers to the existential situation that in the former mankind and the world are estranged from God, and in the latter the life-

⁴⁰ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Vol. I* (University of Chicago Press; Chicago, IL, 1951) 101.

⁴¹ Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Vol. I*, 101.

⁴² Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Vol. I*, 72-73.

⁴³ Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Vol. I*, 74.

giving salvation offered by the coming of Christ.⁴⁴ Thus, the actualization of ontological reason, moves from its essential perfection of being-itself into the existential situation of the reality of existence, life and history.⁴⁵ Therefore, “[...] theology must show that, although the essence of ontological reason, the universal *logos* of being, is identical with the content of revelation, still reason, if actualized in self and world, is dependent on the destructive structures of existence and the saving structures of life; it is subjected to finitude and separation, and it can participate in the ‘New Being’.”⁴⁶

Nevertheless, this gives rise to the question: Why is the actualization of ontological reason necessary? Given that ontological reason in its essence already offers the revelatory truth, the really real. Still, if that revelatory truth of ontological reason is not actualized, it is meaningless. Therefore, both the one-sidedness of reason as controlling knowledge and revelation as receiving knowledge leaves Tillich dissatisfied. As “controlling knowledge is safe but not ultimately significant” since it does not expose itself to the human existential situation and as “receiving knowledge [...] can be ultimately significant, but it cannot give certainty.”⁴⁷ Instead, Tillich argues beyond the ‘objectivity’ of cognitive knowledge towards the significance of revelation, while maintaining the importance of technical reasoning to prevent the mistakes of idealism. Ontological reason for Tillich, offers both the *certainty* of truth by its revelatory essence and the *ultimate concern* as revelation needs to be actualized in relation to our existential situation.

The second problem in the epistemological process of God is the preference for a philosophy of religion that follows the cosmological approach of the really real at cost of the ontological approach. This relates strongly to the just discussed binary of reason and revelation, but this time it occurs in the specific context of the history of philosophy of religion. Tillich expends on this problem in his essay ‘The Two Types of Philosophy of Religion’ (1946), an essay that was very influential on the work of Caputo.⁴⁸ Tillich argues that there are two ways of approaching God: “[...] the way of overcoming estrangement and the way of meeting a stranger”. In the first option, “man discovers himself when he discovers God” and in the second option, “man meets a stranger when he meets

⁴⁴ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Vol. II* (University of Chicago Press; Chicago, IL, 1957) 27-28.

⁴⁵ Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Vol. I*, 74-75.

⁴⁶ Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Vol. I*, 74.

⁴⁷ Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Vol. I*, 105.

⁴⁸ Both in Caputo’s works *The Insistence of God* (2013) and *The Folly of God* (2016) extensive references are found to Tillich’s essay ‘The Two Types of Philosophy of Religion’. For example, in the *Insistence of God* chapter five is called ‘Two Types of Continental Philosophy of Religion’. In this chapter Caputo proposes a variation of Tillich’s distinction of two types of philosophy of religion. Caputo distinguishes a Kantian and a Hegelian type of postmodern philosophy of religion. In the Kantian version, to add ‘perhaps’ to God is a way of keeping God safe from trouble, a type of fideism. However, in the Hegelian version of a postmodern philosophy of religion that Caputo proposes the perhaps of God cuts much deeper. It makes the name (of) God radical contingent and open-ended, to release the event inside the name (of) God. in: Caputo, *The Insistence of God*, 87-103.

God”.⁴⁹ For Tillich, these two ways of approaching God symbolize two types of philosophy of religion: the ontological type called the Augustinian solution which acknowledges the possibility of immediate knowledge of God and the cosmological type called the Thomistic dissolution which argues that knowledge of God is not immediate but mediated.⁵⁰

This Thomistic dissolution of the Augustinian solution caused a radical change in philosophy of religion, in that it revealed the contingent element of faith in contrast to the naïve position of immediate God knowledge in the ontological approach. Tillich, however, argues that with the loss of the ontological type of philosophy of religion, an existential part of religion was lost. As the ontological approach “transcends the discussion between nominalism and realism, if it rejects the concept of the *ens realissimum*, as it must do. Being itself, as present in the ontological awareness, is power of Being but not the most powerful being; it is neither *ens realissimum* nor *ens singularissimum*. It is the power in everything that has power [...]”⁵¹ Therefore, Tillich offers a philosophy of religion which incorporates the cosmological approach while keeping an ontological base. This ontological base is what Tillich describes as man’s immediate awareness, or revelatory essence, of something Unconditional, namely the power of Being which proceeds subject-object separation.⁵² However, ontological certainty is meaningless without the addition of the existential risk of faith, as the Unconditional needs to be a matter of ultimate concern. For the Unconditional to be a matter of ultimate concern, it needs to appear “in a concrete embodiment”.⁵³ This correlation between the Unconditional and embodiment, reveals that for Tillich the Unconditional, or the really real, cannot be separated from reality. Thus, Tillich’s ontological base gives *certainty* but cannot do without the risk of faith as offered in the cosmological approach, to turn *certainty* into embodied knowledge of *ultimate concern*.

As humans cannot avoid the risk of faith, the process always entails the risk of the really real getting confused with the seemingly real in the reality of existence and life. However, this risk cannot be avoided if the really real is to concern us ultimately. For Tillich, therefore, the really real is no longer the theological Absolute of a powerful Being but the transcending immanence of the *ousia*, which means that it depends both on its ontological base and the cosmological recognition in reality. The fact that God as a powerful being is unacceptable for Tillich, is the consequence of what Tillich calls ‘The Protestant Principle’. The term finds its origin in his book *The Protestant Era* (1934) with references to the Lutheran doctrine of *sola fide* —justification by faith alone— namely that the sinner

⁴⁹ Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture* (Oxford University Press; Oxford, 1959) 10.

⁵⁰ Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, 10-19.

⁵¹ Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, 25-26.

⁵² Which is equal to the content of revelation, see above.

⁵³ Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, 28.

is forgiven by faith not by works. According to Tillich, justification is not just limited to the ethical realm of the sinner but must be extended to the intellectual realm of those who doubt about the existence of God.⁵⁴ This radical interpretation of justification by faith alone in the Protestant Principle established Tillich conviction that revelation is not solemnly found in traditional religion, but can also be found in the secular culture, as the holy embraces both religion and the secular.

In conclusion, for Tillich the risk of faith is that the really real might get confused with the seemingly real. However, if faith itself does not want to be reduced to an epistemological quest for God that is merely cosmological, God as a transcending reality 'out there', then it has no choice except taking this risk. Nevertheless, for Tillich, this is never a blind risk because he presupposes a human awareness of the really real, the power of being. This ontological foundation of faith, which proceeds from the subject-object separation, guards the certainty of theological knowledge, even if it still needs to be actualized in the reality of the human life-world to be meaningful. It is only in this reality of the human life-world that God can become the ultimate concern which answers our existential questions and problems.

As described, Caputo is strongly influenced by Tillichian understanding of the Hegelian binary of reason and revelation. Tillich stresses the importance of both reason and revelation in his philosophy of religion as an ontological certainty and the risk of faith. This in-between position, is built upon Hegel's understanding of *Vorstellung*, in which religion occupies the narrational and pictorial middle space of truth. As the *Vorstellung* of God represents an image of the truth but never obtains the Absolute clarity of *Begriff*.⁵⁵ For Caputo, however, the *Vorstellung* represents or presents, a figure not of *Begriff* but of the event in the name (of) God.⁵⁶ Influenced by Derrida, Caputo is suspicious both of the Absolute Spirit of Hegel and the essentialist ontological move that Tillich makes. He reckons that Tillich's essentialist ontology is not so much a transcendental immanence, but more a transcendental theology in disguise. Against, Hegel's real that is based on a metaphysics of the Absolute and Tillich's real that is based on a metaphysics from below, Caputo proposed a theopoetics of the in-between of the event in the name (of) God. Therefore, Caputo disagrees with Tillich's distinction between the really real and the seemingly real, as for him there is no difference. Underneath the seemingly real

⁵⁴ Tillich himself realized that when a person doubts it does not necessarily mean that they are separated from God, as serious doubt requires faith in the truth. Consequently, Tillich became aware of the mystical paradox that those who deny God, affirm God, as it lets God be God. Therefore, knowledge of God is not established by following one 'right' epistemological approach to a singular Being of overwhelming power, as no human-being has the authority or knowledge to decide on a religious Absolute. Instead, both the conscious doubter and the believer are justified in their faith and are offered the salvation of grace. in: Paul Tillich, *The Protestant Era* (University of Chicago Press; Chicago, 1948) xxix.

⁵⁵ Caputo, *The Insistence of God*, 89.

⁵⁶ The Hegelian notion of *Vorstellung* is treated more extensively in chapter three of this study. in: Caputo, *The Insistence of God*, 95.

there is nothing, only nihilism. Thus, unlike Hegel or Tillich he lets atheism run all the way down to deconstruct all that is seemingly real and really real and leave us just in the middle voice of the call for a kingdom of God in reality.⁵⁷

2.2 JACQUES DERRIDA: THE REAL AND REALITY

Caputo's thinking as reflected in the Jewish or deconstructive principle, is the resistance towards the stability that belongs to the idolatrous 'real'. Such a resistance to the stability of the idolatrous real cannot be understood without reflecting on the work of the French philosopher Derrida. Derrida's position on the meaning of 'the real' can be best explained by the simultaneous relation to both presence and non-presence, as he does not deny the existence of 'reality' in the sense of it being fiction, but simultaneously the radical alterity of the real makes it impossible to connect it to a stable meaning in reality. To explain Derrida's position on the meaning of 'the real', this paragraph will expand onto the Derridean term *différance* and its philosophical background.

Différance is for Derrida a term which is no term, it is "writing under erasure, saying something without saying it."⁵⁸ This writing under erasure explains the deliberate misspelling of *différance* from difference, to point out that in the process of giving meaning, signs are not only differing from one another but also always deferring. When moving from sign to meaning, the process consequently shows "a continual displacement or dissemination of meaning, and hence the supplementary nature of signification".⁵⁹ This constant process of *différance*, dissemination, and supplementation is what is meant when Derrida speaks of deconstruction. Along these lines, *différance* must be understood as both a continuation and a critical response to the metaphysical

⁵⁷ The 'middle voice' in the work of Caputo wants to do justice to the structurally incoming alterity of God, such an understanding of God stems from the Derridean interpretation of time as transcending. (this study will come back to this interpretation in chapter 4) For now, it is sufficient to say that speaking in the middle voice when speaking about God and the kingdom of God, is a way to implement the foolish realisation that God and the kingdom do not exist, instead, the event that stirs in the name (of) God is structurally nothing more than a call in the middle voice. The middle position of this voice refers to the fact that the call in its structure in time keeps the gap open between human existence, in which the call is heard and conceptualized, and the insistence for something other in the kingdom to-come. In other words, "[...] a call is *getting itself called* in the traditions and languages we inherit [...] we start from where we are, where we first find ourselves, undertaking the life-long negotiation between the conditional and the unconditional, which we call the story of our lives. The unconditional is a homeless, uncanny sort of thing or nothing that does not inhabit the house of being. [...] It is not a Divine Providence transcribed into space and time but a more radical roll of the dice, a promise/threat, where the risk runs all the way down, where the folly is to follow the risk all the way down without turning back." in: Caputo, *The Folly of God*, 78-79.

⁵⁸ John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida* (Indiana University Press; Bloomington, 1997) 2.

⁵⁹ Graham Ward, 'Deconstructive Theology', in: Kevin J. Vanhoozer (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology* (Cambridge University Press; Cambridge, 2003) 80.

presuppositions that determine the relation between sign and meaning both in the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), and in the structural linguistic theory of Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913).

The study of Husserl's work and a critical reflection upon his phenomenology filled the early years of Derrida's academic career. In a series of books and essays he provided a careful analysis and commentary on Husserl's phenomenology, as Husserl's phenomenology forms "the paradigm, the highest and final case of this tradition".⁶⁰ Consequently, Derrida's critical analysis of Husserl should be understood as a contestation of the entire discourse of phenomenology, in which he reveals that although the discourse has an anti-metaphysical standpoint itself, it nevertheless has its own metaphysical preunderstandings. For Derrida, the problem in Husserl's work is that he neglects to recognize that the pre-supposed 'essential distinctions' are metaphysically loaded. In his endeavour of metaphysical critique Husserl "puts out of play all constituted knowledge" and instead he blindly turns to the starting point of the *Faktum* of language, to the *ideality* of "that which is".⁶¹ This *ideal* reflects Husserl's presupposition of consciousness or being as presence, namely "presence has always been and will always, forever, be the form in which, we can say apodictically, the infinite diversity of knowledge is produced."⁶² Strongly influenced by the Kantian *Idea*, Husserl consequently moves to distinguish matter from form, signifier from signified and in the case of language: indication from expression. In this last distinction, the latter forms the pure language as meaningful and the former is simply the impure, empirical signifier without content. Against this distinction, Derrida points out that the meaning of language can never be in the pure present, because the context and history always affect it. Thus, Derrida argues that Husserl's 'essential distinction' between 'impure' indication and 'pure' expression in language can only be made on the base of metaphysical presuppositions. The presence of language namely is always in relation to non-presence; language creates meaning by differentiation and the absence of non-present signifiers. Therefore, expression cannot be without indication.⁶³

This critique of Derrida on Husserl was partly build upon the language theory of Saussure, who had argued that meaning was not in the text itself but underneath or behind the text. To discover the meaning of language Saussure had created a method to reveal the relationship of the signifier-signified. He showed that the structure of language is a speech act, composed of a system of

⁶⁰ David B. Allison, 'Translator's Introduction' in: Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena, and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs* (Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1973) transl. of *La Voix et le Phénomène* [1967] xxxii.

⁶¹ Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, 4-6.

⁶² Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, 6.

⁶³ Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, xl.

associations and differentials.⁶⁴ While Derrida built on Saussure's idea of differentiation, he, nevertheless, was very critical towards the presupposition of Saussure that the language structure was stable. Derrida's critique of the work of Saussure circles around these effects of time, namely that Saussure is so focused on synchrony between the signifier-signified that he seems to lose sight of the diachronic effect of language. Differentiation required a time-frozen moment in the speech act. However, under the influence of time "the chain of signifiers moves on toward an open future, and so that which the signifiers communicate is always deferred".⁶⁵ For Derrida the speech act of Saussure, by requiring a time-frozen moment, makes an illegitimate transcendental move beyond language towards atemporality. Derrida calls this move towards atemporality, the metaphysics of the presence. In the metaphysics of the presence there is a dissociation from the dimension of time, ergo a presupposed metaphysical overflow beyond the situatedness of language which in that way creates direct access to a stable meaning. However, language and its meaning can never be purely related to the presence, because it is always haunted by that which is absent.

In conclusion, *différance* is a reminder that we cannot grasp the real by using stable binaries of difference without simultaneously engaging in metaphysics, as that ignores the relation between presence and absence. Therefore, Derrida argues that reality is never given as presence or directly accessible but always requires interpretation. This does not mean that Derrida "denies the reality of the real world of the possibility of reference."⁶⁶ Instead, Derrida shows that the interpretation of reality is contingent and inscribed by *différance*. As *différance* is "less than real, not quite real, never gets as far as being or entity or presence, which is why it is emblemized by insubstantial quasi-beings like ashes and ghosts which flutter between existence and nonexistence, or with humble *khôra*."⁶⁷ Therefore, Derrida places the interpretation of reality from the perspective of *différance* in contrast to "what our everyday understanding of the real presupposes".⁶⁸ The preference for the stability of the real refers to either "whenever we imagine we see it (phenomenology) or can claim 'there it is' (ontology) or think we can anticipate (hermeneutic fore-structures)".⁶⁹ Against these metaphysical presuppositions of the real, Derrida argues for the critical quasi-transcendental perspective of *différance*.⁷⁰ For Caputo, this understanding of the real will form the basis of his understanding of both

⁶⁴ Ward, 'Deconstructive Theology' 78-79.

⁶⁵ Ward, 'Deconstructive Theology', 79.

⁶⁶ Mark Dooley and Liam Kavanagh, *The Philosophy of Derrida* (Routledge; London, 2014) 56.

⁶⁷ Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida*, 2-3.

⁶⁸ Dooley and Kavanagh, *The Philosophy of Derrida*, 56.

⁶⁹ Caputo, *What Would Jesus Deconstruct?*, 79.

⁷⁰ The quasi-transcendental perspective of *différance* refers to the fact that *différance* in itself is structurally unknowable, and therefore, does not give the safety of traditional transcendence because it "does not quite exist". At the same time, *différance* does have a certain impossible or 'quasi-' transcendental nature given that it establishes "the conditions which make possible our beliefs and our practices, our traditions and our

God and the kingdom of God as neither an object of our subjective knowledge as Kant argued, nor a “transcendent ulteriority” of negative theology.⁷¹

2.3 JOHN D. CAPUTO: THE REAL AND REALITY

For Caputo, the hermeneutical key to understanding the real, the ‘other’, is the biblical story of Mary and Martha in the Gospel of Luke.⁷² In the story, the behaviour of Martha embodies the insistence of God that merges with human existence in this world. This reading of the story originates from the Medieval interpretation of mystic Meister Eckhart (1260-1328). For Eckhart, the story of Mary and Martha is an allegory of monastic life, in which Martha represents the *via activa* and Mary *via contemplativa*. In the biblical story Mary simply sat down at the feet of Jesus and listened, while Martha opened her home to Jesus and started material preparations. This leads to Eckhart’s conclusion that in contrast to Jesus’ literal announcement that “Mary has chosen what is better”, Martha secretly has Jesus’ preference because she has two gifts whereas Mary only has one.⁷³

Caputo takes this interpretation of the biblical story of Martha and Mary in *The Insistence of God* (2011) one step further, by interpreting the biblical story not merely as “an allegory of contemplation and action but as an allegory of the chiasmic intertwining of the insistence of God with existence.”⁷⁴ Martha is the paradigm that the insistence of God, the call of the ‘other’, needs human assistance. In as much as Martha turns to the material and quotidian needs of Jesus, she makes Gods insistence exist and real, while Mary by solemnly sitting and listening to Jesus stays unaffected by the needs of the world, a world-less theology.⁷⁵ For Caputo, Martha becomes the hermeneutical model that symbolizes the return of religion, while Mary forms the anti-model of a world-less faith that breathes Kant’s transcendental idealism. This paragraph will consequently set fort both the hermeneutical anti-model of Mary, namely of the postmodern philosophy of religion Caputo opposes, and the hermeneutical model of Martha, the postmodern philosophy of religion which he endorses.

As said, the hermeneutic anti-model of Mary, is heavily influenced by the ideas of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). In Kant’s *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (1781) his transcendental idealism, had

institutions, *and* no less to make them impossible, which means to see to it that they do not effect closure, to keep them open so that something new or different may happen.” in: Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida*, 10-12.

⁷¹ Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida*, 3.

⁷² Luke 10: 38-42, NIV.

⁷³ Luke 10:42, NIV.

⁷⁴ Caputo, *The Insistence of God*, 45.

⁷⁵ Caputo, *The Insistence of God*, 44.

delimited the epistemological access to (theological) knowledge. Nevertheless, this did not move God out of the picture for the pious Kant, instead God evolved from an object of knowledge to an object of faith. Caputo argues with the philosopher Quentin Meillassoux (1967), that a similar Kantian move can be detected in the philosophy of religion that is symbolized in the anti-model of Mary. Meillassoux argues that such a pseudo-Kantian philosophy of religion replaces the Copernican revolution with “a phony one,” which leaves “the door wide open to ‘fideism,’ to the ‘theological turn’ and the ‘return of religion’.”⁷⁶ It delimitates both atheism and science, to make room for God in a new version of the Augustinian mythical two-world cosmos.⁷⁷ Thus, “postmodern theory is being taken as a subdivision of confessional theology known as apologetics, the epistemological delimitation of atheistic metaphysics that leaves the field open for confessional theology, for religious belief in the God of classical metaphysical theology.”⁷⁸

Caputo agrees with the critique expressed by Meillassoux, that this fideistic version of philosophy of religion turns the “perhaps” of radical theology into a safe “perhaps” by disconnecting it from the world, while at the same time putting up a transcendental safety net against the nihilism that awaits us. Nevertheless, Caputo argues that the point of Meillassoux and likeminded thinkers is overrun by ‘warrior realists’, who polarize the discussion into a choice between realism and relativism, fact or fiction, science or fideism, social construction and reality.⁷⁹ Bruno Latour (1947) in his analysis of these ‘warrior realists’ argues that this choice is caught in “an impossible ‘double bind’, because the mediations, the means, are both necessary and declared impossible.”⁸⁰ This often results in the ‘warrior realists’ denying any access to reality, in order to preserve the objective reality of the really real, namely uninterpreted facts.⁸¹ However, without the interpretation of reality, the result is not the pure reality of the real but a void of utter meaninglessness. To avoid this void, we need constructs to get access to the reality of meaning. That does however mean that these constructs never give ‘pure’ access to the really real, as they are always contaminated by time and context and therefore always deconstructible. Caputo is aware of “the contingency and revisability of our understanding of the real,” therefore proposes to remodel the *logos* of theology into a theopoetics of the ‘perhaps’.

But before turning to this Caputo’s theopoetics, there is one important point left to explore. As Caputo argues to differ from Mary’s model of philosophy of religion that takes up the pseudo-Kantian move, he does not just contain or put away the critique of the ‘warrior realists’. Instead, he

⁷⁶ Caputo, *The Insistence of God*, 22.

⁷⁷ Caputo, *The Insistence of God*, 97-98.

⁷⁸ Caputo, *The Insistence of God*, 97.

⁷⁹ ‘Warrior realists’ is a term set forth by Bruno Latour (1947) which refers to the “culture wars” in the 20th century between humanists and natural scientists. in: Caputo, *The Insistence of God*, 200.

⁸⁰ Caputo, *The Insistence of God*, 205.

⁸¹ Caputo, *The Insistence of God*, 206.

argues that the ‘warrior realists’ do have a point that continental philosophy has been extremely occupied with the sameness of its own discourse namely the Humanities, while neglecting the wider cosmic context and the context of science.⁸² The expressed materialist-realist critique in the context of science does require a circumfession of philosophy of religion. If the striving is for the metaphysics of the really real that is not affected by our existence and our constructs, then Derrida proposes we are dealing with the study of objectivity namely “of things as if we were dead (or never born).”⁸³ In that case, “physics is all the metaphysics we are ever going to get” – meaning that theoretical physics is the only discourse that has a vocabulary at its disposal, to look at things as if we were not there.⁸⁴ So while the really real is limited to physics, for which we seem to be nothing more, perhaps, then the luckily result of a role by the cosmic dice, nevertheless we are alive, we are here. Therefore, we need another more poetic vocabulary to talk about “the real inter-relations of the real, of the chiasmic intertwining of human reality with reality at large [...] the human and non-human”, this makes that Caputo calls for “a poetics of the chiasm [...] a theo-poetics that finally makes contact with a majestic cosmopoetics.”⁸⁵

Let us return to Martha, as the hermeneutic model for this theo-poetics of chiasmic intertwining. Martha is not only attested in the Gospel of Luke but also in the Gospel of John, in the story about Lazarus.⁸⁶ In this biblical story Martha’s brother Lazarus is very ill and he is about to die, Jesus is aware of this situation but nevertheless only shows up when Lazarus has already died. As Jesus approaches Bethany, Martha goes out to meet Jesus and says: “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”⁸⁷ In the classical tradition this has been interpreted as a complaint towards Jesus, after which Jesus reassures Martha that in the end her brother will rise again. Martha answers by saying: “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”⁸⁸ In contrast to this classical interpretation, Caputo proposes a radical reinterpretation of the passage. In his interpretation Martha is not so much complaining to Jesus, but instead expressing her desire for “the possibility of the impossible here and now, in this world, not in another one.”⁸⁹ In that case, this is not a passage dealing with the quest for life after death, but the quest for life before death even if Martha knows that death cannot be avoided. Martha according to Caputo is asking for material and earthly time in this world reality, as she knows “the life of grace is the grace of life.”⁹⁰

⁸² Caputo, *The Insistence of God*, 185-186.

⁸³ Caputo, *The Insistence of God*, 190.

⁸⁴ Caputo, *The Insistence of God*, 191.

⁸⁵ Caputo, *The Insistence of God*, 212.

⁸⁶ John 11:1-44, NIV.

⁸⁷ John 11: 21, NIV.

⁸⁸ John 11: 24, NIV.

⁸⁹ Caputo, *The Insistence of God*, 231.

⁹⁰ Caputo, *The Insistence of God*, 232.

In conclusion, theopoetics à la Martha, follows Martha's example in taking both existence and insistence serious. The "[...] whole idea is to come to grips with the "real world," the one we have to deal with at this very moment, even as we cultivate a heart for a real beyond the real, for an ultra- or hyper-real."⁹¹ Thus, the insistence of God is a constant incoming call, for the really real or hyper-real, without separating this insistence from our existence. The insistence for the hyper-real embraces reality and makes humans responsible to bring this call into existence. So, the really real, the complete otherness of God, is always called for in the event. Therefore, Caputo's position on the real can be described as the navigation of narrow waters, avoiding all the classical, modern, and postmodern binaries, towards the poetic voice of the 'perhaps'. While Caputo realizes that the really real, logically speaking can only be described with the metaphysics of physics. Nevertheless, this metaphysics of the really real describes a situation as if we are death, and does not deal with our current situation in which we are alive. In the context of our existence, Caputo argues, we need a language to describe and give meaning to the intertwining our existence with the real: theopoetics.

Thus, the theopoetics of 'perhaps' leads Caputo to a "cosmo-theopoetic realism and materialism that turns on what I call the 'nihilism of grace'."⁹² Building onto both Tillich's analysis that the really real is only accessible by moving beyond the binary of reason and revelation, while simultaneously acknowledging that Derrida's *différance* makes all understanding of the really real contingent and revisable. Yet, because Caputo follows in his weak theology Martha's hermeneutic of the call, he escapes the earlier debates of theological realism and anti-realism as it moves into a "hyper-realism of the event."⁹³ Meaning that the event of God insists, as it calls upon us without any force for existence, it is "neither real nor unreal, but not yet real."⁹⁴ In the insistence of the event the kingdom of God is called for, voicing a hoping against hope. The event in the name (of) God calls upon us to bring the kingdom of God into existence in the reality of this world, but because the really real is to be found in an event in the name (of) God, it will never be reached and will always be to-come. The kingdom of God is not yet real.

⁹¹ Caputo, *The Insistence of God*, 183.

⁹² Caputo, *The Insistence of God*, 22.

⁹³ Caputo, *The Weakness of God*, 102.

⁹⁴ Caputo, *The Weakness of God*, 123.

CHAPTER 3 – THIS IS MY IMPROPER BODY: A POSTMODERN KINGDOM OF THE CROSS

“James Clerk Maxwell’s theory of electromagnetism states, that light as electromagnetic radiation has a property of momentum and thus exerts pressure on any surface that is exposed to it. Thank you, Wikipedia. Allow me to develop a theory, which I like to call: The Jesus Effect. It states that the restoration of vision is a direct result of the revelation of Christ, in a space previously unaware of his abiding presence. Allow me to explain [...] I cannot comprehend how Word was made flesh, but I know that the moment Christ was born, suddenly the eyes of shepherds opened, they beheld angels, and wise men could pick up a single star out of the sky, like a compass. Vision restored, Immanuel, God with us, is The Jesus Effect, because darkness is not nearly the absence of light but also of sight, the electromagnetic says. On the spectrum of light there are wavelengths too long and too short for us to detect. So sometimes, what we consider darkness, is in reality brightness, but in frequencies that the human eye cannot perceive, so the command of let there be light, is one aimed at darkness, telling it to move, so God can reveal his preexistence, even within the void, no wonder the psalmist cries: even in darkness I cannot hide from you [...]”⁹⁵

Siphokazi Jonas, *The Jesus Effect*

The world we live in seems to be obsessed with bodies: healthy bodies, gendered bodies, perfectly proportioned bodies, non-aging bodies, racially defined bodies, sexual bodies, and exceptional bodies. The gospels in the New Testament also give witness to bodily obsession, but an obsession of a different kind, namely the body of Jesus Christ. The body of the Jesus described in the New Testament, however exceptional it may be for Christians all around the world, is a body that is first of all characterised by its mundane and everyday material needs. In the previous chapter we saw that the intertwining of the material side of existence with the divinely ‘other’ is pivotal for Caputo’s understanding of the deconstructed kingdom of God; and a similar intertwining can be witnessed in the paradigmatic body of Jesus Christ. Therefore, in this third chapter of the study we will explore the role of the body in relation to the deconstructed understanding of the kingdom of God.

The fact that the body plays a significant role in the work of Caputo is already unmistakably attestable in Caputo’s deconstructive understanding of ethics in *Against Ethics* (1993). This chapter will further trace the developments in Caputo’s understanding of the body, as his understanding advanced from a philosophical and ethical perspective towards an explicit theological understanding of the body in his more recent books. We will investigate how his earlier understanding of the body relates to the theological, to his understanding of flesh, to Jesus Christ, and to the kingdom of God. To finally round off, we will proceed with two case studies of communities that according to Caputo

⁹⁵ The fragment is a transcription of the poem *The Jesus Effect*, that is normally performed as spoken word by the South African poet Siphokazi Jonas. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SzeeqI4lGG8> (accessed 14th of June 2017).

reveal in their embodied practice the deconstructed kingdom of God. Hence, the research question of this chapter is: How does Caputo interpret the body and in what way is his interpretation of the body connected to the deconstructed kingdom of God?

3.1 IMPROPER BODIES

As was said, the fact that the body plays a role in the oeuvre of Caputo was already visible in his philosophical work *Against Ethics*. As the title of the book suggests, Caputo takes in this book a provocative stand against the philosophical discourse of ethics. In Caputo's Heidegger-inspired endeavour to overcome metaphysics, he argues against the metaphysical "originary ground" or "First Beginning" that can be detected in ethics.⁹⁶ Rather than offering his readers an ethical safety net in retrieving "something More Primordial", Caputo turns to the deconstruction of ethics: "From a deconstructive point of view, declining the good name of ethics is an operation aimed at appreciating that tenuous and delicate situation of judgement which is addressed by the name 'undecidability'."⁹⁷ Deconstruction reveals that ethics was never a case of making easy decisions based on the safety of an originary framework; instead the undecidability that surrounds judgements has always made ethical judgements difficult. Nevertheless, the ambiguity surrounding ethical judgement in deconstruction does not offer an excuse to not act, since the obligation that occurs between human beings is, according to Caputo, something that just happens.

When Caputo speaks of obligation he does not refer to anything profound coming from on-high or from our deepest inside, like in ethics; instead, he has in mind "a very earthbound signal, a superficial-horizontal communication between one human being and another, a certain line of force that runs along the surface upon which you and I stand: the obligation I have to you (and you to me, but this is different) and the both of 'us' to 'others'."⁹⁸ It is the feeling that comes over a human being when we see someone suffer or in need of help; it is then that we experience the powerless power of obligation. In conclusion, Caputo in *Against Ethics* argues both against originary philosophical ethics with its violent metaphysical framework and the merciless nihilism put forward by Friedrich Nietzsche. Instead, he proposed the 'an-ethics of obligation', or the poetics of obligation, that exposes us to the powerless and risky power of the event of obligation, when someone or some-body, perhaps, makes an appeal to us after which obligation just can happen. In Caputo's 'an-ethics', he makes the argument

⁹⁶ John D. Caputo, *Against Ethics: Contributions to a Poetics of Obligation with Constant Reference to Deconstruction* (Indiana University Press; Bloomington, IN, 1993) 2.

⁹⁷ Caputo, *Against Ethics*, 3.

⁹⁸ Caputo, *Against Ethics*, 5.

that this disruptive happening is something 'other' and can seize us without knowing the origin of this obligation.⁹⁹

Caputo's an-ethics is in part based on the careful distinction between *proper* and *improper bodies*, or *the body* and *the flesh*. Caputo argues that the history of philosophy from Plato to phenomenology has created a perspective on the body that is both too abstract and too idealistic. The body for these (Greek) philosophers is always "an active, athletic, healthy, erect, White male body, sexually able, an unambiguously gendered, well-born, well-bred, and well-buried, a *corpus sanum* cut to fit a *mens sana* in the felicity of being-in-the-world and mundane intentional life."¹⁰⁰ Caputo, thereupon, contrasts this aesthetic-phenomenological view of the body as proper, athletic and healthy, with the improper jewgreek body.¹⁰¹ In ancient times, the controversy of such an improper jewgreek body was exactly their distasteful and scandalous nature of visible mess and brokenness. The improper body displayed the visible limits of the body and additionally its opaque nature constantly attracted attention to itself. In the improper jewgreek body the limitations of all bodies are displayed, and therefore, it deconstructs the athletic and healthy proper bodies of philosophy. Caputo argues, that together the disfigured, painful, and damaged jewgreek improper bodies outline a new perspective, which he names the antiphilosophical category of the flesh.¹⁰²

Besides the differentiation between the proper and improper body in Ancient philosophy, the antiphilosophical category of the flesh that Caputo proposes should also be understood in differentiation from phenomenological philosophy. In *Against Ethics*, Caputo analyses the phenomenological reduction of the improper body in the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961), in which the improper body is reduced to "an object of phenomenological gaze".¹⁰³ This reduction requires "a distantiating eye" and "a slightly voyeuristic, phenomenological 'we'", in a way that does not disturb "the clear lines of the classical ontophenomenology of the body".¹⁰⁴ Exactly because the healthy agent stays unaffected by the phenomenological reduction of the body of the

⁹⁹ Caputo, *Against Ethics*, 8.

¹⁰⁰ Caputo, *Against Ethics*, 194.

¹⁰¹ The term 'jewgreek' refers to "everything miscegenated and impure and hence subject to expulsion, decontamination, extermination. I also use it to say that whatever I say here is always already Greek, philosophical, metaphysical, that one cannot simply walk away from our inherited Greek conceptuality, nor would one want to, as both Derrida and Levinas insist. The expression, of course, is taken from James Joyce's *Ulysses* and it received a now classic gloss in Jacques Derrida's 'Violence and Metaphysics,' *Writing and Difference*." in: footnote 61, Caputo, *Against Ethics*, 258.

¹⁰² Caputo's distinction between body and flesh is not entirely new, it has a precedent in the phenomenological distinction of 'Corporeal body' and the 'body' made by Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). Husserl made this distinction to disclose the difference between the physically perceived Corporeal body, *Körper*, and the touched living body, *Leib*. in the English translation: Edmund Husserl, *Ideas II* (Kluwer; Dordrecht, academic transl. 1989) 161-165.

¹⁰³ Caputo, *Against Ethics*, 195.

¹⁰⁴ Caputo, *Against Ethics*, 195-196.

'other' into the misery and brokenness of flesh, Caputo draws the conclusion that such a phenomenological reduction is problematic. Alternatively, Caputo proposes an antiphenomenological reduction of the improper body, to express that the reduction into the *tout autre* of the body of flesh causes a disturbance from which it is impossible to safeguard yourself. It disrupts the presuppositions of the healthy agent, it rips apart the pre-understanding that belongs to the onto-phenomenology of the body, and leaves the healthy agent with the unsettling obligation that sticks to flesh. In that sense, flesh is the "site of the breakdown and deconstruction of the world" beyond the proper transitive intentionality of the body.¹⁰⁵ In the breakdown of the body's intentionality of being-in-the-world, it moves into the intransitive world-less situation of solitude and suffering in the flesh.¹⁰⁶ Thus, Caputo's approach to the improper body is not a clean-cut phenomenological reduction; instead, the antiphenomenological contraction of the body affects both the person involved, by throwing the person into solitude, and everyone witnessing the contractions into flesh, with the claim that the obligation of flesh lays upon them. The vulnerability and disturbing weakness of the flesh models the anarchy that disrupts the safe philosophical *arche* of the body.

The vocabulary distinction of transitive and intransitive intentionality of the body indicates that Caputo connects the philosophical category of the body and the antiphilosophical category of the flesh with the difference between 'I' and the 'other'.¹⁰⁷ The autonomous subject, I, is "structurally a bundle of active forces, an agile aggressive agent", while, in contrast, the 'other' is "always vulnerable, always structurally liable to be reduced to flesh."¹⁰⁸ It exposes that between the active agent I and the vulnerable flesh of the 'other' there is an unequal power relation, which can be easily interpreted as the normalizing power of the body that dominates the powerless and vulnerable flesh of the 'other'.¹⁰⁹ However, for Caputo this unequal power relation is not one-dimensional, since he considers not only the normalizing power of the body, but also the resisting power of the powerless flesh. The vulnerable and weak flesh of the 'other' is also the site, where the just-discussed, irreducible call for obligation rises. This call disrupts and tears apart the stable *arche* of the I, and thus, creates space for difference. The call of the flesh, causes the *arche* of the body to break down into the bare anarchy of the flesh.

¹⁰⁵ Caputo, *Against Ethics*, 203-205.

¹⁰⁶ Caputo, *Against Ethics*, 206.

¹⁰⁷ 'The other' as both a biblical and deconstructive notion refers to "victims", the "ta me onta", and to "the outsiders" in the eyes of the world. Thus, the "qualitatively other" is no abstraction from the suffering and pain of the other, instead, it refers according to Caputo, to the singularity of the other and the subsequent call that arises from the position of suffering. in: Caputo, *The Weakness of God*, 135-139.

¹⁰⁸ Caputo, *Against Ethics*, 213.

¹⁰⁹ The working of power relations is explored extensively in the different philosophical works of the French philosopher Michel Foucault (1926-1984), in: Caputo, *Against Ethics*, 214.

The anarchy of the singularity of the flesh coincides with the anti-metaphysical realization that “we have no star to guide us, no messages from on high. Life is a dis-aster; the earth is adrift. Obligation is on its own and will have to fend for itself.”¹¹⁰ In the absence of an *arche*, all the ethics that remains for Caputo is based on the obligation emerging from the powerless flesh of the marginalized ‘other’, which still is more than the anonymous and bare nihilism Nietzsche was expecting. When obligation happens, it can cause “transubstantiation”, meaning that the flesh of the ‘other’ with a proper name, touches and transforms the body of the I and turns it into flesh.¹¹¹ This disruptive character of obligation that sticks to flesh —the fact that obligation can unexpectedly seize any of us— displays the distinction between Caputo’s ‘an-ethics of obligation’ and classical ethics. In other words, classical ethics, with its violent *arche* of metaphysics, makes things safe and foreseeable, while the poetics of obligation models an anarchy that values the disruptive singularity of the breakdown into flesh by the *ta me onta*.¹¹² Thus, the an-ethics of Caputo takes on a delicate in-between position in the poetics of obligation, between classical ethics and the nihilism of Nietzsche.¹¹³

In this appendix to the first paragraph, an exploration will follow of the relation between the category of flesh in *Against Ethics* and the theological. Although Caputo in *Against Ethics* does not place the category of the flesh in a Christological framework, the resemblances with the disrupting nature of Jesus’ crucified body of Christ are at least remarkable.¹¹⁴ Therefore, I would pose the hypothesis that the distinction between the proper and improper body or the category of body and flesh in *Against Ethics*, are not solemnly in conversation with Greek philosophy and phenomenology but also with Christology. This means that Caputo’s interpretation of the flesh, whether consciously or not, reflects the Christian paradigm of vulnerable flesh in Jesus Christ. Although, at this point in his career Caputo explicitly does not consider himself a theologian,¹¹⁵ he nevertheless argued that “there are always lingering or unavowed theological presuppositions in what we say or do”.¹¹⁶ Therefore, we

¹¹⁰ Caputo, *Against Ethics*, 24.

¹¹¹ Caputo, *Against Ethics*, 217.

¹¹² In 1 Corinthians 1:28 Paul speaks of the choice for what is foolish in the world, the preference for the “low and despised” of the world, stands in contrast to the earthly wisdom of the wise. Thus, when Caputo speaks of the ‘*ta me onto*’, which can be translated as the things that are not. He refers to the outsiders of this world, the least among us, the nothings, and nobodies. The preference of God for the nothings and nobodies of this world in Paul’s letter to the Corinthians is the basis for Caputo’s theo-poetic understanding of theology. in: Caputo, *The Weakness of God*, 42-48.

¹¹³ Caputo, *Against Ethics*, 232.

¹¹⁴ *Against Ethics* was published in 1993, at this stage the academic work of Caputo was primarily engaged with the field of continental philosophical that covers, amongst others, the works of Aquinas, Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Derrida. However, Caputo argued himself in *Hoping against Hope* (2015) that his philosophical and theological work cannot be kept “pure”; instead he embraces “cross-pollination” between the two discourses. Therefore, the anti-philosophical category of the flesh cannot be disconnected from the crucified and the resurrected body of Christ that is central to Christian theology. in: Caputo, *Hoping Against Hope*, 105.

¹¹⁵ Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida*, 288-289.

¹¹⁶ John D. Caputo and Catherine Keller, ‘Theopoetic/Theopolitic’, *CrossCurrents* (Vol. 56, no. 4, 2007) 105.

cannot exclude the influence of the (Roman Catholic) Christian tradition in which the younger Caputo was brought up. This hypothesis is further confirmed in the choice of words in *Against Ethics*, as for example his usage of ‘transubstantiation’ and the reference to the Pauline terminology of ‘*ta me onta*’. The final argument to support the hypothesis that the category of flesh is also in conversation with Christology is derived from the small signs scattered in *Against Ethics* that give a preview of the theological interpretation of the category of flesh in his later work. For example, Caputo argues that the function of the obligation arising from the flesh is to restore joy in everyday life, or in more theological language: “to bring back exultation”.¹¹⁷ He also connects this anarchy of the poetics of obligation, very briefly, but nevertheless so, with the understanding of the kingdom of God. In the poetics of obligation, the kingdom of God undergoes a transformation from a material Being in the future, a reward in the economy of works and salvation, into a kingdom that is here and now in the small joys of daily life.¹¹⁸ Thus, Caputo’s poetics of obligation sets the scene for the theo-poetics of the event and the central role of the flesh in the deconstructed kingdom of God.

3.2 THE THEOPOETICS OF FLESH

In this second paragraph of this chapter we will seek to explore, both the development of the category of flesh in the work of Caputo —from an an-ethical category to a theo-poetic category— and the consequences of an theo-poetical interpretation of flesh with regard to the kingdom of God, given that for Caputo the kingdom is a “kingdom of the crucified.”¹¹⁹

Caputo’s theo-poetical understanding of the category of flesh is nurtured by two lines of thought: Derrida’s deconstruction and the New Testament’s bodily theology. Let us first turn to the deconstructive thought of Derrida in which the working of *différance* is not only restricted to the meaning of language, but also marks, amongst other things, the body. “*Différance* is the nameless name of the open-ended, uncontainable generalizable play of traces.”¹²⁰ Deconstructing the stable play of differences that normally surrounds the sign of the autonomous body, opening its meaning up to the disruptive and unforeseeable singularity that arrives in Caputo’s an-ethical category of bodies of flesh. The evolvement of this category to a more theo-poetical understanding is instigated by the bodily theology of the New Testament. In the New Testament bodies are described in all their

¹¹⁷ Caputo, *Against Ethics*, 236-237.

¹¹⁸ Caputo, *Against Ethics*, 234.

¹¹⁹ Caputo, *The Weakness of God*, 42.

¹²⁰ Jacques Derrida, John D. Caputo (ed.), *Deconstruction in a nutshell: a conversation with Jacques Derrida* (Fordham University Press; New York, 1997) 104-105.

different shapes and disfigured forms: just-born, resurrected, healed, sick, tortured, crucified, dead bodies.¹²¹ However, the heart of the New Testament circles around the body of Jesus, being both concerned about Jesus' own incarnated body, as well as his dealings with other bodies of flesh.

Jesus' own body gives witness to the antiphenomenological category of flesh in his bodily transformation, which symbolizes the disruptiveness of the godly *metanoetic* event that leaves no one unaffected.¹²² In the crucifixion Jesus gives witness of the vulnerability of the flesh, while in the resurrection of the crucified flesh of Jesus he reveals that for God the impossible is possible. Caputo argues: "If flesh is defined by its vulnerability, it is also for the same reason mendable, healable, transformable; and Jesus is a charismatic place of divine transformation."¹²³ Jesus' life, suffering, death, and resurrection symbolizes the transformative *metanoetic* event that stirs in the name (of) God, it reveals that Jesus is "the *ikon* of the nothings and nobodies of this world, who bear the mark of God."¹²⁴ Illuminating that to care for the nothings and nobodies in this world is to care for Jesus, and moreover, that to follow Jesus and be affected by his call for the kingdom to-come means to attend to the needs of deconstructed bodies of flesh, because he "came teaching and healing, offering a *therapeutic* for the body and a *didactic* for the spirit, mending hearts and healing lepers, curing bodies and preaching the forgiveness of sin, which together constituted the coming of the 'Kingdom of God'."¹²⁵ Thus, the flesh of Jesus is both the source and the location of *metanoetic* transformations, and consequently, the proclamation of the kingdom of God is connected to the transformation of the bodies of flesh.¹²⁶

In Caputo's theopoetics of vulnerable bodies of flesh, he makes an important distinction between the phenomenological reality of flesh and the Derridean *tout autre* as the event that stirs

¹²¹ John D. Caputo, 'Bodies Still Unrisen, Events Still Unsaid', *Angelaki* (Vol.12, no. 1, 2007) 73.

¹²² '*Metanoetic*' refers to the biblical term '*metanoia*', which is used in several gospels to refer to the transformative consequences of Jesus Christ. Caputo understands the term '*metanoia*' as follows: "*Metanoia* thus tells us to change our heart [...] to be vulnerable to the vulnerability of the other, to become weak of their weakness, to be wounded by their wounds, to be affected by their affliction, all of which are rigorous axioms in the poetics of the impossible." in: Caputo, *The Weakness of God*, 143.

¹²³ Caputo, *The Weakness of God*, 132.

¹²⁴ The conclusion that Jesus fulfils this iconic position of solidarity can be drawn from Matthew 25:31-46, more specifically the verses 31-36 and 45-46: "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' [...] He will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life." in: Caputo, *The Folly of God*, 122.

¹²⁵ Caputo, 'Bodies Still Unrisen', 74.

¹²⁶ Caputo, *The Weakness of God*, 132.

within the flesh. In classical theology, the phenomenological reality of flesh in the New Testament is understood as upholding what Derrida called “the Hegelian-Christian model of incarnation.”¹²⁷ This means that the phenomenological Being of Jesus, or more generally a finite form of flesh, becomes the determinable and foreseeable incarnation of that wholly ‘other’ event named God. This appropriation of the event of God in classic theology —of that which is uncontainable— results in idolatry. Caputo’s objection to this idolatry, leads him towards Derrida and his concern with the preservation of the openness to the unrepeatable singularity of the *tout autre*, to keep the event of God holy. Because in the history of classical theology, the *tout autre* is always under the threat of becoming determinable of incarnating into a finite stable form, and in that process, substituting its disruptive nature for being the spokesperson of the powerful on this earth. In other words, in incarnation theology the event in the name (of) God runs the risk of being equalized with an autonomous body, instead of preserving *tout autre* or the disruptive character of the flesh (of Jesus).¹²⁸ Thus, in Caputo’s usage of the Derridean *différance* as the basis for his theopoetics, he prevents that the New Testament bodies of flesh become merely phenomenological bodies, instead by leaving a gap between the phenomenon and the event that stirs in the name (of) God, there becomes space for the radical disruptive character of (Jesus’) flesh.

3.2.1 A NECESSARY DETOUR: GEORGE WILHELM FRIEDRICH HEGEL (1770-1831)

The aim of Caputo, thus, is to maintain the distinction between the disruptive character of the event as *tout autre* and the phenomenon of incarnation, in which the phenomenon can refer to the figure of either the name (of) God or the incarnated flesh. To successfully maintain this gap Caputo’s theopoetics utilizes the philosophy and theology of Hegel as a fundament. His utilization of Hegel’s work, however, is critical, given that Caputo decapitates Hegel of his most capital thought with the sword of Derridean deconstruction. Nevertheless, Hegel’s thought is of fundamental importance for the theopoetics proposed by Caputo, and therefore, a small detour will be made into the thinking of Hegel, specifically, his understanding of theological truth.

At the turn of the 19th century, Hegel launched his deviating approach to the theological truth. Not only did he criticize the supernaturalism in theology and Christian philosophy that turned Christian truth into a revealed truth from above, he was equally critical of the lack of philosophical reasoning in the theologies of feeling based on the work of Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834). Hegel criticized

¹²⁷ Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida*, 244.

¹²⁸ Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida*, 244-246.

the logical dualisms of classical theology and Christian philosophy that underlaid such positions, expressing an objection to the dualisms: God vs. the world and reason vs. revelation.¹²⁹ The first dualism refers to the two-world distinction between God and the world in classical theology, most notably demonstrated in *The City of God* of St. Augustine.¹³⁰ In this type of dualistic theology — inherited from Greek philosophy— there is a distinction between the sinful earth, being the world in space and time that we perceive, and the perfect eternal world of God above. Hegel’s problem with such a theological dualism lies in the positioning of God in the eternal world above. Consequently, all our knowledge and our speaking about God which was supposedly based on the revealed theological truth can be nothing more than a human abstraction, given our own sinful earthly nature. For Hegel, the divine reality cannot be reduced to a two-world dualism of classical theology; instead, biblical incarnation describes the entanglement of God in the flesh, making Jesus Christ the paradigm of the Eternal Logos or the absolute truth coming down into space and time.

While incarnation theology solves the way in which divine reality works, nevertheless it immediately gives rise to a second problem concerning the absolute theological truth. Namely, the incarnation in classical theology has been interpreted as an untouchable revelation, being knowledge of the supernatural, therefore, the category was off-limits for philosophy that worked strictly within the limits of reason.¹³¹ Hegel, however, treated religion less revelatory than classical theology, by interpreting religion as a *Vorstellung*: “a pictorial representation (*Vorstellung*) of the absolute truth”.¹³² Hegel argued, that human beings only have a figurative understanding of the absolute truth, since we only have access to “the imaginative setting of the work of God that is found in the Scriptures.”¹³³ Thus, Hegel argues that the philosopher can get access to revelation, since the dualism reason and revelation is not the dualism of natural and supernatural knowledge, but instead, they are “different stages or modalities of the same thing”.¹³⁴ The Christian truth is accessible to us but only in the form of a pictorial representation; therefore, it will always require philosophical reason to interpret revelation.¹³⁵

In the final part of the detour, we arrived at Caputo’s objection to Hegel, which has resulted in Caputo’s decapitation of the most capital thought of Hegel, the Absolute Spirit. While, Caputo is very

¹²⁹ John D. Caputo, ‘Theopoetics as Heretical Hegelianism’, *CrossCurrents* (Vol. 64, no. 4, 2014) 509.

¹³⁰ Caputo, ‘Theopoetics as Heretical Hegelianism’, 509-514.

¹³¹ Caputo, ‘Theopoetics as Heretical Hegelianism’, 514-518.

¹³² Caputo, *The Folly of God*, 98.

¹³³ Caputo, ‘Theopoetics as Heretical Hegelianism’, 514.

¹³⁴ Displayed in the famous distinction made by Hegel between *Verstand* (a mechanic way of understanding in which things are isolated and reduced to a limited phenomenon) and *Vernunft* (reason that strives to go beyond the limits of understanding to the synthesis of Absolute Knowledge), in: Caputo, *The Folly of God*, 98.

¹³⁵ Caputo, ‘Theopoetics as Heretical Hegelianism’, 515.

appreciative of the material side of the theology of Hegel, namely the fact that Hegel brings down the changeless eternity of God into space and time. Nonetheless, his objection to Hegel is that in the work of Hegel God never really runs the radical risks that come with the incarnation into the world, especially with regard to the death of God. Catherine Malabou (1959) makes this point in her book *The Future of Hegel* (2005) when she argues that for Hegel, Christ is nothing more than “a temporal intuition of the Absolute.”¹³⁶ The death of Jesus Christ is never a real risk, because Hegel already knows that Good Friday is not the end. God for him is the underlying source of the world, being a part of the logic of the unfolding of God’s Absolute Spirit.¹³⁷

It is this safeguarding of the theological truth in the teleological interpretation of the Absolute Spirit that Caputo objects to, based on the Derridean perspective of *différance*. Therefore, he decapitates Hegel’s thought of the unfolding of the Absolute Spirit in history; instead, his radical hermeneutics proposes to bring the Hegelian interpretation of New Testament’s incarnation theology together with philosophical deconstruction. This means that, Caputo’s radical hermeneutics can be understood as the continued deconstruction of a demolishing project already started by Hegel, deconstructing not only the logical dualisms that underlie classical theology but also Hegel’s backup of the Absolute Spirit unfolding in history. This radical interpretation brings Caputo to the conclusion that the earthly incarnation of the absolute Christian truth is the risky business of *Vorstellungen*. This radical hermeneutical approach enables an understanding of the New Testament bodies and the incarnated body of Jesus as *Vorstellungen* all the way down. The antiphenomenological bodies of flesh in the New Testament are *Vorstellungen* of the otherness of the event of God that dwells within them, with all the weakness and hermeneutical open-endedness that belong to such a truth. This makes the event of God in its incarnation both a promise and threat to the world, without something like the Hegelian unfolding of the Absolute Spirit to safeguard it.

3.3 THE KINGDOM OF FLESH

Hegel has offered Caputo in the figurative understanding of the absolute theological truth the basis for his radical hermeneutics of theology. These radical hermeneutics require a new interpretation of the body of Jesus, of the theology of the cross, and finally of the kingdom of God. Jesus’ paradigmatic body cannot be reduced to a phenomenological body; instead, Jesus’ body is a disruptive body of flesh, and therefore, the paradigmatic location and the source of the transformative

¹³⁶ A quote of Malabou in the work of Caputo, in: Caputo, *The Insistence of God*, 122-123.

¹³⁷ Caputo, ‘Theopoetics as Heretical Hegelianism’, 525-527.

event of God from death to life. For Caputo, this movement from death to life starts at the cross when Christ is dead. All the lines of Christianity intersect in Jesus' body hanging on the cross, because on the cross "the force of the event [...] calls to us and overtakes us in the name of God".¹³⁸ The centrality of the cross results in Caputo's reshaping St. Paul's theology of the cross in the letters to the Corinthians.¹³⁹ On the cross, the illusion of a healthy and autonomous body of Jesus is crucified, Jesus contracts into the lonely and "helpless body whose flesh is nailed to the cross".¹⁴⁰ The *logos* of the cross in 1 Corinthians 1:18-25 is not a calculated moment of weakness in the economy of God's power to teach mankind a lesson; rather, the crucifixion of Jesus reveals that the event of God is not powerful but weak.¹⁴¹ The *logos* of the cross is not at all logical to the world, but instead seems an absolute foolishness, in the sense that it lets the powerless flesh of Jesus suffer so helplessly on the cross. Caputo however, in line with the Lutheran tradition of the theology of the cross, values the suffering of the cross as being more (de)constructive. In his interpretation of the *logos* of the cross, crucifixion means to crucify the powerful image of God and its sovereign being in the body of Jesus.¹⁴² In the crucified flesh of Jesus hanging on the cross "the perverse core of Christianity" becomes clear, that is, the powerless event of God that in its incarnation engages fully in the risks of the world.¹⁴³

The perverse core of Christianity breaks open any theology that proclaims a God of strength and logic, analogous to the discussed *arche*-category of the autonomous body. Conversely, all that we are left with is the foolish but paradigmatic powerlessness of Jesus hanging broken on the cross, analogous to the disruptive category of the flesh. In the cross, a strong God is crossed out, and revealed to us as a powerless God, who lies down, eats, and dies with the nothings and nobodies of

¹³⁸ Caputo, *The Weakness of God*, 42.

¹³⁹ However, Caputo's interpretation of St. Paul's *logos* of the cross decapitates Paul's theology from its most capital thought in its refutation that "the weakness of God belongs to the larger economy of the power and wisdom". Such power thinking is problematic for Caputo, since it places the *logos* of the cross in a larger economy of two-world thinking. In such two-world thinking, as for Paul, the *logos* of the cross is only temporary, it points ahead to the eschatological perspective of the other-worldly kingdom of God. in: Caputo, *The Weakness of God*, 17, 48-54.

¹⁴⁰ Caputo, *The Weakness of God*, 54.

¹⁴¹ "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate." Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength." in: 1 Corinthians 1:18-25, NIV.

¹⁴² The focus on the cross was prominent in the work of the reformer Martin Luther (1483-1546), who was the first to publish a 'theology of the cross'. Given the influence of the Lutheran Hegel and Tillich on Caputo, it is not surprising that also Caputo turns to the cross. in: Caputo, *The Weakness of God*, 41, 96.

¹⁴³ Caputo, *The Weakness of God*, 43.

the world.¹⁴⁴ Furthermore, the cross expresses the horrific physical suffering that surrounds Christ in his death, showing that the physical side of the incarnation is not just a neat phenomenological body but also involves the dirt and mess that comes with a body of flesh. The cross not only reminds us of the reduction of Christ into flesh, but also, the sight of flesh on the cross provokes us. The recalling of the powerless Jesus hanging on the cross, crucified by the powerful, makes people in power, until the present day, uncomfortable. This uncomfortable feeling that comes with the sight of the powerless 'other' and its suffering lays a claim upon us, in the unconditional call or obligation for the coming of life in circumstances of death. This means that after the deconstruction of the body into flesh, there is something undeconstructible left, this excess of deconstruction is what Caputo calls the event of God. Thus, God is not a being but the structure of a "vocative order —the order of what is calling, what is called for, what is recalled and who is called on—".¹⁴⁵ In the weakness of God, we encounter an unconditional and weak call of the event of God calling for the kingdom to-come.¹⁴⁶

Thus, the paradigmatic Jesus Christ not only reminds us of the perverse core of the cross in which his body was deconstructed into flesh, but the story of the flesh of Jesus also reminds us of the transformation of such circumstances of death into the impossible life-giving resurrection of Jesus after his death. The flesh of Jesus calls upon us to transform our hearts, *metanoetics*, to undergo an existential conversion and to receive a new heart.¹⁴⁷ The arising of this call is not limited to the paradigmatic flesh of Jesus, but it arises for millions of broken bodies of flesh in this world who all call for the possibility of the impossible, namely, the call that the nothings and nobodies of this world who are in desperate need for new life, for justice to-come, and for the becoming of the kingdom of God.¹⁴⁸ Therefore, the truth of the biblical narratives is not found in the right interpretation or Absolute Inspiration of the text, but in what is called-for by the event of God. The truth is found when someone confesses that he/she will make the truth happen, this understanding of truth is based on the Augustinian performative truth of '*facere veritatem*'.¹⁴⁹ In other words, Christian truth is found in the call to bring the impossible into existence and when we make the impossible happen.¹⁵⁰ This interpretation of Christian truth has consequences for the aforementioned call of the kingdom of God to-come: for the kingdom that is called for can only come into existence if we do the truth.

¹⁴⁴ That is why the different theologies of the cross, that all speak of the broken reality of God make sense to Caputo. For example, the crucified God (Jürgen Moltmann); the disabled God (Nancy L. Eiesland); the mortal God (Jacques Derrida); the body of God (Sallie McFague); the suffering God (Dietrich Bonhoeffer); the God of 'indecent theology' (Marcella Althaus-Reid). in: Caputo, *The Insistence of God*, 46 and *The Weakness of God*, 36.

¹⁴⁵ Caputo, *What Would Jesus Deconstruct?*, 59.

¹⁴⁶ Caputo, *What Would Jesus Deconstruct?*, 82.

¹⁴⁷ Caputo, *The Weakness of God*, 16.

¹⁴⁸ Caputo, 'Bodies Still Unrisen', 82.

¹⁴⁹ John D. Caputo, *Truth: The Search for Wisdom in the Postmodern Age* (Penguin Books, 2013) 62-63.

¹⁵⁰ Caputo, *The Weakness of God*, 16.

In conclusion, Caputo's understanding of the category of flesh develops into a deconstructed theology of the cross. In the crucifixion of Jesus Christ both the king, the kingdom, and theology are crucified; no longer are they royal but they are contracted into crucified flesh. In the sight and in the recalling of this deconstruction into flesh, all we are left with is the powerless and weak call of the event arising from this flesh. This event calls upon us for things to change and for the impossible kingdom of God to become possible. The kingdom to-come is the impossible calling for life in circumstances of death, for justice in circumstance of injustice, for the material needs of the nothings and nobodies in this world, and therefore, Caputo's interpretation of God and the kingdom is not a being or a place but an '*analogia non-entis*', an analogy of non-being.¹⁵¹ The kingdom of God should be understood as "a field of flesh, of flesh laid low and flesh raised up" that circles around the crucified and risen flesh of Jesus.¹⁵² In the sight of the disruptive bodies of afflicted flesh, a transformation of our heart can happen, *metanoein*, making us responsive to the call for the kingdom of God to-come.

3.4 THE THEO-PRAXIS OF CONCRETE FLESH

In the theopoetics of Caputo, the paradigm is the crucified and resurrected flesh of Jesus that reminds us, not only of the weakness of theology, but also, of the possibility of the impossible that is called for in the kingdom of God. Both in the weakening of theology and in the calling for the kingdom to-come, Caputo's eyes are constantly on the flesh of the nothings and nobodies. The consequent siding with the poor and outsiders of the world, based on the event of the cross, shows strong resemblances with the arch-father of liberation theology: Gustavo Gutiérrez (1928).¹⁵³ Nevertheless, there is one difference; the critical theological reflection of Gutiérrez arose from the concrete flesh of the poor in South-America, while in Caputo this concrete context of the flesh of the nothings and nobodies is not articulated.

The absence of flesh has led towards a critique of Caputo and his portrayal of the kingdom of God as the kingdom of crucified. For example, the continental philosopher B. Keith Putt expressed that the kingdom described by Caputo is "a sterile field", and the philosopher of religion Joeri Schrijvers expressed that there is "too little of phenomenology" of the vital impulse that is so vividly described in

¹⁵¹ Caputo plays here with the classical understandings of God by St. Augustine as '*analogia fidei*', the rule of faith, and St. Aquinas as '*analogia entis*', the rule of Being. in: Caputo, *The Weakness of God*, 37.

¹⁵² Caputo, *The Insistence of God*, 253-254.

¹⁵³ Caputo, *The Weakness of God*, 134.

his theology.¹⁵⁴ Given the choice of methodology for this research that specifically focusses on the voices of the most powerless of this world, the critique of the absence of context is taken very seriously and provides the line of research for this section. Signifying that, this paragraph will move away from the theoretical theo-poetics of Caputo, towards research on the concrete context or theo-praxis encountered in the work of Caputo. The only time such a concrete context is spoken of by Caputo is in *What Would Jesus Deconstruct?*, when Caputo reflects on two marginal Christian communities where “the kingdom of God is being proclaimed in uniquely deconstructive tones”.¹⁵⁵

The first example, deals with the diary of a Catholic priest John McNamee, *Diary of a City Priest* (1993), who practices traditional ministry in the ghettos of northern Philadelphia.¹⁵⁶ This diary describes the workings of the church in the margins of society, working among the nothings and nobodies of the world. According to McNamee, this working church differs fundamentally from the Big Church, because the latter is mainly occupied with its own power and church structures. By contrast, the working church is there where the brutalities of life hit the hardest, where life is impossible for the nothings and the nobodies of the world, and thus, where the church’s “only power is the power of powerlessness that commands our faith.”¹⁵⁷ McNamee is an orthodox and traditional Roman-Catholic priest who distinguishes himself not so much in his beliefs, but in “the radicalized evangelical *hospitality* he practices, or tries to practice, toward all those who knock on his door (which seems like everybody all the time).”¹⁵⁸ In the context of the Philadelphian ghettos, where faith is constantly broken by the brutality of life, the perverse core of Christian faith as a deconstructive event of the impossible becomes clear to Caputo.¹⁵⁹ This context strips down our autonomous bodies onto the bare knees of flesh, to realize with McNamee that all we can do is pray, pray for the coming of the impossible. It is in this mess of impossibility, Caputo argues, where the real church is at work: by testifying of hope in circumstances where having hope seems impossible or at least ridiculous. This shows that the truth of the church manifests itself not in the administrative systems or doctrines of faith, but in the doing of the truth that McNamee practices in his radical hospitality.

The second case study concerns an “independent, avant-garde assembly” called ‘Ikon’ who gathers in a bar in Belfast, Northern Ireland.¹⁶⁰ Caputo is interested in this avant-garde community and

¹⁵⁴ B. Keith Putt, ‘Reconciling Pure Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Bringing John Caputo Into the Kingdom of God’, *CrossCurrents* (Vol. 59, no. 4, 2009) 512, and Joeri Schrijvers, *Between Faith and Belief, Toward a Contemporary Phenomenology of Religious Life* (Sunny Press; New York, 2016) 209.

¹⁵⁵ Caputo, *What Would Jesus Deconstruct?*, 117-118.

¹⁵⁶ Caputo, *What Would Jesus Deconstruct?*, 118.

¹⁵⁷ Caputo, *What Would Jesus Deconstruct?*, 120.

¹⁵⁸ Caputo, *What Would Jesus Deconstruct?*, 127.

¹⁵⁹ Caputo, *What Would Jesus Deconstruct?*, 124.

¹⁶⁰ Caputo, *What Would Jesus Deconstruct?*, 129.

their practice of 'para-liturgy' or 'orthopraxis'. This liturgy can be best understood being a provocative and deconstructive postmodern practice in which God is reimagined, moving in their para-liturgy beyond the idolatry of classical theology that claims to have the truth about God on their side towards the open-endedness of letting yourself "be addressed by what God has to say to us (iconic)."¹⁶¹ Thus, in the description that Caputo gives of the deconstructive quasi-community 'Ikon', he portrays an avant-garde movement that is not concerned with formulating THE truth about God but wants to create space in which we can all be called upon by God.

In line with the criticism that both Putt and Schrijvers expressed, Caputo's case studies seem to lack the concrete embodied flesh and voices of the nothings and nobodies. Instead, the concrete context of the bodies of flesh in which the powerless call for the kingdom of the crucified to-come rises is analysed from the outside perspective of the powerful of this world. This is illustrated in Caputo's choice of perspective in the case studies of the priest and an avant-garde movement, which allows him to speak from the safe distance about the call coming from broken flesh.¹⁶² In these case studies Caputo does not dare to dive as deep as the actual experiences and voices of the afflicted bodies of flesh who call for the kingdom to-come. He instead remains on the side-line describing from the perspective of the powerful how the call develops. Therefore, the flesh of the nothings and nobodies in these case studies are reduced to the phenomenological body against which he so fiercely objected in *Against Ethics*. From the side-line, an analysis is given on behalf of the nothings and nobodies of this world without the disruptive input of the flesh itself. Thus, the theo-poetics of the kingdom of God needs to engage with the flesh and voices of the powerless, otherwise, it risks becoming itself nothing more than a phenomenological reduction of the *arche*-body.

¹⁶¹ Caputo, *What Would Jesus Deconstruct?*, 131.

¹⁶² That a priest has power is clear, however, whether an avant-garde movement has power can be a point of discussion given their disruptive stance against any form of establishment. Nevertheless, even if avant-gardists are disputed and contested it is always from an intellectual perspective, but never are they considered nothings and nobodies in this world. Peter Rollins, the founder of 'Ikon', for example, offers high-end workshop and boutique festivals for prices that can only be paid by the most fortunate in this world. <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/one-day-we-might-live-the-land-life-and-legacy-of-cs-lewis-tickets-32708005525> (accessed 4th of July 2017).

CHAPTER 4 – ANOTHER TIME: THE DECONSTRUCTED KINGDOM OF GOD

Reparation

The action of restoring something to a proper or former stage; spiritual restoration; the action of making amends for a wrong or loss; compensation for war damage by a defeated state.

What it cost no one is telling.
Can't subtract what might have been.
Can't add up to a sum we understand.
Can't subdivide what once was seen.

Can carve a tombstone for the dead.
memorialize with flower and crosses,
exhume a body, clear a name,
issue receipts for wrongs and losses.

But can't repair, and can't restore
an uncut arm, unbruised genital,
untroubled sleep, unscarred face,
unweeping mother, children, faith,
or wide unwatching private space.

Ingrid de Kok¹⁶³

In the poem *Reparation*, the South African poet Ingrid de Kok describes the difficulties that come with the broken past of *apartheid* in South Africa. How is it possible to repair: to repair what has been done and what has been left undone in South Africa? Can the complicated past of South Africa and the subsequent (physical) scars be fitted into her definition of 'reparation'? These questions reflect to a large extent the ongoing debate in post-*apartheid* South Africa, which seems to move in-between an approach, on the one hand, of trying to reconcile with the past in initiatives like the Truth and Reconciliation Committee, and on the other hand, of confrontation that history cannot be repaired or undone.¹⁶⁴ Currently, more than 20 years after *apartheid* ended, South Africa is still financially, the most unequal country in the world.¹⁶⁵ This lack or at least difficulty with repairing the

¹⁶³ *Italics* in the original poem. in: Ingrid de Kok, *Seasonal Fires* (Umuzi; Cape Town, 2006) 121.

¹⁶⁴ The Truth and Reconciliation Commission "was approved during the first session of the new South African Parliament in October 1994. Its mandate was to provide a record of gross human rights violations by both the upholders of apartheid and the liberation movements [...]." The commission aimed in their speaking "for understanding not revenge, reparation not retaliation, *ubuntu* not victimization." in: John de Gruchy and Steve de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa* 25th edition (Fortress Press; Minneapolis, 2005) 224-225.

¹⁶⁵ Based on recent data in the Gini index and the Palma ratio, in: https://www.theguardian.com/inequality/datablog/2017/apr/26/inequality-index-where-are-the-worlds-most-unequal-countries?CMP=fb_gu (accessed 22nd of June 2017).

past of South Africa resulted in, amongst other things, the 2015 and 2016 student protests on the campuses of all tertiary institutions in South Africa.¹⁶⁶ The impossible task of trying to repair the past of South Africa, can be traced back to the ambiguity of understanding of time. Is the past something that can be closed, something we can be reconciled with, something to forgive and forget as time moves us into the future, or does time follow a less linear track?

The importance of the hermeneutics of time in relation to the reparation of the past does not only relate to the state of current South Africa but also to the kingdom of God in theology. In the gospel, the kingdom of God is proclaimed as a kingdom of reversals, which brings the comforting hope that the current power relations of the world will be turned around. However, what does this reversal mean for the functioning of time in the kingdom? Is the kingdom a place in the future, which offers a chance to forgive and forget the past? Or does the kingdom run on its own time? Overall, these questions invite for further exploration of the dimensions of time in the kingdom of God, voiced in the research question of this chapter: How, according to Caputo, does time function in the deconstructed kingdom of God?

4.1 THE EVENT OF TIME

The kingdom of God in the work of Caputo is strongly connected to his understanding of the weakness of God. In the previous chapter, we saw that this weakness of God was revealed in his theopoetics of the paradigmatic body of Christ. The crucifixion of the body of Christ signifies, for Caputo, not only the crucifixion of the autonomous body, but also the crucifixion of the powerful and omnipotent God. In a similar way, the breaking down of Christ's body in the flesh of the crucified, also signifies the breaking down of the Kingdom of Kings into the sacred anarchy of the kingdom of crucified. This means that the *arche* of the kingdom is the *an-archic*, "to take the side of everyone who is out of power."¹⁶⁷ This *an-archic* preference of the kingdom for the outsiders indicates the logic of the reign of that event which stirs in the name (of) God. It displays a call for the possibility of the impossible, namely, that also for these outsiders the transformative *metanoetics* of the resurrection of life, even in circumstances of death, can occur. Thus, the event in the name (of) God follows the time-structure of the vocative order of the call, which is a powerless call for the possibility of the kingdom to-come.

¹⁶⁶ #rhodesmustfall and #feesmustfall.

¹⁶⁷ Caputo, *The Weakness of God*, 135.

This time-structure of ‘to-come’ makes that the event that stirs in the name (of) God “an event of time”.¹⁶⁸ In the insistence of the event, we are confronted with the unforeseeable and disruptive character of the metanoetic event, one that overtakes us and draws us out of ourselves, that changes our heart of stone and makes us responsible for the kingdom to-come. This structure of time denoted in the event, displays “the intertwining of the time of the kingdom with a deconstructive or eventualistic concept of time.”¹⁶⁹ In contrast to the idolatry of the predictable or containable time of strong theology, Caputo proposes to keep the time of the kingdom holy in the radical hermeneutics of time. Therefore, the next section will examine the deconstructive or eventualistic concept of time that stems from the philosopher Derrida, while the third part will attend to an exploration of time of the kingdom in the New Testament.

4.2 INTERPRETING JACQUES DERRIDA: EVENTUALISTIC TIME TO-COME

The expectation in the work of the French philosopher Derrida of the incoming of something *tout autre*, namely the impossible, has been interpreted by Caputo as religious.¹⁷⁰ In the field of Derrida-studies, this religious interpretation has resulted in a fierce critique towards Caputo, most notably by Martin Hägglund (1976).¹⁷¹ Contrariwise, Caputo argues that Hägglund has misunderstood his ‘religious’ interpretation of Derrida: the critique Hägglund expresses associates Caputo’s religious interpretation incorrectly with the orthodox understanding of theistic religion, and the two-world dualism of heaven and earth that belongs to classical theology.¹⁷² Instead, for Caputo, the religious interpretation of Derrida is found in his messianic idea of time, by way of *à venir* (to-come) which is “the idea of life in time, of hope and expectation, of prayers and tears, of being toward a future that does not and will not arrive.”¹⁷³

¹⁶⁸ Caputo, *The Weakness of God*, 155.

¹⁶⁹ Caputo, *The Weakness of God*, 155.

¹⁷⁰ Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida*, xviii.

¹⁷¹ Hägglund argues that for Derrida faith cannot exist without the logic of radical evil. However, Caputo interprets the religious side of Derrida in such a way that the main concern of deconstruction is to reveal the promise of the ‘good structures’ of this world in both his weak theology and his reading of Derrida. This interpretation of deconstruction neglects the radical evil of faith: “Caputo here inserts ‘the good’ as a term equivalent to Derrida’s notions of the gift, justice, and hospitality—despite the fact that Derrida never aligns any of these terms with the good. [...] Derrida maintains that the exposure to alterity—which he analyses as constitutive of the gift, justice, and hospitality—is not characterized by goodness but rather by what he describes as radical evil. [...] the messianic *is* radical evil.” in: Martin Hägglund, ‘The Radical Evil of Deconstruction: A Reply to John Caputo’, *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* (Vol. 11, no. 2, 2012) 130.

¹⁷² Hägglund, ‘The Radical Evil of Deconstruction’, 128.

¹⁷³ John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon (eds.), *Transcendence and Beyond: A Postmodern Inquiry* (Indiana University Press; Bloomington, 2007) 198.

In the remaining part of this paragraph, Caputo's interpretation of Derrida in which time and transcendence are connected will be further explored and clarified. Caputo argues, that in contrast to classical theology, transcendence for Derrida is not located in transcending time and space. The kingdom of God is not another world or another existent place; instead, the Derridean understanding of transcendence regards time itself *as* transcending. This renewed understanding of transcendence—which to prevent confusion with metaphysical transcendence is named quasi-transcendence—has forced Caputo also to renew his understanding of God and his kingdom. Caputo discerns the quasi-transcendence of Derrida in “the unfolding under the different circumstances and transferred dynamics of deconstruction” in which an “infinite qualitative temporal intensification, an infinite self-transformation of our temporal lives” takes place.¹⁷⁴ In other words, the Derridean quasi-transcendence does not turn away from time, but claims that the transcendence of the kingdom happens in the intensification of time on earth, created in the promise of time to-come.

Transcendence is the “temporalizing event” of time to-come in which the desire for the beyond of where we cannot go, or the impossible itself, is exposed.¹⁷⁵ In the messianic desire for the incoming of the wholly ‘other’ we are drawn “out of ourselves beyond ourselves”.¹⁷⁶ It is in the structure of time—of time to-come—that we are taken out of ourselves and that a call is released for the becoming of that which is impossible. In other words, the time to-come insists upon us that we transcend our limited and finite world that is filled with constructs of self-interest, and thereby makes the impossible possible. Interestingly, following my own observation, this structure of Caputo's interpretation of time to-come displays a structure that is comparable to the Catholic sacrament of penitence with the features of confession and grace. Firstly, the insistence of time to-come asks for an individual response in the confessional conversion of being-toward the impossible, and secondly, the disruptive side of time is the incalculable incoming event of the wholly ‘other’ that gracefully gives new time.¹⁷⁷

In any case, the transcending intensification of time in the time to-come adheres to what Derrida calls the ‘messianic’ paradigm. The coming of the Messiah proclaimed both in the Jewish and Christian Scriptures voices expectation, it is a time of “hope and promise, of faith and the future”.¹⁷⁸ However, for Derrida, the Judaeo-Christian metaphysical heritage connected to the Messiah needs to be deconstructed to release the full meaning of the Messiah. Derrida, thus, proposes a “messianism

¹⁷⁴ Caputo and Scanlon, *Transcendence and Beyond*, 191.

¹⁷⁵ This desire of the impossible is for Caputo the effect of the deconstructive *différance*. in: Caputo and Scanlon, *Transcendence and Beyond*, 191-193.

¹⁷⁶ Caputo and Scanlon, *Transcendence and Beyond*, 190.

¹⁷⁷ Caputo and Scanlon, *Transcendence and Beyond*, 197.

¹⁷⁸ Caputo and Scanlon, *Transcendence and Beyond*, 196.

without religion” in which we are left with is the undeconstructible “emancipatory promise” of the messianic time to-come.¹⁷⁹ This deconstructive reading of the messianic resonates in part with the Jewish Scriptures and tradition in which the Messiah does not refer to an “eschatological personality”, but instead to the idea that “eschatological salvation was more important than the concept of” a Davidic Messiah.¹⁸⁰ However, it negates the various attestations or expectations in Judaism of the Davidic Messiah from the beginning of the second temple period (530 BCE-70 CE) that describe the Messiah as a human agent of God.¹⁸¹ In the Christian tradition, the expectation of the Jewish Messiah is fulfilled with the coming of the historical figure of Jesus Christ who is described in the New Testament and in extra-biblical literature. Hence, the Derridean interpretation of the Messiah deconstructs that part of the Jewish and Christian tradition in which a physical Davidic Messiah was expected, because in such expectations the messianic eventualistic open-ended structure of time is encapsulated in a metaphysical framework. Thus, for Derrida the deconstruction of the Messiah was necessary to reveal that the messianic is a paradigm for time in philosophy.

However, in Caputo’s project of a theology of the event this Derridean deconstruction of the Messiah becomes more problematic, because Caputo works with both the messianic structure of time to-come that presupposes the deconstruction of the (metaphysical) being of the Messiah and with the Christian biblical tradition of Jesus Christ that presupposes the being of Christ as the fulfilment of messianic expectation. Caputo’s theopoetics is primarily grounded in the eventualistic structure of time to-come, notwithstanding that the incarnated finite being of the messianic Jesus Christ is also attested in Caputo’s theopoetics. While Caputo argues that Jesus Christ in the New Testament is merely “a narrative in which the event is expressed”, still, Caputo has kept a prominent role for this embodiment of the godly event in the messianic being of Jesus Christ.¹⁸² For example, in the fact that his weak theology “is a theology of the cross” after the cross of Jesus Christ, and that in the study of time of the kingdom Caputo turns to “Jesus’ own proclamation of the kingdom of God”.¹⁸³ Thus, the New Testament is used in an exemplary way to describe the working of Caputo’s theology of the event, but this centrality of the New Testament is only justified if Jesus’ messianic being in his first coming is paradigmatic. (something that is contradicted in the Derridean understanding of the messianic as the time to-come) Therefore, I would argue that Caputo’s interpretation of the Messiah refers to the Derridean messianic transcendence of time — levelled with the expectation of the

¹⁷⁹ Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International* (Routledge; London, 1994, originally published in French [1993]) 74.

¹⁸⁰ Harold Louis Ginsberg, David Flusser, Gerald J. Bildstein, Joseph Dan, and Louis Jacobs, ‘Messiah’, in: *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed., edited by Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, Vol. 14. (Macmillan Reference USA; Detroit, 2007) 110.

¹⁸¹ Flusser, ‘Messiah’, 112.

¹⁸² Caputo, ‘Bodies Still Unrisen’, 76.

¹⁸³ Caputo, *The Weakness of God*, 42, 161.

second coming of Christ— without releasing himself from the being of the Messiah in the first coming of Jesus Christ.

4.3 THE TIME OF THE KINGDOM

The just discussed religious understanding of Derrida's quasi-transcendence, being the eventualistic time to-come, has consequences for the structure of time that underlies the kingdom of God. Given that the eventualistic structure of time to-come prevents the coming of the kingdom of God from being containable or foreseeable, the kingdom cannot be "a matter of determining a datable *when*".¹⁸⁴ In its place, Caputo concentrates on keeping the time of the kingdom of God holy, which means "to make it transparent to the event, [...] to the event of God's rule, to turn it over to God and to ask God to give us time."¹⁸⁵ This effort to keep time holy means that theology should no longer be occupied with predicting the coming of the kingdom; instead the eventualistic structure of time in the kingdom asks for a theology of trust, namely to trust whatever time God gives to us.¹⁸⁶ Therefore, prayer is a central category in theopoetics, because the eventualistic or kairological structure of time in the kingdom of God leaves us with no choice but to resort to the insecurity of prayer, to pray for the impossible and uncontainable sacred anarchy of the kingdom of God to-come.¹⁸⁷ Hence, Caputo's exploration of the working of time in the kingdom, follows roughly the structure of the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6: 9-13 and Luke 11:2-4.¹⁸⁸ Thus, the rest of this paragraph grasps onto Caputo's prayer for the kingdom of God to-come, by explaining the time of the kingdom in the shadowing of the Lord's prayer.

*"[...] Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,"*¹⁸⁹

In Caputo's paraphrase of the first verse of the Lord's prayer, he leaves out the reference to heaven and the idea that the kingdom of God is a kingdom of heaven, like in the Gospel of Matthew. Instead,

¹⁸⁴ Caputo, *The Weakness of God*, 159.

¹⁸⁵ Caputo, *The Weakness of God*, 156.

¹⁸⁶ Caputo, *The Weakness of God*, 156.

¹⁸⁷ 'Kairological' time refers to time as the fitting moment, which can be contrasted with chronological time, the latter being the time that can be accounted for on clocks and watches. In the New Testament Kairos denotes the fullness of time (Mark 1:15), which for Tillich, the father of *kairos* theology, is the moment in which the eternal breaks into the temporal and the temporal is prepared to receive it. in: Tillich, *The Protestant Era*, xv, 45. Additionally, an interesting fact is that in Greek methodology Kairos is the Greek god of opportunity, who works together with the goddess Metanoia, the Greek god of regret and repentance. A similar collaboration between kairological time and Metanoia is attested in the Bible, and in Caputo's relation between time to-come and the transformative metanoetics. see: Kelly A. Myers, 'Metanoia and the Transformation of Opportunity', *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* (Vol. 41, no. 1, 2011) 1-18.

¹⁸⁸ See 'FRAGMENT #2. A PRAYER FOR THE KINGDOM. in: Caputo, *The Weakness of God*, 282 and 163-181.

¹⁸⁹ Matthew 6:9; cf. "Father, hallowed be your name," in: Luke 11:2, NIV.

he follows the more grounded Lord's Prayer in the Gospel of Luke that has no reference to heaven whatsoever.¹⁹⁰ Caputo's objection to a two-world dualism of heaven and earth means that he proposes a one-world transcendence in the hyper-real structure of time to-come. Thus, in Caputo's understanding, to hallow the name (of) God is not on "the plane of being, but of the event."¹⁹¹ Of course, there is a need to name God and to speak about God, but this nominalization can never fully grasp the event that stirs within its name. To signify that the name (of) God can never be the final interpretation of the uncontainable and transformative event of God, the structure of time to-come keeps the otherness of God in the structure of time holy. It all turns around keeping the gap between the name and the event of God open. Therefore, Caputo prays: "[...] may your name be blessed, may your name be kept safe."¹⁹²

*"your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."*¹⁹³

To pray "your kingdom come" expresses that the rule of God in the kingdom is not something we can predict or provoke; by contrast, it leaves us praying every day. The only thing we can predict is that one day we are going to die, which provokes a constant worry with most human beings about our future and the inevitability of death. This emphasis on death during our life is implied in what the German philosopher Heidegger called *Sein-zum Tode*; human life is signified in its meaning by the anxiety for and the realisation of our own death. This anxiety for death can be so dominant and anxious that we forget to live. Therefore, Caputo proposes that the merit of the kingdom is the suspension of our anxiety about the future, because the kingdom has a 'presential quality' meaning that "the merit of today is that today gives life and life is all we need."¹⁹⁴ Thus, the kingdom is not a place in the future that will come; rather, in the kingdom the inevitable fear for the future is lifted. This lifting of fear creates space to perceive the gift of time and new life in the coming of the kingdom, based on the trust that the "time is not ours, but God's."¹⁹⁵

*"Give us today our daily bread."*¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁰ In the Gospel of Matthew, there are 31 instances in which the reference to the kingdom is the 'kingdom of the heavens'. Two-world theology was, thus, not merely theology created by St. Augustine, but already attested in the New Testament. This biblical preference for two-world theology, Caputo does not take seriously into account.

¹⁹¹ Caputo, *The Weakness of God*, 181.

¹⁹² Caputo, *The Weakness of God*, 282.

¹⁹³ Matthew 6:10; cf. "your kingdom come" Luke 11:2, NIV.

¹⁹⁴ John D. Caputo, 'Reason History and a little Madness: Towards an ethics of the kingdom', in: Richard Kearney and Mark Dooley (eds.) *Questioning Ethics, Contemporary debates in philosophy* (Routledge; London, 1999) 91.

¹⁹⁵ Caputo, *The Weakness of God*, 170-171.

¹⁹⁶ Matthew 6:11; cf. "Give us each day our daily bread." in: Luke 11:3, NIV.

When we pray this part of the Lord's prayer, Caputo interprets it as a prayer for the time of today and not for the time of tomorrow or yesterday. Since, "today's bread is all the bread we need and ask for, for when tomorrow comes, it will be today, and that will suffice."¹⁹⁷ This presential quality of "each day" is the result of perceiving each day as a gift of God's rule. Therefore, when Caputo prays "may the rule of the gift come", it means he prays for the gift of today that breaks the reciprocal worldly economy of expectations, gifts, and returns.¹⁹⁸ The time of the kingdom of God runs on this foolish open time of the gift of today, in which each day is experienced as God-given or what Caputo calls 'quotidianism'.¹⁹⁹ The kingdom is letting God rule, not in the future but today, because the given time of the day is all the time we need. All we can do is pray is for this kingdom to come, for the possibility of the impossible gift of time to-come, for God to rule each day, "*viens, oui oui.*"²⁰⁰

*"And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."*²⁰¹

In the prayer for the forgiveness of debts in the Gospel of Matthew and the forgiveness of sins in the Gospel of Luke, we are reminded of our faulty past. Thus, to pray for forgiveness—in the eyes of Caputo— means to pray for the impossible release "from our faults" and "from our past".²⁰² Forgiveness is an impossible thing, because it is caught between the tension, namely, that to truly forgive the past it needs to be undone; and yet, simultaneously, forgiveness cannot happen without something to forgive in the past. This tension circles around the paradox of the gift of the event paralleled in forgiveness, namely that for the gift to be a pure gift of the event it needs to break with the reciprocal economy of the world in which we are caught.²⁰³ Otherwise, the gift can be expected just like a present for a birthday; instead, the gift of the event demonstrates a certain excess beyond this economy. This unconditional gift of forgiveness means to say to someone without conditions or expectations of returns: 'Let us forgive and forget the past and start anew'. Such unconditional forgiveness is in the economy of the world impossible. This is something which is well described in the ambiguity of South African attempt at reparation, mentioned in the introduction of this chapter. For

¹⁹⁷ Caputo, *The Weakness of God*, 168.

¹⁹⁸ Caputo, *The Weakness of God*, 282.

¹⁹⁹ Quotidianism or epi-ousiology refers to the rule of God over *quotidie* or *epiousios* which means 'each day'. in: Caputo, *The Weakness of God*, 156.

²⁰⁰ Caputo, *The Weakness of God*, 282.

²⁰¹ Matthew 6:12; cf. "Forgive us our sins, for we forgive everyone who sins against us." in: Luke 11:4, NIV.

²⁰² Caputo, *The Weakness of God*, 282.

²⁰³ The distinction between the gift and the reciprocal economy is, for Caputo, more than an abstract distinction in French postmodernism. He argues that this distinction reflects the difference between Christianity and Judaism: the former circles around the unconditional gift of grace and love, and the latter circles around an economy of legalism. In the Scriptures, this contrast can be attested, for example, the Beatitudes in the Gospel of Matthew 5:3-12, on the one hand, and Leviticus 24:17-21 with the reciprocal mentality of a "life for life [...] fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth" on the other hand. in: Caputo, *The Weakness of God*, 217.

Caputo, it means that when we pray for forgiveness, we pray for the impossible disruption of the reciprocal economy of the world in the gift of eventful time, as seen in the coming of the kingdom of God. In this given time of the kingdom, our sinful past is not in control, since we receive a new time due to the excess of unconditional forgiveness that wipes away “the past [...] *as if* it never happened.”²⁰⁴ Still, this excess of forgiveness does not add up to the undoing of the past which would make forgiveness no longer necessary.²⁰⁵ Rather, our faults in the past continue to exist but a new interpretation of the past is given. The gift of forgiveness is the gift of metanoetic time of the kingdom, in which we are not ruled by the past but by God’s gift of the newness of each day. The time of the kingdom of God allows for hermeneutical new beginnings every day.

*“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.”*²⁰⁶

For Caputo, evil is “irreparably ruined time, without the possibility of compensation.”²⁰⁷ Evil is the result either of our own faults or the visitation of evil is bad luck “part of the price we pay for life, for history and nature.”²⁰⁸ Either way, the ruined time of evil is not something that can be made up for in a later moment; it is the irreparable loss of Auschwitz or a child born with AIDS.²⁰⁹ Unlike the time of the world in which the reciprocal economy offers the possibility of compensation, as when, for example, the missing of a birthday party can be repaid or counterbalanced with the offer of material compensation or compensation of time later on. Instead, ruined time can only be repaired in “rebirth and a new time, which in the religious discourse we call salvation.”²¹⁰ Therefore, when we pray the Lord’s prayer for the deliverance from evil, we pray to be “saved *from* the ruined time of the world *for* a new time.”²¹¹ We pray for the salvation offered in the unconditional gift of messianic time to-come, that belongs to the kingdom of God. For the incoming otherness of the event that stirs in the name (of) God, for the impossible deliverance from the ruined time of the world in the new beginnings of the time of salvation.

In conclusion, Caputo’s analysis of the Lord’s prayer further develops the Derridean interpretation of time as transcending in relation to the kingdom of God, in opposition to the traditional notion of transcendence in classical theology that places God and the kingdom outside of

²⁰⁴ Caputo, *The Weakness of God*, 146-147.

²⁰⁵ Caputo explores the impossibility to undo the past extensively in the ninth chapter of *The Weakness of God* on the 11th-century theologian Peter Damian (1007-1072); Damian claimed that if God is omnipotent he could also undo what was done in the past. in: Caputo, *The Weakness of God*, 182-207.

²⁰⁶ Matthew 6:13 cf. Luke 11: 4 “*And lead us not into temptation*”.

²⁰⁷ Caputo, *The Weakness of God*, 5.

²⁰⁸ Caputo, *The Weakness of God*, 92.

²⁰⁹ Caputo, *The Weakness of God*, 243.

²¹⁰ Caputo, *The Weakness of God*, 241.

²¹¹ Caputo, *The Weakness of God*, 241.

time.²¹² Caputo argues that the proclaimed biblical kingdom of God is engraved with the working of the quasi-transcendental structure of *différance* that has its vanishing point in the infinite not-knowing of the *khôra* (the open space of alterity), which means that the deconstructed kingdom of God does not move us out of the world to a place in eternity where we are rewarded for a pious life on earth, rather, it is the unconditional and impossible incoming of the rule of the event that stirs in the name (of) God. The kingdom of God turns out to be a certain excess in the world that can only be prayed for. In the Lord's prayer, we pray for such excess, for the possibility of the impossible, which is symbolized in the excessive gift of salvation; the gift of salvation saves us from the time of the world and gives us the impossible gift of new time —or the time to-come— in which creation can be reborn.

²¹² As pointed out in this chapter at several points, Caputo's interpretation of time as transcending neglects the description of the kingdom of God as the kingdom of heaven(s); especially, the Gospel of Matthew does leave room for the dualistic understanding of heaven and earth that Caputo so fiercely opposes.

CHAPTER 5 – CRITIQUE OF BLACK REASON:
ACHILLE MBEMBE’S POSTCOLONIAL PERSPECTIVE APPLIED TO THE
DECONSTRUCTED KINGDOM OF GOD

Colonialism - Gendered

The colonial object
manifested as male, tough,
rough and ruthless,
ravages the now colonial subject.
The subject subdued,
woman like, and
pinned down to many
centuries’ rape
of human dignity
cries out: Rape! Rape!

Rivers of blood flow,
turning into an internalized
unstoppable
revolution,
until the colonial object,
so beastly, humane streak-
stripped, deafening,
brutality its hallmark,
finally hears:

You can’t stop
the revolution.
Africa! It is ours!
Power! To the people!

The colonial object-
day dawning, truth
dawning, surveys
the damage and
realizes – the subject
of rape, cannot be
ravaged into
submissiveness and
oblivion. No!

The evidence:
Amidst oceans of
blood lost – yet mountains
of resolve
unshaken!

At last the colonial object
disengages, convinced,
finally, of the foolishness,
of living a lie, convinced
finally, of the invincibility
of truth.

At last, the experience
of release – and relief –
all round, and human
dignity repairs, begin –
dare we say – all round

Lynette Hlongwane²¹³

In the poem *Colonialism – Gendered*, the poet Lynette Hlongwane speaks of the effects of colonialism, a period during which millions of (wo)men were reduced to colonial objects, and who in turn internalized an attitude of repression, rape, and violence. The poem describes the longing to break the cycle of violence, to be, as a human being, released from the objectification of others, and thus, to become fully human again. More particularly, the poem articulates a female South-African perspective of this longing to be fully human as a woman and to be treated in such a way, to be heard, to be seen and not handled like a (sexual) object. This struggle to be released from objectification, and to be human again, is in many ways the consequence of the history of Western colonial control,

²¹³ Lynette Hlongwane, ‘Colonialism – Gendered’, in: Michela Borzaga & Dorothea Steiner (eds.), *Imagination in a Troubled Space, A South African Poetry Reader* (Poetry Salzburg; Salzburg, 2004) 82-83.

slavery, and domination. This history has resulted in the current complexity of postcolonial times, in which these processes —like the need for the people to take back power, the breaking of the cycle of reduction, and the longing to restore human dignity— are still painfully accurate, and thus, the longing to move beyond these processes remains necessary.

The Cameroonian-born philosopher and political theorist Achille Mbembe offers in his oeuvre a critical reflection on the history of colonialism from the context of sub-Saharan Africa. Touching in his work not only on the history of slavery and colonialism, but also on the effects nowadays of the colonial past in phenomena like racism, racial thinking, and the current state of the African postcolony. In his reflections, Mbembe offers situated embodied knowledges based on the sub-Saharan postcolonial African context that in this study will be brought into conversation with Caputo's theological thinking. It is especially Mbembe's critical reflection on the Black body in relation to the Western body that forms the foundation of this chapter. The encounter with the postcolonial African context is important, because based on feminist standpoint methodology —the methodology that is utilized in this research— location and power relations influence the production of (theological) knowledge, and thus, our understanding of the world. Therefore, reflecting on Caputo's theological work from the postcolonial sub-Saharan African context brings out a new and critical understanding of Caputo's theopoetics of the kingdom of God. An understanding that is necessary given the observation formulated in the previous chapters that Caputo's theopoetics scarcely articulates a context, but nevertheless, seems to presuppose a Western one.

In the encounter of these two perspectives this chapter aims at understanding the problems and possibilities that surround Caputo's deconstructed kingdom of God in the postcolonial sub-Saharan African context. By utilizing the research question: How does the postcolonial perspective of Mbembe assess the deconstructed kingdom of God that Caputo proposes?

5.1 AN INTRODUCTION INTO ACHILLE MBEMBE'S THINKING

Mbembe's work observes a cycle of reflections from sub-Saharan Africa on colonialism, postcolonialism, and racial thinking. His reflections are spread over three books, that were all originally published in French: *Notes Provisoires sur la Postcolonie* (2000); *Sorters de la grande nuit* (2010); *Critique de la raison nègre* (2013). In these works, he engages in an appreciative but critical way with important Black liberation thinkers and writers of the 20th century: Marcus Garvey (1887-1940), Aimé Césaire (1913-2008), Léopold Sédar Senghor (1906-2001), Édouard Glissant (1928-2011), Nelson Mandela (1918-2013), and most importantly Frantz Fanon (1925-1961). Nevertheless, in these

reflections Mbembe moves beyond “an easy gesture of fragmentation” by provincializing African and European thought; instead, he formulates “a thinking of circulating and crossings.”²¹⁴

Mbembe starts out his latest book *The Critique of Black Reason* with posing that Europe has lost its position as “the centre of gravity of the world”, and to a large extent this book is an attempt to examine what the consequences are of this “fundamental experience, of our era”.²¹⁵ In general, it can be said that his books and articles are a critical space for reflecting on the identity constructs that historically underlie and have formed European thinking and society, constructs like Blackness, Europe, and Africa. In this endeavour to rethink such modern ‘knowledge’, Mbembe is critical towards the modernistic European attitude that assumed the natural superiority of Europeans, and constructed differences with all ‘other’ human beings, while neglecting in the knowledge formation the cobelonging of humanity to one common world. To enable a new space for more connecting knowledge that is based on world-thinking, the work of Mbembe first problematizes the old and current ways of thinking through his genealogy of the constitutive myths about the concepts of Africa and Blackness in Western thought. For example, in *The Philosophy of History* (1837) the German philosopher Hegel argued that Africa refers to “the Unhistorical, Undeveloped Spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature.”²¹⁶ According to Mbembe, such mythological European thinking about Africa and its inhabitants influences, until this day, the interpretation of the continent, given that still within the discourses of our time the “African human experience [...] can only be understood through a negative interpretation.”²¹⁷ In the negative European interpretation of Africa, the continent is perceived as possessing nothing; the continent of Africa stands out in its reference to “absence”.²¹⁸

Mbembe problematizes not only European thinking about the continent of Africa, but more particularly how Blackness has also constituted the European identity. Historically, the identity of the self-conscious European subject was formed in contrast to or through the negation of Black identity.

²¹⁴ It is important to realize that Mbembe’s thinking of circling and crossing is built upon his understanding of the identity concepts belonging to humanity and the world, which according to him mean nothing in themselves. Only the composition of all the different parts, or the co-belonging of humanity is what gives them meaning: “[...] it is therefore humanity as a whole that gives the world its name [...] Sharing the world with other beings was the ultimate debt. And it was, above all, the key to the survival of both humans and nonhumans. In this system of exchange, reciprocity, and mutuality, humans and non-humans were silt for one another.” in: Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason* (Duke University Press; Durham, 2017) 8, 180-181.

²¹⁵ Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, 1.

²¹⁶ These myths circle around the otherness of Africa and its inhabitants which can be contrasted by the Europeans with their rational reason. Hegel takes this ever further, in stating that Africa represents absolute otherness: “The peculiarly African character is difficult to comprehend, for the very reason that in reference to it, we must give up the principle which naturally accompanies all our ideas—the category of Universality.” in: Achille Mbembe, ‘Africa in the New Century’, *The Massachusetts Review* (Vol. 57, no. 1, 2016) 91.

²¹⁷ This is reflected in the popular and academic writings about Africa, in which the continent remains associated with poverty, lack of economic development, diseases, wars, and political instability. in: Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (University of California Press; Berkeley, 2001) 1.

²¹⁸ Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, 4.

This difference between the European or Western subject and the Black Man was conceptualized in constructed identity markers, like the negro and race.²¹⁹ This historical process of differentiation that aimed at positioning the rational European White Man as superior, depended not only on naming difference but also on the arbitrary reduction of the Black Man into the alterity of being nothing. Hereby, making the Black Man not just different but less than a human-being, namely a primitive, a savage, a primordial human, or even an animal. Thus, the concepts of Africa, the Black Man, and race were never on their own, but always the mediation and negation of the subconscious of the West, which made the otherness of the African or the Black 'other' the antithesis of everyone and everything in the West.²²⁰ In contrast to the civilized rationality of the European subjects, the Black Man was "a sign in excess of all signs and therefore fundamentally unrepresentable, [...] the ideal example of this other-being, powerfully possessed by emptiness, for whom the negative had ended up penetrating all moments of existence."²²¹ This process of reduction resulted in the Black Man being an unreality, in which the Black Man became 'some-thing' with whom the European human subject does not share anything, let alone a common human nature. Mbembe's problematization of these mythological constructs reveals on a conceptual level why the colonies were "spaces of terror", in the sense that in the constructs of European thinking the colonized was reduced into hollow identity categories that caused self-exhaustion and self-crucifixion.²²²

Not surprisingly, the violent reduction of the identity in constructs like the Black Man and Africa has made identity to be a central category in the work of Black liberational thinking. In the objective to reaffirm the human dignity of the Black Man and the dignity of Africa, Mbembe observes that the Black liberation movement often resorts to the Afrocentric approach of identity. Such an Afrocentric approach emphasizes the absoluteness of the African self by referring to the distinctive history of the Black Man, the genius essence of the Black race, and the visualization of independent Black nations. However, Mbembe questions if this Afrocentric reaffirmation of identity in response to the European reduction or negation of identity is as liberating as it argues to be. The imagination and memory of such an Afrocentric counter-identity is still rooted in the same European categories of modernity. Mbembe, therefore, argues that the reaffirmation of identity in Black or Afrocentric discourses is engaged with the process of filling-in the Black and African identity, once proclaimed hollow, but it does so without breaking the European modernistic dualism that lies beneath such categories of identity. Thus, the "repeated stress on the absoluteness of the African self" has, according to Mbembe, reaffirmed the "tragic duality" of identity stemming from modernity. As a

²¹⁹ Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, 38.

²²⁰ Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, 3.

²²¹ Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, 11.

²²² Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, 182.

result, Mbembe makes the very controversial claim that both the reduction of the identity of the Black Man in modernity and the reaffirmation of the Black Man in the recent Afrocentric discourse are “two sterile sides of the same coin”.²²³ This means that in the Afrocentric discourse the aim of emancipating the Black Man, often unknowingly has been transformed in the “twin-project” of both emancipation of the identity of the Black subject and the merging with modernity.²²⁴

For Mbembe an Afrocentric approach is too simplistic; instead, Africa and Blackness “are rooted in a multiplicity of times, trajectories, and rationalities that, although particular and sometimes local, cannot be conceptualized outside a world that is, so to speak, globalized.”²²⁵ For him, the reflection and rethinking of constructs like Africa and Blackness cannot be limited to the one-dimensional Afrocentric reclaiming of identity and history. Instead, to move beyond the tragic duality that surrounds identity in modernity and to enable the formation of knowledge based on connected world-thinking, the rethinking of identity “presupposes a critical delving into Western history and the theories that claim to interpret it.”²²⁶ In this widening of the scope of research Mbembe displays that decolonization is not so much about “the Westernness of modernity but on what the Enlightenment bequeathed ‘us’ and on the possibilities of accomplishing the promises of universality”.²²⁷ This approach of Mbembe that connects the decolonization of modernistic identity constructs in the postcolonial sub-Saharan African context, with the rethinking of the universalizing tendencies in Western history and theories, makes his work particularly interesting for this study, given that both Caputo and Mbembe express a similar objection to the violent stability of meaning in the identity and knowledge constructs that underlie modernity. Both thinkers are on a similar, yet different, endeavour to rethink these constructs in their current discourses —respectively within philosophy of religion and political theory— by critically reflecting on the formation of those constructs in modernity.

Finally, the normativity in the formation process of knowledge in modernity reflects power relations in which a certain group of people can declare how things should be perceived, while simultaneously excluding ‘other’ perceptions or people. What is specific about Mbembe’s analysis is that he explicitly connects these power relations to context or location, namely the universalization of a provincial African or European understanding. Thus, while both scholars object to the stability and normativity of knowledge that reflects the perspective of those in power, nevertheless the way in which both scholars want to create space for the marginalized in the rethinking of identity and knowledge constructs differs. This study poses the hypothesis that this is largely the result of the

²²³ Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, 12.

²²⁴ Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, 12.

²²⁵ Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, 9.

²²⁶ Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, 9.

²²⁷ Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, 11.

difference in context, respectively Europe and sub-Saharan Africa. Therefore, the encounter with the postcolonial sub-Saharan African perspective of Mbembe offers the possibility to critically explore the working of Caputo's theopoetics in the African context and the power relations that are given in Caputo's usage of certain European categories and theories. Thus, inquiring to what extent the deconstructed kingdom of God actually is liberative to people in the marginalized context of sub-Saharan Africa.²²⁸

5.2 A CRITIQUE OF REALITY: THE ENCOUNTER BETWEEN MBEMBE AND CAPUTO

In the second chapter of this study, the notion of reality in relation to the kingdom of God in the work of Caputo was discussed. Caputo concluded that the kingdom is not a transcendental or phenomenological reality, a place that we can perceive, a place to which we can go to or a transcendent ulteriority. Instead, such interpretations of the kingdom of God are in Caputo's opinion an idolatrous objectification of something which can never be captured in human categories. To safeguard the disruptive alterity of Caputo's theologically interpreted real —the theological Other or God— and its kingdom, he argued that the kingdom of God can be best understood as not yet real. This results in the chiasmic intertwining of the real with the phenomenological reality, in the call for the Kingdom of God to come into existence. This interpretation of the kingdom's reality will be further explored in this paragraph, by critically reflecting on the working of the real and reality from the sub-Saharan postcolonial perspective that Mbembe offers.

Both in the work of Caputo and in the work of Mbembe the stable interpretation of reality is disputed, especially when related to the understanding of that which is considered 'other'. Often, in such attempts to capture and gain understanding of that which is not like us, an idolatrous understanding of the real is proposed based on the limited viewpoint belonging to the superior regarded interpreter. Nonetheless, there is a difference between the thinkers, where Caputo is struggling with the idolatrous theological real —the theological Other— and its relation to reality, Mbembe is struggling with the idolatrous human real —the human 'other'— and its relation to reality. This difference not only affects the interpretation of the real —a theological versus an anthropological way— but also the way in which the real is assessed in relation to reality. Caputo highly values and

²²⁸ Referring back to the question asked at the beginning of this study concerning the practical implementation of the kingdom of God, namely who are both the 'we' on the receiving end of the call for the kingdom of God to come and the subjects giving and receiving the works of mercy? in: Caputo, *The Folly of God*, 122-127.

wants to safeguard the alterity of the theological Other, because it is a holy or sacred event that breaks into our human reality disrupting those in power. Alternatively, Mbembe wants to move beyond the observation that there is a human 'other' in the shared human reality; the perceived otherness is, according to him, the result of arbitrary power relations in the formation of knowledge that contradicts the fact that all humans co-belong to one common world. In Mbembe's description of the genealogy of the human 'other' and its relation to European history and thinking, he shows how the 'other' functions, being everything that is not 'us' and in that sense not real or an unreality. This process reached a culmination point in the Black Man, who became a sacred unreality in the constitution of the normative rational European subject. This process of differentiation between human beings aimed at the denial of a common reality of all human beings, thus, has historically opened the way to slavery, colonization, and racism.

This distinction between different realities and the connection of the reality of the 'other' with race is, according to Mbembe, based on problematic constructs not on facts. Mbembe argues that while race presents itself as a fact, in truth it is constructed in the disconnection from all limitations of human reality. In this construction of race, a transgression takes place of the limitations of the finite reality, by closing the fundamental open-endedness of reality and substituting it with the closed reality of appearances and invented facts. Race is "useful fiction" or a "phantasmagoric construction" to classify the otherness of the 'other', turning the 'other' into "schizophrenic objects" that establish the power of the failing "I".²²⁹ This process of the reduction of the 'other' to the closed reality of appearances, leaves the 'other' behind in an intransitive reduced position that is similar to death. Mbembe, however, argues that in our current timeframe this position, which he calls the 'Black condition', is no longer limited to Africa or the Black Man; instead, this mythological practice by the imperial or economic powers of this world is widespread. Whenever capitalistic or imperialistic powers reduce the identity of the 'other' into some-thing that is not really real, to subject and exploit a human-being, we encounter the Black condition.²³⁰

The just described Black condition in which the 'other' becomes a construct —based on appearances and invented facts— means that "there is no real [...] that is not at the same time [...] the product of dramaturgy."²³¹ This means that the production of the 'other' is the result of the interchanging dynamic between imagination and reality, in which the created image becomes a fact because the appearance of the 'other' is invested with a content that exceeds it.²³² This dynamic

²²⁹ Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, 11-12, 31-32.

²³⁰ Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, 4.

²³¹ Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, 130.

²³² Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, 130.

became particularly visible in the colonies, in which the colonizer had the power to imagine the identity of the colonized and invested “that imagination with a reality that became, as a result, objective not because such a reality actually existed as described, but because people acted from and in accordance with what they took to be real—and, by acting, produced a materiality.”²³³

Subsequently, the arbitrary power of the colony allowed for both the finite reality to be understood as unreality or a void, but also to materialize an imaginary reality in “the power to posit every thing represented and representable as possible and realizable.”²³⁴

The question can now be raised: What is really real when it comes down to the reality of the ‘other’? To answer this question, Mbembe’s treatise on the history of racism, slavery, colonization, and the widespread Black condition, has described that the reality of the ‘other’ is turned into fiction and the fiction of the ‘other’ is turned into reality, resulting in a total indifference towards the limitations belonging to our human reality.²³⁵ This last process—in which fiction of the ‘other’ is turned into reality—makes the relation between the real and reality even more ambiguous, it is what Mbembe calls the rise of a shadow or nocturnal economy in the (post)colonial context. In which the collision of fiction and reality is not only confined to the reduction of the subject into the closed unreality of appearances, but in return an identification process starts in which the subject identifies itself with its imposed shadow, making ambiguous, even to the subject itself, what is still real. All in all, both Mbembe and Caputo in their analyses reveal the idolatrous objectification and appropriation of the ‘other’/Other, and furthermore, reveal the impossible separation of the reality of the ‘other’ from the shared human reality given that “there is only one world.”²³⁶

The difference is that for Mbembe, who is formed by the context of postcolonial sub-Saharan Africa, to object to the construction of the human ‘other’ is based on the actual experience of being ‘other’ in his analysis of the Black Man. This analysis shows that the objectified ‘other’ in its disconnection from reality becomes a mix of fact and fiction that serves as a way to reinforce the power of the powerful in this world at the cost of negating the powerless in this world to an empty state of nothingness. Thus, Mbembe in tracing the constructs of race, the Black Man, and Africa reveals that, historically, the identity of both the Western subject and those who were categorised as

²³³ Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, 59.

²³⁴ Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, 188.

²³⁵ The postcolonial states are still in a complex way interwoven with the colonial bedding of the violent arbitrariness that concerns reality, meaning that many of these states have recreated an arbitrary reality, through “administrative and bureaucratic practices” in which their own surplus of meaning is imposed and institutionalized. The postcolony, therefore, is “a regime of unreality (*regime du simulacre*)” because it tries to impose one stable mythological system of signs, images, and markers of power, in the “chaotically pluralistic” postcolony. in: Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, 103-108.

²³⁶ It is Mbembe himself also uses the word ‘idolatry’ in the context of race: “[...] the idolatry of race.” in: Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, 159, 182.

'other' were in their relation to reality built upon reduction, negation, fantasy, and its doubles, making the earthly reality and the position of the 'other' within that reality very layered and complex.

By contrast, Caputo's interpretation of the intertwining of the reality of the Other with the earthly reality in the call to bring the kingdom of God into existence, focuses first of all on safeguarding the disruptive alterity of the godly event without neglecting our earthly suffering and needs.²³⁷ In Caputo's theopoetics à la Martha, he offers to come to grips with the real world while simultaneously reaching for the beyond; nevertheless, he does seem to disregard the complexity of this world. As described in this paragraph, Mbembe has shown quite convincingly, that the reality of this world is blurred in the reduction, negation, and doubling of reality, to the extent that even the subject does not know what is really real anymore. Therefore, Mbembe's perspective questions what exactly the real world of Martha is that we come to grips with, given that at least in the postcolonial context of sub-Saharan Africa the earthly human reality is more ambiguous than Caputo articulates. Therefore, speaking about the earthly and godly reality —assuming that there is an intertwining between the two— cannot be disconnected from its context and political power relations, because they shape and frame the category of reality that in all its ambiguity underlies the call for the kingdom of God to-come.

5.3 A CRITIQUE OF THE BODY: THE ECOUNTER BETWEEN MBEMBE AND CAPUTO

Mbembe's work is in many ways an appeal to make space for the body in all its different shapes and forms, being the refutation to accept the reduction of human bodies into "matters of appearance, skin, color".²³⁸ This appeal is the result of Mbembe's analysis that historically the body of the native was gazed upon by the slave trader or the colonizer. Based on its physical appearances, the native was considered to lack the rational capacity necessary to transcend their own body. In this arbitrary judgment of the slave trader or the colonizer, the valuation of the body was equalized to the bodies' physical appearances. Furthermore, in the continuation of Mbembe's analysis he connects this emphasis on the native's physical appearances in defining its value, with the differentiation between people based on race. A racially defined body is also invented and fixed in the gaze, judgement, fantasies, gestures, and attitudes of Western (White) subjects. Race, as said, is not something that "exist, as a physical, anthropological, or genetic fact," but is a mythological figure of the real, a

²³⁷ Not to neglect the fact that Caputo himself states that the intertwining of the earthly reality with the godly reality is risky business.

²³⁸ Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, 2.

construct to justify the power of the racial superior. Thus, the inability of those 'who are gazed upon' to transcend their own physical appearances, reveals the "funerary power" of the colonizer or the racial superior in their diminishing of the body of the native or the racially 'other' to a state of "death without resurrection."²³⁹ Mbembe seeks to move beyond this arbitrary decision to declare certain bodies death, by creating in his work a resurrective space for the diversity of all bodies.

In the previous paragraph, this study described that the reduction of the 'other' into the spectral reality of the body, in effect, had not been stopped there but continued to develop once the subject gazed upon started to identify itself with the spectral reality of the body. Making the body of the 'other' the location of a paradox, on the one hand, this body is, in the gaze of rational subjects, transformed into an image of fantasies and mere appearances, and, on the 'other' hand, paradoxically, the subject responds by acting and performing according to the expectations that come with this gaze bringing the body of appearances into actual being. By linking this paradox with the African Black body, we come to realize that the created image of the African Black body reduces the fullness of this body into an object of appearances, while alternatively the identification of the African subject with these appearances, by the power of performativity, develops into an autonomous body with "a living, figurative surface".²⁴⁰ Mbembe, therefore, concludes that in this process of (self-)perception the body of the African Black subject is united with the gaze or the head of someone else, usually the Western rational subject, making "the body—a network of images and heterogeneous reflections, a compact density, liquid, osseous, shadowy, the concrete form of the disproportion and dislocation that is always on the verge of exceeding the real."²⁴¹ Mbembe wonders if such a paradoxical body can be the basis for any form of singularity, given that the subject does not have full ownership of this body of appearances; instead, the body of appearances has become an autonomous plane and reality.

The absence of full ownership of your own body, of being fully human in that regard, resulted in the struggle to regain ownership of the body. The Black liberation movement utilized in this struggle "imagery resources from Christianity."²⁴² These resources are not so much based on the dogmas of Christianity or the institute of the church, but on the figure of Christ.²⁴³ Particularly, the image of his resurrection after the horrid deconstruction of Christ's crucified body, signifies the hope that a human being can "be pulled from the concrete experience of death" because "the final truth of death is in resurrection—in the infinite possibility of life."²⁴⁴ This image of resurrection offers hope to those who

²³⁹ Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, 128.

²⁴⁰ Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, 133.

²⁴¹ Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, 133-134, 140.

²⁴² Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, 174.

²⁴³ Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, 174-175.

²⁴⁴ Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, 175-176.

are declared death based on their appearances and provides “the liberation of the body and of sensorial plenitude [...] the resurrection represents entry into another world [...] its power of suspending history—and of transcending history.”²⁴⁵ This Christian perspective brings the liberating realization that in the end all bodies deserve to share in the life that God has envisioned for us as human beings, freeing in this perspective the body from all differentiation based on appearances. For Mbembe, this results in the conclusion there are not different realities concerning the body, in the end, there is only one world which belongs to all the differently shaped bodies and we are left with the responsibility to restore and repair access to this world, especially for those bodies that are excluded in their (self-)reduction to appearances.²⁴⁶ It requires an “ethic of restitution and reparation” in which we take responsibility to recognize “the other’s share”, and thus, to allow every body in this world to be fully human again.²⁴⁷

For the most part, Mbembe’s analysis of the body coincides with the theopoetics that Caputo proposes. This is mainly reflected in the way that both thinkers object to the distancing power that belongs to the phenomenological gaze of the ‘other’, reducing the body of the ‘other’ into the spectral reality of a racially different object or thing. The two thinkers, however, have a different reasoning that leads them to this conclusion. For Caputo, based as it is on the paradigmatic body of Jesus Christ, the singularity of the nothings and nobodies in this world calls in their intransitive powerlessness for the impossible metanoetic transformation from death to life. In other words, the sight of a destructed and intransitive body reveals a vulnerability that is not solemnly powerless but releases in vulnerability a call for life, for healing, and divine transformation, that breaks into the life of the autonomous subject and shatters their autonomy calling for the kingdom to-come. Thus, in contrast to phenomenology, in which to perceive the bareness of the singular stripped body of the ‘other’ means to look at the body of the ‘other’ in a voyeuristic way, Caputo wants to do justice in his antiphenomenological category of the body of flesh to the singularity of the broken ‘other’ and the disruptive character of the obligation that arises from the sight of this powerless singular ‘other’.

The perspective of the Black body in the postcolonial sub-Saharan African context that Mbembe offers complicates the encounter with the singular ‘other’ that Caputo describes. In this context, deconstruction of the body does not simply mean to be reduced to an improper or intransitive body of flesh, but the reduction of the body releases a multiplicity of bodily realities working at the same time. In the postcolonial context, the Black body has often lost himself/herself in this multiplicity of bodily identities, by performing a spectral reality that breaks the given autonomy of

²⁴⁵ Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, 224.

²⁴⁶ Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, 181-182.

²⁴⁷ Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, 182.

owning a body. This contextual observation makes Mbembe's perspective sensitive to the complexities that surround the singularity of the body.²⁴⁸ As said in chapter three, Caputo's understanding of the antiphenomenological category of the body of flesh does not articulate a context, and this deficiency in contextual and embodied voices means that he omits to recognize the complexity that surrounds the singularity of the body. This is important to note, because Mbembe's perspective muddles with the establishment of the powerless identity of the singular body as described by Caputo. While Caputo considers that the hermeneutical process of meaning-giving to the body should be structurally open to the future and transformation to avoid normative universalism; he disregards that the body is often already an ambiguous plane of heterogeneous images and content projected onto the body, resulting in questions regarding the meaning of the body itself. What does the subject him/herself see when it looks at its own body, what do we exactly see when we see the crucified and deconstructed body, and what, if any, can this ambiguous plane that surrounds the body be calling for? Thus, Mbembe shows that the site of the (deconstructed) body is an obscure site of bodily identity, and therefore, also a problematic site to locate the call for transformation, or Caputo's call for the kingdom to-come.

5.4 A CRITIQUE OF TIME: THE ECOUNTER BETWEEN MBEMBE AND CAPUTO

In this final paragraph on the work of Mbembe, we turn to the exploration of the hermeneutics of time in the (post)colony. Mbembe, in proceeding with his interest for the contextual notions of time, does not move into the complicated debates that surround memory, history, and forgetting; instead, his goal is to think "through the modes of inscription of the colony in the Black text."²⁴⁹ Mbembe establishes that there is a range of ways to remember the colony, but he is particularly interested "in those aspects of Black memory of the colony that transform memory into a site of loss, on the one hand, and a place where debts are settled, on the other."²⁵⁰ The act of remembering in Black memory, therefore, can be best described as a critique of time. Criticizing the way time was handled in social theory and history that did not "account for time as lived, not

²⁴⁸ In the analysis of the work of the Nigerian writer Amos Tutuola, Mbembe argues that: "The body, here, is an anatomical reality, an assemblage of organs, each with a specific function. As such, it is not the basis of any kind of singularity that would enable one to declare once and for all, absolutely: 'I possess my body'. True, it belongs to me. But this belonging is not absolute; I can, in fact, hire out parts of my body to others." Which leads Mbembe to the more general conclusion that: "It is the deployment of the organs, their malleability and their more or less autonomous power, that makes the body forever phantasmagoric. The meaning of the body, then, is tightly linked to its functioning in the world and the power of fantasy." in: Mbembe, *The Critique of Black Reason*, 143-144.

²⁴⁹ Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, 103.

²⁵⁰ Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, 104.

synchronically or diachronically, but in its multiplicity and simultaneities, its presence and absences, beyond the lazy categories of permanence and change beloved of so many historians.”²⁵¹ Thus, the attested Black time in Black texts that Mbembe analyses, is neither something that exists in itself or on its own, nor something that can be understood as “succession of the present”; rather, Black time is the result of the complex and ambiguous relationships that we uphold “with things, with the world, or with the body and its doubles.”²⁵²

This means that to understand the working of Black time requires a sensibility to the way the Black subject experiences things and how the existence of the subject shapes the working of time. This close relation between the notion of time and the experience of the Black subject—in his/her location, historical context, conditions, and racial formation—undermines an understanding of time that is predictable and coherent. By contrast, the ambiguity of (post)colonial life discloses the contingent and provisional nature that belongs to Black time, criticizing any understanding of time that omits to consider the lived experience of (Black) bodies. In consequence, the lived time that Mbembe discerns in Black texts, calls into question time that consists out of stability and rupture. Alternatively, the observed lived time by Mbembe functions on three postulates: (1) “an interlocking of presents, pasts, and futures that retain their depths”; (2) “this time is made up of disturbances, of a bundle of unforeseen events”; and this (3) “time is not irreversible [...]”²⁵³ This makes the Black Man, Africa, and in fact all of us, rooted in a multiplicity of times. This array of temporalities is what Mbembe calls the ‘time of entanglement’.

Such an understanding of time reveals that it is important in the process of decolonization to break with the repetitive and sequential notions of time, in recognition of the lived ambiguous experience of time. The Black liberation fighter and psychiatrist Fanon already described how the construction of the identity of the native or the colonized is largely about the stabilization of their identity outside of time, by means of a repetition without difference. Thus, regaining ownership of the Black body has everything to do with the opening of time to its multiplicity, because in time we are offered the possibility of “creation and self-creation”²⁵⁴ In recognizing the entanglement of time, everyone receives a possibility to create and become human again, “[...] time as the permanent possibility of the emergence of the not yet.”²⁵⁵ Lastly, Mbembe acknowledges that the embeddedness

²⁵¹ Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, 8.

²⁵² Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, 121.

²⁵³ Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, 16.

²⁵⁴ Mbembe, Achille, *Decolonizing Knowledge and the Question of the Archive* (a public lecture given at WISER in 2015)

<http://wiser.wits.ac.za/system/files/Achille%20Mbembe%20%20Decolonizing%20Knowledge%20and%20the%20Question%20of%20the%20Archive.pdf> (accessed 27th of March 2017) 12.

²⁵⁵ Mbembe, *Decolonizing Knowledge and the Question of Archive*, 14.

of time in the human experience makes our temporal entanglement necessarily paradoxical, because it is “never fully anchored in the present, nor is it ever completely cut off from the past or the future.”²⁵⁶ The Black novel, therefore, always speaks of time in the plural, in which there is space for the co-occurrence and ambiguity of both “disjuncture and simultaneity” that belongs to the subjective experience of time.²⁵⁷

In chapter four we explored the hermeneutics of time belonging to the kingdom of God in the work of Caputo. Caputo’s hermeneutics of time was inspired by the religious interpretation of the Derridean incoming of the *tout autre*. Such an understanding of time as time to-come requires a fundamental openness towards the future, the unconditional incoming of the ‘other’ cannot be fixated. In locating transcendence in the intensification of earthly time, Caputo manages to deal both with the desire for the beyond of where we cannot go and avoids the idolatry of containing the godly ‘other’. The otherness of the event in the name (of) God is kept holy in the infinite incoming of the event, which in turn leaves us humans hanging on a prayer; praying for the godly gift of time.

Mbembe and Caputo discern in a very similar fashion the need for the incoming of time, because in the open-endedness of time we are offered the possibility of transformation beyond our current identities. For Mbembe, this possibility of creation and re-creation is important, because in the history of the Black Man the placement of identity outside of time was an effective strategy to control the ‘other’.²⁵⁸ Analogously, Caputo argues that from the intransitive position of the nothings and nobodies of this world a call goes out for life in circumstances of death, a call for the kingdom to-come. Thus, the aim for life and a future for every human being in the work of both authors is similar, but nonetheless, their motives are different: Caputo’s motive is religious in the longing for the impossible kingdom of God to-come, while Mbembe’s motive is anthropological and political in his longing to build a shared world, which for him means to “restore the humanity stolen from those who have historically been subjected to processes of abstraction and objectification.”²⁵⁹ The difference in motive and discourse of both scholars reveals above all a different perspective on the structure of time. For Caputo, the working of time —in its structure— reveals the quasi-transcendence of the impossible in the daily gift of time. This messianic understanding of the structure of time, and thus of understanding, is unconditionally open-ended, it nevertheless seems to be a structure that gives only

²⁵⁶ To illustrate this, Mbembe refers to the body: the body, while being in the present, shows physical traces or scars. Seeing those traces and scars, he argues, is to remember “events of the past.” in: Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, 122-124.

²⁵⁷ Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, 122.

²⁵⁸ The importance of the possibility to re-create identity is not limited to the Black Man but it is important for all human-beings who suffer under the widespread Black Condition.

²⁵⁹ Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, 182.

space for one dimension of time (in-coming) which makes that Caputo's deconstructive structure of time is insensitive to the lived or contextual experience of multiple times. By contrast, the structure of time that Mbembe observes is not limited to one dimension; instead, he argues, based on Black texts, that (Black) time is relational which results in the experienced entanglement of time. In other words, (Black) time is the messiness of lived experiences is the co-occurrence of a multiplicity of times: amongst others, the incoming of time, the absence of time, the disjuncture in time, and the simultaneity of time.

CONCLUSION

In the introduction of this study the research question that has driven this study was formulated: What are the contributions and problems of Caputo's deconstructed kingdom of God, in relation to the postcolonial perspective of Mbembe? Throughout the five chapters of this study it was the aim to find an answer to this research question by way of an academic exploration of Caputo's and Mbembe's work. In the first chapter, some time and space were given to outline the methodology of this study, because in the choice of feminist standpoint methodology the direction of this study was determined and the objective was articulated to diversify the discourse that surrounds the theology of Caputo. The subsequent second, third, and fourth chapters focused on gaining understanding by reflecting on the vision of kingdom of God that is laid out in the theological work of Caputo. In the final chapter, we explored the work of Mbembe and brought it into critical conversation with Caputo's understanding of the kingdom of God. In the current conclusion, we will draw this research to a close by returning to the main research question and carefully formulating an answer that is based on the findings of the different chapters in this study.

The best way to summarize the deconstructed kingdom of God that Caputo proposes is to understand it as the excess that remains after the idolatrous theistic God and its corresponding kingdom are crucified. The word 'crucified' reveals that the cross in Caputo's theo-poetics of the kingdom fulfils a central role. Inspired by Paul, he argues that the cross is the place where all the lines of Christianity intersect, that in the contracting body of Jesus Christ on the cross we find the perverse core of a religion that fully engages with the risks of the world. The fact that the body of Jesus contracts into flesh, while God does nothing seems to both insiders and outsiders at the time —and still— absolutely foolish. However, in the crucified flesh of Jesus we are offered a *Vorstellung* of the fact that the event of God fully engages, in a powerless way, with the risks of the world. At the same time, however, the excess beyond his death reflects the otherness that belongs to the powerless event of God.²⁶⁰ In other words, the image of the cross deconstructs the idea that Jesus had an intentional and autonomous body all the way until his death; instead, his powerless and intransitive flesh is paradigmatic for understanding the event of God. In the crucifixion, the body of Jesus —like God and theology— gets crucified, breaking with any powerful interpretation of God in classical theology in which God is an almighty, omnipotent, and all-knowing power.

²⁶⁰ *Vorstellung* refers to the Hegelian understanding of the theological truth, being the narrational or pictorial middle space of truth. A *Vorstellung* is an image of the truth but never the Absolute truth.

As Jesus Christ died a painful death with the nothings and nobodies of this world on the cross, his flesh became transparent to the powerless nature of the event of God. This weakness of the event of God displays that God is solemnly a vocative order, calling upon us for the kingdom of God to-come into being. The event of God calls upon us with an infinite insistence that transformation is needed in our human existence, calling for something different for all people like Jesus who are out of power and long for life. Caputo's theopoetics of the kingdom deconstructs the stable play of differences that surround the understanding of the kingdom, making the kingdom not a certain place at a certain time for certain people but a sacred anarchy that adheres to the infinite incoming of singularity in siding with each person that is out of power. To prevent that such a weak and foolish understanding of the kingdom of God will get caught, after all, in human power play, Caputo emphasizes the importance of the kingdom being not yet real. The kingdom's messianic and open-ended structure of time displays the structure of the event of God that calls upon human beings with the impossible task to bring the kingdom to-come into existence. The impossible mission to bring the call for the kingdom into actual realized existence, means that a gap remains for the disruptive and unforeseeable character of the singular 'other', who reflects the complete otherness of the event of God. Beyond our human power play, the call for the kingdom of God to-come is the call to let the otherness of the event of God rule, not in the future but today, because the given time of the day is all the time we need. It is the prayer for the gift of the newness of each day, in which we are released from the interpretation of ourselves in the past, the circumstances of death that we are surrounded with, and moreover, we are released from the anxiety of our future (death). The merit of the kingdom is the realization that today is all we need. In the newness of each day we are no longer ruled by either the past or the future, rather we are free to re-interpret our identity in the light of the promise of time that belongs to the coming of the kingdom of God.

All in all, Caputo's understanding of the kingdom of God as a call for the impossible which interrupts and contradicts the powers of this world is, in its liberating aim very fitting for any context in which people are suppressed or made outsiders. In that sense, Caputo's theopoetics can be a major contribution to the postcolonial sub-Saharan African context, where the economic, political, poverty, and identity problems still reduce many people to the fringes of society. It is this emphasis on the need for a liberating perspective —analogous to the perspectives that can be found in theologies of the cross, liberation theology and postcolonial theology— that links Caputo's theopoetics of the kingdom of God and Mbembe's critical analysis of the postcolonial sub-Saharan context. In their work, both authors explicitly break with the violent categories of universality that belonged to modernity, aiming at the emancipation of the powerless body of flesh that is named 'other' and offering such bodies in the re-interpretation of identity —Caputo's structurally open-ended and future-oriented

understanding of identity and Mbembe's understanding of shared human identity that is rooted in the way we maintain a relationship with the totality of the living world— a chance to live fully as human beings again. This means for both authors the deconstruction of the stable play of differences —a repetition without difference— in the process of meaning-giving of the body (a sign), gives way to the open-ended structure of understanding categories of identity and the whole of humanity, offering in this deconstruction, a resurrective space for all people who were and are marginalized, including those people in the postcolonial sub-Saharan African context.

Nevertheless, problems can be attested in the encounter of Caputo's kingdom of God and the postcolonial sub-Saharan perspective of Mbembe. These problems cannot be reduced solely to the difference in discourse —theology vs. postcolonial theory— but are the result of Caputo's portrayal of the call for the kingdom of God itself, one that lacks for the most part the articulation of context and the disrupting input of marginalized voices, suggesting in that sense, a certain universalizing tendency in the call of the kingdom. The call for the kingdom to come assumes the presupposition that the identity of both the 'we' on the receiving end of the call for Caputo's kingdom to-come and the bodies that receive the work of mercy, are clearly recognizable in the dichotomy of powerful bodies and powerless flesh that Caputo works with. If anything, the analysis of Mbembe criticizes such a dichotomy from the postcolonial sub-Saharan African context, displaying that ambiguous identity constructs have and still are reducing or negating the identity of the 'other' to a state of powerlessness and marginalization that denies our shared human identity. Consequently, the identity of the 'other' becomes a network of images and heterogeneous reflections that serves, first off, to reinforce the identity of the powerful subject, making the identification of the powerful and powerless in Caputo's theology not as innocent and self-evident as his theopoetics seem to suggest.

Caputo's deconstructed kingdom of God which in the call to come into existence wants to remain open to the needs of the singular 'other', is, therefore, problematic in two ways. Firstly, his theopoetics is formulated in a western academic context. This specific context in which his theopoetics was born, does result in the —unconscious? — identification with those in power as showed in the examples of chapter three. This leads me to the observation that although Caputo does not engage with people in these 'powerless' contexts, he nevertheless argues that from his 'powerful' outside position how to understand the needs of those who are powerless. Caputo himself conceptualizes, as a phenomenological gazer, the context of the powerless and conceives how these people can be empowered, namely as "the kingdom of God weakens into the works of mercy."²⁶¹ This conceptualization results from the fact that Caputo is informed by a context of Western academics

²⁶¹ Caputo, *The Folly of God*, 124.

that is clearly on the powerful end of the spectrum of power relations. I would argue, therefore, that Caputo's theopoetics is an example of well-intended thinking in the name of other people, and in doing so it does not take the reality of every human-being in its multiplicity, fully seriously. Thus, the kingdom of God that weakens into works of mercy is not so much an empowerment process that is happening between human-beings, but rather, a traditional and maybe even colonial aid program in which the rich feed the poor based on their own well-intended but dominating perspectives, categories of identity, and conditions.

Secondly, the encounter with Mbembe's postcolonial sub-Saharan perspective muddles with the clear-cut boundaries of reality, the body, and time in Caputo's kingdom of God. In Mbembe's genealogy of concepts like the Black Man and Africa, he displays not only that reality is layered and complex, but also that bodily identity is obscure, and that Black time in its co-occurrence can be both disjuncture and simultaneity. This further confirms, in this historical analysis something which the utilized feminist standpoint methodology in the beginning of this study already argued, namely that location and power relations influences our understanding and the formation of knowledge. The multiplicity and ambiguity that Mbembe's description of (identity) categories in the postcolonial sub-Saharan African context offers, breaks open and criticizes not only Caputo's understanding of (bodily) identity but also his understanding of reality and time. Hereby, pointing out that Caputo's theopoetics of the kingdom of God is built upon categories that universalize the experience of the Western academic context, without engaging fully with the multiplicity and ambiguity of (identity) categories in the shared human experience including people in marginalized contexts. This reveals that, if Caputo's theopoetics of the kingdom of God wants to be liberating, and thus, to contradict the powers of this world in the context of postcolonial sub-Saharan Africa, it cannot do so without the contextual voices from the ground who will infinitely correct and disrupt the categories that Caputo uses as well as his understanding of the kingdom of God.

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