



feral feminisms

Feminist Forms of Submission

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(Un)Making the Dominator: Does Earth Consent?

Michael Paramo

This article uses a fusion of art, poetry, and traditional analytical writing to critique the human's ideology and practices of domination over the Earth. While interconnectedness is framed by modern coloniality as backward and submissive, domination over the Earth has been positioned as a rational and divine right of the human. This piece is organized into four vignettes that investigate questions of colonial violence against the Earth and the Other. It plays on notions of domination and submission that are associated with BDSM practices to provoke reflections on what the human's roleplay as a dominator in a chaotic universe means.



Figure 1: Michael Paramo, “no shame,” digital art, 2019. **Accessibility Text:** The silhouette of a multi-colored figure is centered in a black abstract space facing away from the viewer with its hands restrained behind it. Two white abstract shapes loosely resembling hooks or keys juxtapose either side of the figure.

I began, bound by my own thoughts...



I. The Birth of the Dominator

“Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it” (Gen. 1:28). This Bible verse was interpreted as a command from God in the Christian imagination and used as divine justification for colonialism by some European powers, perhaps most notably in seventeenth-century England (Harrison 2005). Different interpretations of the original Hebrew text argue that the Bible actually recommends a more nuanced relationship with the Earth than the word subdue offers in English (Benner 2023). Furthermore, Genesis 2 of the Bible has been described as offering a different perspective on our relationality with the Earth—one of (inter)dependency (Hiebert 1996). However, it is Genesis 1 that proved to be far more influential over how humans have conducted themselves in the world, so much so that it has been described as a discursive force that has “largely determined the West’s relationship with the natural world and its domination over other cultures through colonial rule” (Paul 2010, 23). Colonialism disseminated the notion that colonizers should become the rightful dominators of the Earth, which became the popular view in the West by the nineteenth century (Carman-Brown 2019, 42–43). Biblical references were not only influential in perpetuating colonial claims of rightful domination over the Earth, but also in laying the groundwork on which Western science was established (Montuschi 2010). It is through the collaboration of the Christian worldview and the logics of Western science that the human as dominator was enlightened or born.

Rather than a universal category for all people, human came to be established firstly as a category for a particular type of person. This is because its architects perceived themselves as the light bearers of civilization, who were rationally and divinely destined to create a new “ordered world” (Ferreira da Silva and Bradley 2021, 2). In building his superiority complex, the enlightened human expelled Others from being equal to himself, marking Others as irrational, backward, uncivilized, savage, or otherwise non-human. As colonial expansion and domination over non-Christian lands bolstered the human’s belief in his own superiority, the authority of the Other was brought into a state of submission and designated to be undeserving of human rights (Becker 2018, 39). He pronouns are used here to emphasize how the human was framed in patriarchal terms, where masculinity was conflated with rational order and femininity with the irrational wilderness. The non-human Other was positioned as destined for submission because of a failure to follow the Bible’s command to subdue the wilderness (i.e., to exploit it for individualized benefit). Such a perception was signified in manifest destiny and became the dominant view of Euro-immigrant America toward Indigenous Peoples (Dodge 2013, 61). The colonized peoples of the world remain largely bounded in a purgatory of oscillation between the suppression of acknowledging colonial violence (Acuña 2017, vii) and the superficial recognition of atrocities by colonial powers who refuse to take actual steps toward decolonization (Tuck and Yang 2012).

*Claiming control over
“Earthly submission”
No revelation, but look!
You’re all bound up
Playing mind games
You thought otherwise
Now see yourself
“The Human”*

*Collapse into the Other
Side of everywhere*

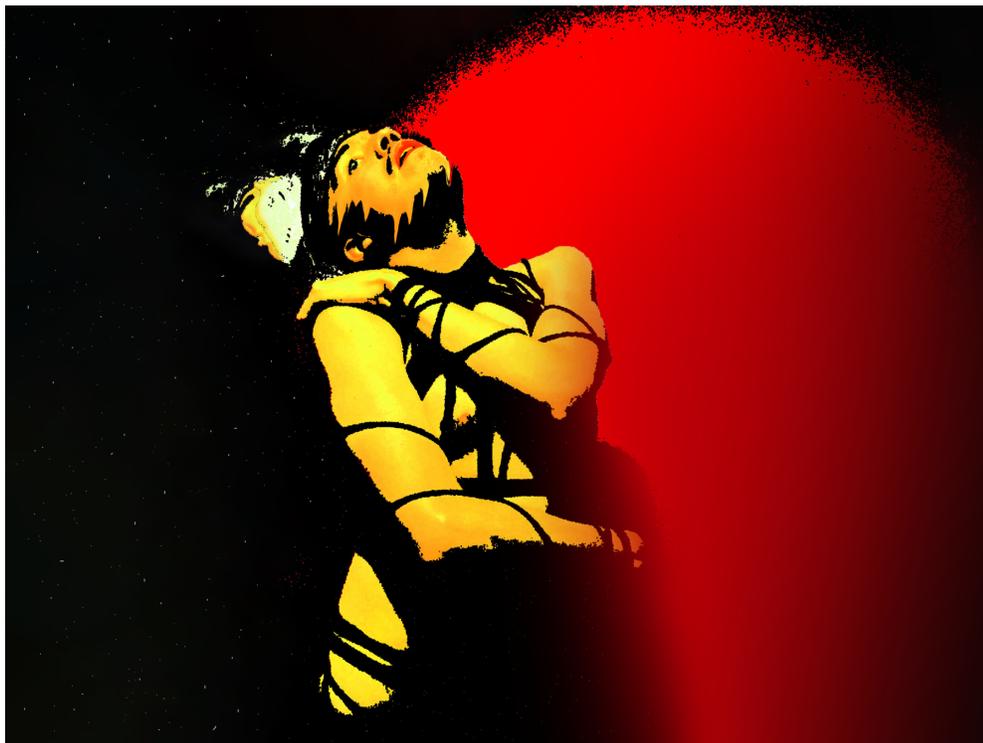


Figure 2: Michael Paramo, “not so hot anymore,” digital art, 2024. **Accessibility Text:** A figure looks upward in a distressed state while standing next to a large red circle seeming to emit an aura. The figure holds itself and appears to be bound in a black twine-like material that is wrapped around its body. The figure’s face appears to be in a state of melting.

Then, melting in my own mind...

II. A Rational Patriarchal Domination

Of the many examples that illustrate the human’s belief in his rational superiority, the following passage written by a German theologian in the nineteenth century perhaps does so most clearly: “A childish, morally-unripe spirit cannot, it is true, dominate nature at the will of its irrational whims,—but we speak here only of the rational spirit” (Wuttke 1874, 64). While domination over nature was construed as *rational* behavior, any modus operandi that was not interpreted in such terms became viewed as irrational submission. Such a worldview of rational domination became a powerful force in influencing human behavior, and the human increasingly dedicated his efforts toward constructing new technologies to subdue nature to his vision. In the eyes of



the dominator, the mind is understood as “the center of intelligence,” while some Indigenous worldviews conversely position intelligence as originating from “suspending thought” (Mercurieff 2016, 3). From this allegedly *irrational* perspective, the mind might be seen less as a liberator from submission and more akin to a cage when lifted on a pedestal: “trapped in our minds... we do not consider how this has coloured our world” (Mercurieff 2016, 184). This consideration flips the notion of domination and submission on its head, as an obsession with rationality can be interpreted as an experience of submission to one’s own mind rather than as a pathway to rational domination. Nevertheless, colonial authorities historically carried forth the idea of the mind as a liberator from submission.

Civilizational progress in fact was framed in terms of “the domination of mind over matter” (Meadows 1856, 581–82). The human viewed the order of the world then as follows: “the animal and the savage will conform to Nature by unconditional submission; while self-conscious man, by understanding Nature and rendering her forces subservient to his wants, forces her to submit to his intelligence” (Heinemann 1893, 45). As a result, it is not surprising to see how being viewed as inherently submissive and inferior by the human also meant that the Other could be treated as *matter* by the colonizer. Within the mind of the rational dominator, submission is not only viewed as inherently inferior, feminine, and irrational, but also as a marker for destruction. This is what has made masculine domination and feminine submission be seen as rational and desirable, whereas masculine submission and feminine domination is seen as irrational and detestable. Discursively placing nature in the feminized submissive position relative to patriarchal authority “served as a justification for the domination of women, animals, and earth” (Gaard 2010, 5). Through such logics, the human established patriarchal authority as rational while simultaneously framing the Other as backward by their submission to what was marked as feminine. Punishments against gendered and sexual transgressions to the colonial patriarchal worldview are performed to “teach both colonial and Indigenous subjects the relational terms of colonial heteropatriarchy” (Morgensen 2011, 37). Through such acts, patriarchal authority was normalized as rational and remains upheld through colonial violence today.

*From hand to hand
Maker to made
I am an old grade
But in these threads
A Mission failed
Because I am not
A huMan remade
I’ll melt away
Corroded locks
And become one
With where I came*



Figure 3: Michael Paramo, “BRAVE,” digital art, 2024. **Accessibility Text:** A masked face stares out of a black shield-shaped opening. Two arms descend downward from the upper corners of the portrait with fingers grabbing the shield. Two eyes, one on each branch, stare forward and provide a sense that they are bearing witness. Two snake-like creatures, one red and one yellow, are entwined as they ascend to the face.

Hardened, I became a shield...

III. The Aesthetics of Domination

When the human framed colonialism as a civilizing mission to rescue the Other from a state of submission to nature, he thereby attempted to make the Other’s submission to his own order justifiable. Thus, the human treated the Other as in his custody or otherwise in submission to him. Such a perspective was reflected in the words of American geologist John Wesley Powell in his essay “Are our Indians Becoming Extinct?:” “the enlightened people who have overwhelmed and destroyed the savagery have, as a body, from the first endeavored to save the savage people and to train them in the better ways of life” (Powell 1893, 352). Such a narrative not only made it appear as though any attempts by the Other to gain autonomy from the colonizer were wild disturbances to the peace of an orderly colonial society, but it also instituted an aesthetic regime over their behaviors and appearances. For the Other to become deemed even partially civilized, submission to the colonial order is a requirement, meaning that steps toward assimilation must be taken. Such indications of civilization are qualified through aesthetic



measures. For example, American Senator Henry Dawes professed that Indigenous Peoples must “wear civilized clothes ... cultivate the ground, live in houses, ride in Studebaker wagons, send children to school, drink whiskey [and] own property” to be deemed civilized (qtd. in Shenk 2008, 54). While such standards have been tweaked slightly, their basis remains instituted. The aesthetics of civilization continue to uphold the either/or constructs of “civilization versus wilderness, culture versus nature, [and] the city versus the country” (Pollan 1998, 273).

In the process, such an aesthetic regime has continued to influence what we are trained to see as desirable, even if this is subconscious. Even relatively minor acts or displays of refusal from total submission to the aesthetic regime can carry harsh consequences. This is because “human dominance over nature is systemically entrenched” in many aspects of modern colonial life (Robbins 2023, 3). Yet, this is despite the fact that the maintenance of such aesthetics by the dominator is contributing to climate chaos: “the statistical reality is that the rational, logical, capitalist, consumerist, industrial, and ‘enlightened’ West is the main cause of climate change” (Yugar et al. 2017, 168). Thus, there is a need to shift our value systems so that we can collectively come to value a different array of behaviors and appearances. Such diversity comprises what we might call an “aesthetics of imperfection” (Gioia 1988, 68). This is because “the modern/colonial project has implied not only control of the economy, the political, and knowledge, but also control over the senses and perception” (Mignolo and Vásquez 2013). Decentering the modern/colonial paradigm then means refocusing our gaze to an experience of being and sensing that the aesthetic regime would classify as disturbed and unsettled (Ferreira da Silva and Bradley 2021). It means transforming ourselves to embrace senses that reflect the nature of the universe, where the human is forced to reckon with his own limitations and enter a new state of (un)becoming.

Branches grasp hold
Weaving arms in fold
A future wilderness
Buries the human
With eyes sprouting
From the Earth
Seeing possibility
Ordered improperly
A false domination
A rising submission

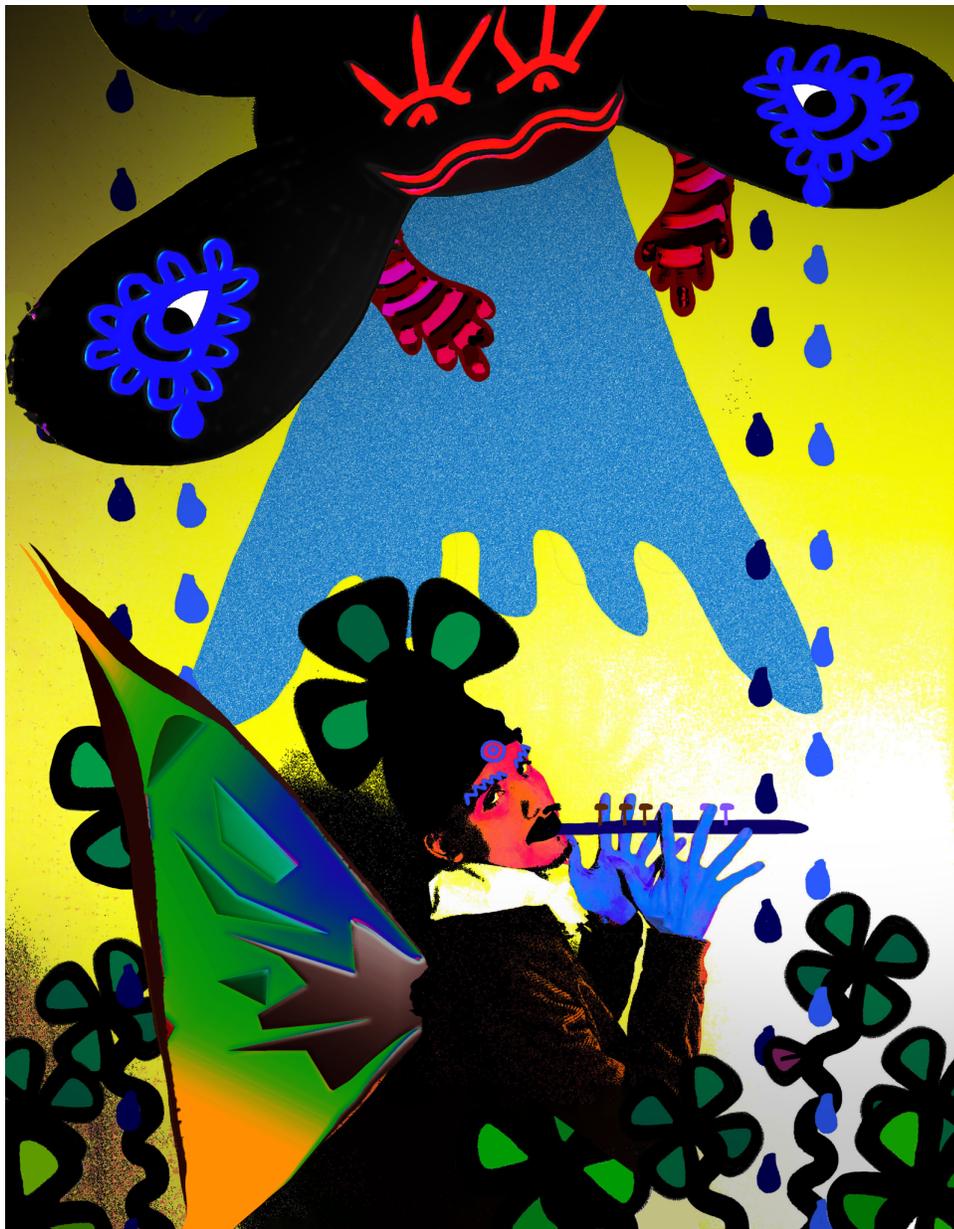


Figure 4: Michael Paramo, “Rainsong,” digital art, 2024. **Accessibility Text:** A figure is surrounded by plants while playing a flute-like instrument. It has butterfly wings and a clover-shaped headpiece. A whimsical UFO-like creature floats above the figure and drops rain down as the figure plays. The flying creature also has arms that reach down toward the figure.

Remembering, the rain nourishes me...



IV. Does Earth Consent? Unmaking the Dominator

Among all of this violence in the pursuit of maintaining domination, what role does consent play? Does the Earth consent? This question is meant to be provocative and even appear preposterous, since modern/colonial ideological domination has made the very question of Earthly consent seem ridiculous. When the Earth was imagined to be nothing more than a domain for the rational human to dominate, its spirit was drained. Thus, if domination over the Earth is seen by the human as his divine right—his manifest destiny—consent of the Earth becomes an irrelevant concern. Yet, the actions carried forth by the human still produce responses from the non-consented. In other words, the Earth responds to the human, even if the human believes his treatment toward the Earth is unworthy of consent. Is climate chaos then a visible reminder of the Earth's rejection of consent? Do these responses unnervingly remind the human of his state of interconnectedness with the Earth that he has neglected to accept? Yet, given the entrenchment of the modern/colonial narrative, would such a reminder not be a fatalistic blow to the human's domination complex? How then could the human continue to claim that his domination is divine right, rational, and that he is superior to the Other? Deconstructing the either/or constructs of the modern/colonial superiority complex requires an ideological transference, since such an action requires the human to release himself from roleplaying as a dominator.

Since domination over nature has been made to be synonymous with modern/colonial understandings of emancipation or freedom, deconstructing this roleplay will be challenging (Jochum 2021). Yet, it is clear that a new relational dynamic apart from the destructive roleplay of domination must be adopted, especially as the Earth reminds us of its rejection of consent. Undertaking such a task requires the human to remember that he is not actually mind over matter, but that he is made of the organic matter of the Earth and exists in a state of deep interconnectedness. However, the modern/colonial project is invested in promoting narratives of domination/submission over interconnectedness, making such an awakening riddled with complications. In other words, there is a politics to how the human remembers: "memory is most certainly constructed and, more important[ly], always political" (Muñoz 2009, 35); "for every story that sees the light of day, untold others remain in the shadows, censored, or suppressed" (Jackson 2013, 31). As this hybrid piece has investigated, modern coloniality is built on a narrative that the human is divinely and rationally destined to be a dominator over the Earth and the Other. Re-storying the human's epistemological and ontological frameworks to be in alignment with Indigenous worldviews—or "walking in a way that is respectful of original peoples, pueblos originarios, and landscapes"—would thus move us toward a decolonial future where the domination/submission mindset has been dismantled (Zepeda 2020, 228). Every reminder of the Earth's rejection of consent to the human's domination complex carries risks towards our fragile existence. To survive, could it be as simple as to say that the human must remember himself, beyond his own mind, for what he really is?

*A song for rain
Washing, come down!
Drown in the realization
Collapse in the wetness
Watch it fall freely*

*But you won't suffocate
Because we are the children
Of water, Earthly
Interconnected with everything
We grow toward Other futures*



Figure 5: Michael Paramo, "Blooming Sun," digital art, 2024. **Accessibility Text:** A figure faces forward with its hands open on either side of its open mouth. The figure wears a flowered garment. Colorful patterns surround the figure. Five black appendages radiate from its head that are reminiscent of a flower. Eyes at the end of each appendage seem to be looking into different portals that appear complex and expansive.

Dreaming, I see other worlds bloom...



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MICHAEL PARAMO is a Ph.D. candidate, artist, and researcher from southern California living on Tongva land. Paramo's debut book *Ending the Pursuit* (2024) is a collection of essays, personal reflections, and poems that investigate questions related to (a)sexuality, (a)romanticism, and (a)genderness in the modern/colonial world. The book was listed as a recommended text in political sociology by Ingram Academic. In 2016, Paramo founded the literary and art journal *AZE*, cited in *Feminist Formations*, *Sexualities*, and Alice Oseman's *Loveless* (2022). Paramo's academic and artistic works reflect on interconnectivity, transformation, and hybridity in the modern/colonial world.