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Resistance and the Radical Social Imaginary: A Genealogy from Eastern European Dissidence to New Social Movements: Connecting the Debates between Activism and Postcolonial, Post-secular and Queer Epistemology and Theology

“Imagine it is socialism and nobody leaves.”

(Christa Wolf)¹

Introduction

Centuries of world-wide resistance against patriarchal behavior in societies, symbolic orders and not least dominant theologies have brought about certain improvements. Only standing on the shoulders of feminist (liberation) theologies, Black theologies, Womanist theologies, Chicana theologies, etc. have we been able to develop our current perspective.² However, up until today racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, nationalism, classism, fundamentalism, etc. have not disappeared from our societies and churches. It also has to be acknowledged that some resistance theories, practices and theologies remain violent. Furthermore, with globalization and neoliberalism we face an even more toxic cocktail of economic, sovereign, and epistemic violence.

Therefore, critical theology has begun to look beyond established liberation theology for new perspectives on resistance and for new visions of improved and less exclusive ways of living together. In the last decades, postcolonial, post-secular and queer theories have begun to play a role in the study of “religion”. All focus on a poststructuralist understanding of power and mechanisms of the production of truth, and the analysis of how in discourses

¹ Thus the well-known East German writer Christa Wolf in her address to the people at Alexanderplatz in Berlin on November 4, 1989: Christa Wolf, *Auf dem Weg nach Tabou: Texte 1990-1994* (Kiepenheuer & Witsch: Köln 1994), 13 (my translation).

² See for instance the 14th International ESWTR Conference “Feminist theology: listening, understanding and giving answer in a secular and plural world,” Salamanca 2011.

(including state institutions like universities, etc.) a particular kind of knowledge is held to be true.

To avoid some pitfalls I find it important to use all three theories together. Postcolonial theory underlines the complex efficacy of epistemic violence and emphasizes that we all live in a world affected by colonialism and under neo-colonial conditions. From the critique of the construction of the “oriental Other” an interdependent approach to the critique of the essentialization and naturalization of the categories of knowledge, “gender”, “race”, “class”, “nation”, “ability” and “religion” emerges. Post-secular theory overcomes the Kantian division between reason and irrational faith. It underlines the importance of religious practices for subject formation, agency, and human flourishing. However, in consequence a de-essentialized category of “religion” is needed for non-faith-based and faith-based approaches to the study of religions. Queer theory underlines that on the one hand the interdependence of nation state, capitalism, and heteronormativity should be considered in the critique of patriarchy and symbolic gender orders. On the other hand, the queering of categories or sites of analysis is a complex epistemological enterprise which tries to revolutionize the (self-)study of the marginalized by undoing those epistemic structures that keep subjects in (universalistic) objectified positions. Queer theory also discusses possible concepts of resistance and futurity.

If we look at more recent resistance theories, it is clear that they are connected with social movements and various activist approaches but in different forms than earlier rights or identity based struggles. Following the crisis of social justice since the financial crisis 2007-2008, the “Arab Spring”, and the Occupy movement, several hundred protest movements have emerged in the last few years in order to protest against increasing economic, social, political, and cultural exclusion. Many of these resistance movements understand themselves to be in the tradition of the dissidence movements in “eastern European” countries.

However, the relationship between protest in eastern European socialist countries and these current protest movements is rarely investigated. It appears to me that dissidence in eastern Europe and its connection with theology, the church, and “religion” is a useful, yet neglected issue, not only for elaborating resistance and vision in (feminist) theology and religious studies, but also for insights into the further development of postcolonial, post-secular and queer theory.

In the peaceful revolutions around the year 1989, the discursive character of resistance and vision becomes obvious, and with it, the need for the historicization and diversification of the understanding of resistance and the danger

of epistemic violence within certain resistance discourses. Furthermore, in the dissidence to totalitarian socialism one could find new alliances among activist groups as well as between activism and theory, and, in a post-secular gesture, alliances between faith-based and non-faith-based protest.

In this essay I will take a closer look at the genealogy of recent forms of resistance and the role of faith-based protest in new social movements. Then I will develop ways to apply postcolonial, post-secular, and queer approaches to theology and religious studies.

The Dissident Protest of 1989: Resistance, Vision, and Theology

The notion of dissidence gained a new political and theoretical momentum with the intensification of the political resistance which emerged in Poland, which was connected with the Perestroika and Glasnost of Mikhail Gorbachev in the Soviet Union and eventually reached all socialist eastern European countries. Dissidence means political resistance within a political system against an elected government (an authoritarian regime, but also “fake democracies”)³ often envisioning a society shaped by greater solidarity.⁴ Some reasons for resistance were the political violence of the totalitarian socialist regimes, the lack of representation, freedom of speech, freedom to travel, governmental accountability, and economic hardships. The methods of resistance vary in different historical epochs and countries and include civil disobedience, peaceful marches, but also the power of the masses of bodies, as in the Occupy movement, or what was later named the “swarm logic” of the multitude.⁵

During the time of eastern dissidence the western democratic states applauded the protest because the socialist states counted as regimes with totalitarian tendencies. The Arab Spring was welcomed in a similar manner in the beginning. In contrast, in western states with their framework of nation statehood, market economy, and a representative democracy, radical, dissident protest has so far been seen as unnecessary because this system was understood as the best possible, in need only of slight improvements which could

³ See Teresa Forcades i Vila’s contribution to this volume.

⁴ See Ulrike Auga, *Intellektuelle – zwischen Dissidenz und Legitimierung: Eine kulturkritische Theorie im Kontext der Transition Südafrikas* (LIT: Münster 2007); Dietrich Beyrau, *Intelligenz und Dissens: Die russischen Bildungsschichten in der Sowjetunion 1917-1985* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht: Göttingen 1993). See also Sabine Hark, *Dissidente Partizipation: Eine Diskursgeschichte des Feminismus* (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt 2005).

⁵ See Michael Hardt / Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (Penguin: London 2004).

be brought about through an elected multi-party system of government and slight interventions by civil society. The new resistance underlines that the liberal idea of the self-regulation of the market in today's societies is false and democracy limited because of capitalism and the exclusive form of the nation state. Furthermore it has been shown that today political transformation towards a just democracy can only be brought about by new social movements.

The shared goal of resistance movements is to overcome the current government. However, the visions of a new collectivity differ greatly. This is a challenge which remains present in current political uprisings. Facing political oppression and economic hardship in East Germany, for example, some aimed for a representative democracy with market economy as in the "West". So the movement turned from chanting "We are *the* people" at demonstrations – a claim to take the power from the regime – to "We are *one* people", implying the goal of reunification. However, numerous others aimed at a society characterized by greater solidarity, going beyond the "actually existing socialism" with planned economy, but also beyond capitalism and the "limited democracy" of the West. Some people, among them theologians such as Wolfgang Ullmann, worked on a new constitution for a more just German state.

When talking about the role of churches, theology, and faith-based organizations in the peaceful revolutions of 1989, it is necessary to differentiate between individual churches and theologians and their involvement in supporting or critiquing the socialist totalitarian governments. Differences among the events in Eastern Bloc countries should be also taken into account.⁶ Generally speaking, a more or less violent secularization was forced onto the churches because of the Marxist-Leninist philosophy which understands religion as "the opium of the people".⁷

I draw on the example of the Protestant Church in East Germany I belong to in order to illustrate how churches and theology were involved in defining the heritage of resistance I alluded to. To oversimplify, one could say that after the Second World War, when two German states had emerged, and after 1961, when

⁶ See Hendrik Bispinck / Jürgen Danyel / Hans-Hermann Hertle / Hermann Wentker (eds.), *Aufstände im Ostblock: Zur Krisengeschichte des realen Sozialismus* (Christoph Links Verlag: Berlin 2004); Detlef Pollack, *Politischer Protest: Politisch alternative Gruppen in der DDR* (Leske und Budrich: Opladen 2000).

⁷ Karl Marx, "Debatten über Preßfreiheit und Publikation der Landständischen Verhandlungen," in: *Rheinische Zeitung* nr. 130, 10 May 1842, Marx-Engels-Werke vol. 1, 47. http://www.mlwerke.de/me/me01/me01_041.htm, 15 May 2014.

the Wall was built and the existence of the two states was considered a fact, the life of the different strands of the church became politically increasingly separated from each other but never split. Some theologians and church officials supported the highly controversial notion of “the Church in Socialism”, which meant a gradual establishment within the state. This approach with its consequently positive attitude toward the fake socialism of East Germany was defended with the pretence at legitimizing East Germany as a truly anti-Fascist and anti-capitalist state.⁸ However, for many, the oppressive and totalitarian character of the East German regime became ever more visible and unbearable. Because the freedom of speech was limited, yet the right to religious freedom was maintained, churches became the only places where it was possible to express one’s opinion.⁹ Some members of the church founded the “Church from below” in order to distance themselves from the church that supported the system. Furthermore, many pastors (also beyond the Church from below) opened their doors for prayers, services, and concerts which were indeed political gatherings. Christa Wolf remembers: “November 4 [1989] on Alexanderplatz – the day of the closest approximation between artists, intellectuals, and other people – was by no means [...] a contingent product of a lucky moment. It was the culmination and climax of a previous history in which authors, theater people, peace groups, and other groups had come into contact and conversation with each other under the roof of the church [...]”.¹⁰ Members of the church encouraged people who were victims of the secret police and state violence.¹¹ Large parts of the Protestant Church in East Germany became the umbrella organization for peaceful resistance. It was in churches where the marches with candles started which brought about the “velvet revolution”.

It is important that this dissidence is seen as resistance *and* vision because bare resistance is in danger to be also violent. The authoritarian self-proclaimedly socialist countries based their education on their interpretation of a Marxist

⁸ See Erhart Neubert, *Geschichte der Opposition in der DDR 1949-1989* (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung: Bonn 1997); Anette Emtmann, *Zivilgesellschaft zwischen Revolution und Demokratie: Die ‘samtene Revolution’ im Lichte Antonio Gramscis Kategorien der ‘società civile’* (Argument: Berlin 1998).

⁹ See Claudia Lepp / Kurt Nowak (eds.), *Evangelische Kirche im geteilten Deutschland 1945-1989/90* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht: Göttingen 2001).

¹⁰ Christa Wolf, “Zwischenrede, 1990,” in: Christa Wolf, *Auf dem Weg nach Tabou: Texte 1990-1994* (Kiepenheuer & Witsch: Köln 1994), 18 (my translation).

¹¹ See Marianne Subklew, *Der Pankower Friedenskreis: Geschichte einer Ost-Berliner Gruppe innerhalb der Evangelischen Kirchen in der DDR 1981-1989* (Der Andere Verlag: Osnabrück 2004).

model of society's natural development from capitalism via socialism to an as yet unrealized communism where injustice would be abandoned. There was certainly some influence on the emergence of solitary individual and collective social imaginaries via living in an atheist utopian state of hope. Even though many people denounced the reality of socialism and many of the doctrinal teachings of the ruling party, the visionary, almost salvational utopian promise for a more just society left some imprints in many people. Additionally, limited access to goods and the danger of resistance brought people closer. However, the openly visionary element was also strong beyond dictated ideologies. People read philosopher Ernst Bloch or the utopian dissident writer and Nobel Prize laureate (1970), Alexandr Solzhenitsyn. The role of the arts was very important. Literature and theater performances were a place of resistant and openly visionary knowledge production. As public intellectuals, artists put pressure on the regime and offered alternative ways of representation.¹² Gestures of solidarity and protest were clearly present in everyday life. The achievement of a more just society for all, not the increased consumption of goods, was at the center of the philosophy of life of many. There is a fundamental difference between the dictated communist futurities and the vision of the peaceful revolution. The former is a closed, naturalized idea of socialism/communism, whereas the vision of parts of the dissidence is an open contribution to the radical social imaginary.¹³

Some aspects of dissidence in East Germany are worthwhile remembering for today's resistance movements. Political transitions show the discursive character of resistance. Some protagonists, and this is also true for the theologians that were involved, remained dissident in the post-transitional society; others became part of the new dominant discourse. Another important observation is the following: in a kind of postcolonial and post-secular gesture people formed surprising alliances between faith-based and non-faith-based belongings. They made astonishing post-identitarian compromises to form alliances against political oppression where gender hierarchies were (provisionally) undone. This even changed feminist theology in East Germany.¹⁴ But there are also some regrets. The hierarchy

¹² See for example the performances of dissident artists Freya Klier and Stephan Krawczyk in GDR churches.

¹³ See Cornelius Castoriadis, "Radical Imagination and the Social Instituting Imaginary," in: David Curtis (ed.), *The Castoriadis Reader* (Blackwell: Oxford 2011), 319-337.

¹⁴ See Ulrike Auga, "'Stiefschwestern': Zum Verhältnis feministisch-theologischer Ansätze in Ost- und Westdeutschland," in: Ulrike Auga / Claudia Bruns / Levke Harders / Gabriele Jähner

in the symbolic gender order was not undone in a lasting fashion even though in East Germany gender equality was instituted much earlier than in West Germany and women were economically independent because nearly all women were employed and earned their own income. This underlines furthermore that resistance needs to go beyond the rights discourse to undo the “glass ceilings” and “walls in our heads”. The experience of the eastern dissidence protest also emphasizes that resistance discourses and practices need to overcome epistemic violence. This fact is most regrettably true for some churches which supported the protest but then became violently patriarchal or homophobic, such as the Catholic Church in Romania, Hungary, Croatia, and the Orthodox Church in Russia. However, one of the most important points to remember is the attempt at radical democracy and the contribution to the radical social imaginary of an open visionary element that is necessary for the self-constitution of a society.

New Resistance, “New, New” Social Movements and “Religion”

At present the world is facing an enormous crisis of social, political, and economic justice for a number of reasons: ever greater inequalities within and among societies with growing economic, social, political, and cultural exclusion. Many people feel a lack of governmental accountability and perceive the state of representative democracy as unsatisfactory and/or no longer achievable. The United Nations prove unable to develop effective measures against poverty, hunger, and the environmental breakdown.¹⁵ Whereas Claude Lefort calls the actually existing democracy a “limited democracy”,¹⁶ Teresa Forcades i Vila speaks in this volume about “fake democracy”. Butler, Laclau, and Žižek call for a “radical democracy”.¹⁷

Protest movements that have appeared over the last few years underline that the social consequences of the neoliberal empire call for new resistances and new visions of solidarity. Even though it might be more appropriate to speak

(eds.), *Das Geschlecht der Wissenschaften: Zur Geschichte von Akademikerinnen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Campus: Frankfurt 2010), 303-326.

¹⁵ See Sara Burke, “Time to Press the Reset Button on Representative Democracy? Or Do We Need a Whole New Operating System?,” in: Werner Puschra / Sara Burke (eds.), *The Future We the People Need: Voices from New Social Movements in North Africa, Middle East & North America* (FES: Berlin / New York 2013), 5-13.

¹⁶ See Claude Lefort, *The Political Forms of Modern Society: Bureaucracy, Democracy, Totalitarianism* (MIT Press: Cambridge 1986).

¹⁷ See Judith Butler / Ernesto Laclau / Slavoj Žižek, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left* (Verso: Brooklyn / London 2011).

about “decolonization” instead of “occupation” (as in “Occupy Wall Street”) the focus of their critique is justified.¹⁸ The emerging violence is the result of an interplay between economic, sovereign, and epistemic violence.

There are many “new, new social movements”,¹⁹ but the Occupy movement underlines visibly the reinvention of politics, revolution, and utopia in the twenty-first century and is therefore used as an example here. The Occupy movement is an international protest movement against social and economic inequality. The movement was clearly inspired by the Arab Spring, especially the Tahrir Square protests in Cairo, and the “Arab Spring” can be related to the “Prague Spring” in 1968 with its protest against the socialist regime, one of the earliest significant protests in eastern European countries.²⁰ A further influence was the Democracy Village set up outside the British Parliament in London in 2010. Another inspiration was the Spanish Indignados (“the outraged”) movement, which started in May 2011 with camps in Madrid and in a few weeks spread all over Spain and across the world.²¹

The methods and structures of the protests are closely linked to the possibilities of communication in the contemporary network society of the information age. Protesters use internet technologies and social media to organize locally and establish links with other Occupy groups around the globe. Their means of protest, which are peaceful, are participatory democracy, non-violence, civil disobedience, occupation, picketing, demonstrations, internet activism, general strikes, and various forms of direct action.

The slogan “We are the 99%” captured public attention first through a tumblr weblog entry and became the main feature, a summary of the movement’s demands.²² Overall the aims of the resistance are in development but

¹⁸ The usage of the term “occupy” as in the Occupy Wall Street movement was critiqued by several “First Nations” activists as too closely connected with the colonizing past of the U.S.

¹⁹ See Janet Jakobsen’s contribution to this volume.

²⁰ See Lauren Frayer, “Inspired by Arab Protests, Spain’s Unemployed Rally for Change,” in: *Voice of America*, 18 May 2011. (<http://www.voanews.com/content/inspired-by-arab-protests-spains-unemployed-rally-for-change-122237154/139615.html>, 15 May 2014).

²¹ See Manuel Castells, “The Long and the Quick of Revolution (2011),” *OpenDemocracy.net*. <http://anthony-barnett/long-and-quick-of-revolution>, 15 May 2014.

²² See Adam Weinstein, “We Are the 99 Percent Creators Revealed: Mother Jones and the Foundation for National Progress.” (<http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2011/10/we-are-the-99-percent-creators>, 15 May 2014). The slogan refers to the concentration of wealth among the top 1 percent of income earners compared to the other 99 percent. In the U.S., the top 1 percent of income earners has more than doubled their after-tax income over the last 30 years according to the 2011 Congressional Budget Office report (see Robert Pear, “Top Earners Doubled Share

the vision for a just society remains an open vision. Kwok Pui-lan and Joerg Rieger's volume *Occupy Religion: Theology of the Multitude* (2012) argues that there is a growing role for religion in the Occupy movement. Their starting point is the historical role the churches played in social movements, and they question how people of faith can work for social justice.²³

Jesse Jackson – in accordance with Dietrich Bonhoeffer's "Church for the Others"²⁴ – sees the Occupy movement as a descendent of the Civil Rights Movement involving personalities like Mohandas "Mahatma" Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., and Nelson Mandela:

They are all exalted now but they were rejected as occupiers, as protesters, as radicals, called terrorists by governments [...] The occupiers' cause is a just cause, a moral cause. They should not be dismissed but heard [...] the church should be the headquarters for the Occupy Movement. In a sense, the occupiers represent the conscience of the church.²⁵

In my own research I noticed the diversity of the movement in terms of class or education, "nationality" or "ethnicity", "gender", "race", "age", "ability" and "religion". It is important to underline that it is a non-identitarian form of resistance. Overall the Occupy movement is a non-religious form of mobilization with varying perceptions of religion in different parts of the world. Some strands which are influenced by (neo-)Marxist atheist philosophy are skeptical about religion. Others have been influenced by the (feminist) liberation theology pre-conferences to the World Social Forums. Furthermore, numerous theologians and students of theology, who are active in the Green Movement and Anti-atomic Power Movement, now also join Occupy in Europe.²⁶

of Nation's Income, Study Finds", in: *The New York Times*, 25 October 2011. (http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/26/us/politics/top-earners-doubled-share-of-nations-income-cbo-says.html?_r=0, 15 May 2014).

²³ See Kwok Pui-lan / Joerg Rieger, *Occupy Religion: Theology of the Multitude* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers: Lanham 2012).

²⁴ See Ulrike Auga, "Decolonizing Public Space: A Challenge of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's and Gayatri Ch. Spivak's Concepts of Resistance, 'Religion' and 'Gender'," in: *Feminist Theology* (forthcoming).

²⁵ See Peter Walker, "Jesse Jackson Cheers on Occupy London Protesters," in: *The Guardian*, 15 December 2011. (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/dec/15/jesse-jackson-occupy-london-protesters>, 15 May 2014).

²⁶ See Ulrike Auga, "Imagine the Future! A Critical Transreligious Bio-theology of 'the 99 Percent'," in: *Feminist Theology* 22.1 (2013), 20-37.

The Pussy Riot performance became an icon of new resistance against the state in the context of religion. The Russian band Pussy Riot performed a *Punk Prayer* to Mother Mary to end the regime of Putin. Three members of the band, Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, Maria Alyokhina and Yekaterina Samutsevich, were imprisoned and only much later released.²⁷ The Russian Orthodox Church has played a questionable role by supporting Putin's power claims, which were accompanied by new bills amending the existing federal law to support homophobia.²⁸

Postcolonies, Modern Empires, and the "Others"

Postcolonialism serves as a label for many different approaches which share the critique of the empire and colonialism. Postcolonialism is also about the opening up of new spaces to investigate colonial, anti-colonial, and neocolonial phenomena.

"[P]ostcolonialism [...] has been primarily concerned to examine the processes and effects of, and reactions to, European colonialism from the sixteenth century up to and including the neo-colonialism of the present day."²⁹ Achille Mbembe coins the term "postcolony" for all the "cultures" affected by the imperial process and underlines the necessity of postcolonial epistemologies that reach beyond colonialism. He studies colonial, post-, and neocolonial interactions of colonizing societies with formerly economically, culturally, and territorially colonized populations. The critique of all forms of violence of colonialism must also include a self-critique of anti-colonial resistance because

²⁷ See Anne-Marie Korte's contribution to this volume.

²⁸ As an amendment to the federal law "On the protection of children from information harmful to their health and development", the so-called "blasphemy bill" and the "gay propaganda bill" were passed unanimously by the Russian State Duma on June 11, 2013 and signed by President Vladimir Putin on July 2, 2013. They legitimize "legislative acts of the Russian Federation aimed at protecting children from information which propagandizes the rejection of traditional family values", and ban the distribution of "propaganda" in support of "non-traditional relationships" to minors. "Public actions expressing obvious disrespect toward society and committed to abuse the religious feelings of believers" will be severely punished. (<http://pravo.gov.ru/proxy/ips/?docbody=&vkart=card&nd=102337335&rdk=&intelsearch=135-%D4%C7,15> May 2014). See also Alec Luhn, "Russian Anti-gay Law Prompts Rise in Homophobic Violence," in: *The Guardian*, 1 September 2013, 3.

²⁹ Bill Ashcroft / Gareth Griffiths / Helen Tiffin, *Post-colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (Routledge: London 2007, 2nd ed.), 169. For the study of postcolonial theory see also Reina Lewis, *Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A Reader* (Routledge: London 1999).

some national liberation projects were also nationalist and maintained a hierarchical symbolic gender order.³⁰

Historically this critique is rooted in European colonialism including the occupation of the Americas, slave trade, etc., accompanied by Enlightenment ideas, the emergence of universalist thought under the premises of a European notion of progress, and the anti-colonial resistance of national liberation projects. Postcolonial critique extends anti-colonial critique and draws on a) poststructuralism with its deconstruction of the constellations of power, knowledge, and truth; b) psychoanalysis with the question of subjectivation and reconsiderations of subject formation; and c) Marxism with its critique of capitalism and hegemony.

Postcolonial thought emerged with Edward Said's study *Orientalism*. Influenced by Michel Foucault and Antonio Gramsci he showed how imperial power, the production of literature, and the perception of tradition interact.³¹ He re-read texts of the "western" literary canon (e.g. Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* [1899]) for its colonial intentions. Said also analyzed the work of European Orient Studies. He concluded that the "western" gaze at the geographical "East" produces the "Orient" as the exotic "Other". Another new perspective of postcolonial thought is the concept of "hybridity" which Homi Bhabha develops in his highly influential book *The Location of Culture*.³²

I would like to look at two central concepts of postcolonial theory. The deciphering of epistemic violence and with it the de-essentialization of categories is a crucial task for Said and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and a major strategy in postcolonial theory. Said criticizes the construction of the essentialized "Other" as a violent act called "Othering". Essentialism reduces and "others" the subject.³³ It presumes an (inferior) ontological a priori. "By Othering we mean imagining someone as alien and different to 'us' in such a way that 'they' are excluded from 'our' 'normal', 'superior' and 'civilized' group. Indeed, it is by imagining a foreign 'Other' in this way that 'our' group can become more confident and exclusive".³⁴

³⁰ See Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (University of California Press: Berkeley 2001).

³¹ See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Pantheon Books: New York 1978).

³² See Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (Routledge: New York / London 1994).

³³ For wider debates see Lisa Isherwood / David Harris, *Radical Otherness: Sociological and Theological Approaches* (Acumen: Durham 2013); Luis Quiros, *An Other's Mind* (Author House: Bloomington 2011).

³⁴ Adrian Holliday / John Kullman / Martin Hyde, *Intercultural Communication: An Advanced Resource Book* (Routledge: London 2010), 2.

This essentialization is often connected with categories of knowledge through which “nation”, “ethnicity”, “race”, “class”, “gender”, “ability”, and “religion” are characterized as homogenizing descriptions of a group. Notions of group “identity” are in danger to fall into the trap of “Othering” and to become essentializing concepts.³⁵ This can also happen if intersectionality, that is the taking into account of several overlapping categories, is applied in a superficial manner,³⁶ as the critique of “queers of color” shows; their strategies will be discussed below.³⁷

A second important concept addressed in postcolonial theory is that of individual and collective representation. Spivak discusses the position of the subaltern (woman), who cannot speak and represent herself because of the epistemic violence of the colonial discourse that is, for example, implied in legal structures and in patriarchal formations of local traditions. However, to speak for somebody can be an act of objectivation if the agency of the oppressed subject is not acknowledged. Saba Mahmood’s understanding of resistance led postcolonial, post-secular theory to shift from representation to the analysis of subject formation, agency, and human flourishing.³⁸

³⁵ Spivak playfully uses the phrase “strategic essentialism”. She is aware of essentialisms of gender, class, etc., but she argues that at times one has to allude to “oppressed identities” in order to build political alliances. Spivak has often been misunderstood as if she would support the essentialized identitarian categories of “nation”, “race”, and “class”. This misunderstanding has consequences for some postcolonial theories which rely uncritically on Spivak. However, as a Marxist she retains an essentialized notion of “religion”. See Auga, “Decolonizing Public Space”.

³⁶ See Kimberlé Crenshaws, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics,” in: Anne Phillips (ed.), *Feminism and Politics: Oxford Readings in Feminism* (Oxford University Press: Oxford 1998), 314-343, and my critique: Ulrike Auga, “Geschlecht und Religion als interdependente Kategorien des Wissens: Dekonstruktion, Diskursanalyse und Intersektionalitätsdebatte und die Kritik antiker Texte”, in: Ute E. Eisen / Christine Gerber / Angela Standhartinger (eds.), *Doing Gender – Doing Religion: Zur Wechselwirkung von Geschlechterkonzepten und religiöser Identitätsbildung in Antike und frühem Islam* (Mohr Siebeck: Tübingen 2013), Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament I 302, 37-74.

³⁷ See Roderick A. Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis 2003); José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis 2007).

³⁸ See Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton University Press: Princeton 2012, 2nd ed.).

Queer Epistemological Critique and the Biopolitical Perspective

The previous reflections have shown the need for an interaction between queer and postcolonial critique. Queer critique is not an identitarian approach. It is a critique of the essentialization of gender and sexuality and of heteronormativity, and implies a consequent epistemological critique, which allows new perspectives on minority discourses. One of the most important aspects of queer analysis is its potential for the deconstruction and destabilization of categories.³⁹

Queer concepts developed out of the poststructuralist critique of gender, especially Judith Butler's deconstruction of the notion of gender. Butler showed that "[t]here is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; [...] identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results."⁴⁰ Equally, categories of gender, nation, race, etc. are shown to be constructed and to emerge performatively. Queer critique is "a point of departure for a broad critique that is calibrated to account for the social antagonism of nationality, race, gender, and class as well as sexuality."⁴¹

A number of ideas of queer theory can usefully be applied to theology and religious studies: a) the new focus on subject formation and agency; b) the disidentification of violent concepts of identity of which José Esteban Muñoz writes that "[d]isidentification is meant to be descriptive of the survival strategies the minority subject practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship."⁴² c) With Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, queer assemblage (and related concepts such as networks and tensities) goes beyond collectivities with their exclusions.⁴³ d) The concept of "queer collectivity" and its political potential is

³⁹ See Gabriele Dietze / Elahe Haschemi Yekani, "'Checks and Balances': Zum Verhältnis von Intersektionalität und Queer Theory," in: Katharina Walgenbach / Gabriele Dietze / Lann Hornscheidt / Kerstin Palm (eds.), *Gender als interdependente Kategorie: Interventionen und neue Perspektiven auf Intersektionalität, Diversität und Heterogenität aus den Gender Studies* (Budrich: Opladen 2007), 107-139.

⁴⁰ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Routledge: New York 1990), 25.

⁴¹ Anne McClintock / Phillip Brian Harper / José Esteban Muñoz / Trish Rosen (eds.), *Queer Transsexions of Race, Nation, and Gender* (Duke University Press: Durham 1997), Social Text 52-53 (Book 15), 90.

⁴² See Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 4.

⁴³ See Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Duke University Press: Durham 2007).

interlinked with the idea of queer utopia. Drawing on Ernst Bloch, José Esteban Muñoz claims that “queer is not yet there”, and describes as queer the open futurity without violence to which he aspires. e) Queer of color concepts (Roderick Ferguson) and queer diaspora approaches (José Esteban Muñoz) harshly criticize capitalism. Ferguson laments the blind spots in Marxist thinking regarding gender, sexuality, and race. He writes: “Queer of color analysis extends women of color feminism by investigating how intersecting racial, gender, and sexual practices antagonize and/or conspire with the normative investments of nation states and capital.”⁴⁴ He draws on Adrienne Rich’s early queer of color critique and learns from Aihwa Ong’s analysis of capital and transnationalism that “[t]he reproduction of racialized gender and sexual regulations [...] facilitate the production of global capital.”⁴⁵

I suggest taking this kind of critique even further. Not only gender and sexuality are regulated, but everybody’s life is affected by regulations through the nation state and capital. I argue for the integration of the critique of biopolitical effects and their counter-discourses into queer critique. Michel Foucault used the concept of biopower/biopolitics to describe a competitive life-or-death rationale in the biopolitically regulated state, which claims that either “we” or the “others” (but not both) could survive. This counts for both capitalist and socialist competitive regimes.⁴⁶ Consequently, in such a society only the body that makes profit has a value. The weak or ill body as well as dissident sexuality count as risk and are enemies within the own collective body. Individual and collective reproduction are thought of as intertwined. The other human body is understood as a racialized, essentialized “Other”. Adriana Petryna speaks of biological citizenship when people face biopolitical regulations or exclusions.⁴⁷ This is especially precarious in the case of non-citizen citizens.

In combination with globalization processes, exploitative capitalism becomes even harsher. The neoliberal empire expands in a different fashion than former imperialism with new forms of work and new forms of regulating

⁴⁴ Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black*, 4. See also Roderick A. Ferguson, “Racing Homonormativity: Citizenship, Sociology and Gay Identity,” in: E. Johnson Patrick / Mae G. Henderson (eds.), *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology* (Duke University Press: Durham 2005), 52-67.

⁴⁵ Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black*, 136.

⁴⁶ See Michel Foucault, *Il faut défendre la société: Cours au Collège de France 1975-1976* (Seuil: Paris 1997).

⁴⁷ See Adriana Petryna, *Life Exposed: Biological Citizens after Chernobyl* (Princeton University Press: Princeton 2002).

populations. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri underline new forms of resistance and individual and collective subject formation/mass formation, representation.⁴⁸ They speak of the multitude instead of the working class. Their critique of the neoliberal empire remains seminal. However they underestimate the biopolitical regulations and the diversity of new empires beyond western neoliberalism which might work quite differently in Russia, for example.

Certain categories seem in certain contexts more useful for biopolitical regulations: today the category “religion” is at the center of public discourse.

The Importance of the Post-secular Turn for Critical Theology and Religious Studies

Several historical events have influenced the shift in debates about the notion of “religion”. The year 1989 brought about the end of many violently atheist socialist totalitarian states. September 11, 2001 with the Islamist terrorist attacks in the U.S. on the one hand underlined religious fundamentalism. On the other hand, the “Arab Spring” showed the importance of faith-based protest for resistance and furthered debates about the possibility of different forms of relationship between democracy, state form, and religion.

I can here only briefly and in an oversimplifying manner mention some of the shifts in these debates.⁴⁹ a) The postcolonial term “neorientalism” (Occidentalism) describes how the “West” instrumentalizes outbursts of Islamic fundamentalism to criticize Islam as such and to depict the self-imagination of the “West” as more enlightened or Christianity as more rational. However, this also means that the analysis focuses more strongly on “religion” as a category now. b) We speak of the end of the traditional secularization thesis because despite certain secularization phenomena in societies, “religion” is not fading; instead a new perception of the concept of “religion” and faith-based practices emerges. c) Overwriting former prejudices in critical and feminist theory towards “religion” as oppressive and patriarchal, it is now possible to show the importance of subject formation, agency, and human flourishing also within and through religious practices.⁵⁰ d) “Religion” appears

⁴⁸ See Michael Hardt / Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge 2002); Hardt / Negri, *Multitude*.

⁴⁹ For a longer summary see Auga, “Decolonizing Public Space”.

⁵⁰ See Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*. Saba Mahmood undertook an ethnographic study of a grassroots women’s piety movement in Cairo. With her results she challenges secular-liberal principles as goals of resistance. She showed how female participants gain subject formation, agency and

as a site where new knowledge can emerge. e) The perception of the role of religion in the public sphere has shifted. This new importance of religion had previously been posited by post-secular scholars but gained broader attention when Jürgen Habermas, who in the past understood the public sphere as secular, insisted that it is necessary to focus attention on religion in a diversified society. He argued for religion's importance to correct capitalism. However, the contributions of religious persons would have to be "translated" for the non-religious. Thus for Habermas "religion" remains the "Other" of society. Charles Taylor contributes to this debate with his understanding of the public sphere as a realm of creativity and social imaginaries through which citizens give form to their lives together, and he seeks for overlaps in shared values of solidarity or social projects among diverse population groups.⁵¹ Regrettably, he underestimates the conditions of capitalism and biopolitical regulations. f) In contrast to essentialist fundamentalism, identitarian conservative theories or previous identitarian liberation theology, there is a turn to de-essentialize or disidentify the category "religion". This does not mean to take away the character of faith, but to illuminate the constructions of the relationships between power, knowledge, and truth that are attached to essentializing epistemologies. In the debate about the public sphere, Judith Butler claimed that religious cohabitation in a globalized world is only possible with de-essentialized concepts of religion.⁵² But also and especially the fields of religious studies, interreligious studies, comparative theology and neighboring fields are making an effort to elaborate the constructed, performative, and imagined character of "religion".⁵³

human flourishing beyond "western" (feminist) values of freedom and autonomy. She extends Foucault's notion of resistance discourses and Butler's notion of performativity: agency is also to be found in the inhabiting of norms (not only in resisting dominant discourses). Religion is opening up possibilities, is enabling agency. See also the review of the new edition in this volume.

⁵¹ See Judith Butler / Jürgen Habermas / Charles Taylor / Cornel West, *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere* (Columbia University Press: New York 2011).

⁵² See Butler / Habermas / Taylor / West, *The Power of Religion*.

⁵³ See Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (The University of Chicago Press: Chicago 2005); David Chidester, *Empire of Religion: Imperialism and Comparative Religion* (The University of Chicago Press: Chicago 2014); David Chidester, *Savage Systems: Colonialism and Comparative Religion in Southern Africa* (University of Virginia Press: Charlottesville 1996); Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and 'The Mystic East'* (Routledge: London 1996); Michael Bergunder, "Was ist Religion? Kulturwissenschaftliche

Aspects of Postcolonial and Public Theologies after Empire and the Biopolitical Turn

For theology, religious studies, and neighboring fields it is high time to rethink those disciplines which are obviously shaped by a colonial heritage such as missionary studies and reinvent them as postcolonial intercultural theology.⁵⁴ Furthermore, we also need postcolonial theologies of religions for a pluralist world.⁵⁵

It is highly important to show the interdependence between traditional theological disciplines and colonial discourses because they still influence the canon of research and teaching in large parts of the world and – via ethics commissions – contribute directly to the dominant discourses in societies.⁵⁶

Exegesis

Postcolonial exegesis is critical towards the historical-critical method especially as taught in the German tradition. The achievement of the historical-critical method as resistance against magisterial truth claims and against violent evangelical interpretations is acknowledged. However, Kwok Pui-lan argues that this approach is determined by “western”, white, male perceptions of the “correct” understanding of the text.⁵⁷ The relationship between Europe’s colonial expansion and the historical-critical method is not made transparent.⁵⁸

Some critics claim that the historical-critical method especially oppressed the “local” readings of biblical texts which are based on different understandings of history or a different relationship between politics and religion. An example for a contextual approach is the *minjung* theology which uses as a hermeneutic key the experience of the *minjung* (the people). Thus *minjung* is understood to refer to the *ochlos* in the gospel of Mark, and the identification

Überlegungen zum Gegenstand der Religionswissenschaft”, in: *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft (zfr)* 19.1-2 (2011), 3-55.

⁵⁴ See Marion Grau, *Rethinking Mission in the Postcolony: Salvation, Society and Subversion* (T&T Clark International: London 2011); Mark J. Cartledge / David Cheetham (eds.), *Intercultural Theology* (SCM Press: London 2011). See also Eleanora Hof’s article in this volume.

⁵⁵ See Jenny Dagers, *Postcolonial Theology of Religions: Particularity and Pluralism in World Christianity* (Routledge: London 2013). See the review of Jenny Dagers’s book in this volume.

⁵⁶ See Fernando F. Segovia / Stephen D. Moore (eds.), *Postcolonial Biblical Criticism* (T&T Clark: London 2005).

⁵⁷ See Kwok Pui-lan, *Discovering the Bible in a Non-biblical World* (Orbis: Maryknoll 1995), 40.

⁵⁸ See Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (John Knox Press: Louisville 2005), 62.

of Jesus with the suffering *minjung/ochlos* is underlined.⁵⁹ The *han* exegesis of Wonhee Anne Joh or Rey Chow starts with the experience of ethnical or class exclusion (*han*).⁶⁰ Fernando Segovia argues that because historical criticism adheres to positivistic prejudices which only allow for an “informed”, academic reader, neglect the context of the reader, and pretend scientific objectivity, it is today obsolete.⁶¹ The most radical position is taken by R.S. Sugirtharajah who criticizes historical-critical exegesis as Eurocentric and serving colonial aims. Shaped by the emerging rationalism and historical understanding of the Enlightenment, the method pretended to be “scientific” and “objective”, but instead it was clearly connected with orientalist philologies, race theories and an evolutionist understanding of religions.⁶² Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza argues along the same lines writing that the battle surrounding this method is a battle about domination in an as such unjust academic system.⁶³

In her book *Toward a Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, Musa Dube underlines:

In view of the fact that Christian biblical religion has been “unique in its imperial sponsorship”, in ancient and current times and over different people and different places, the Bible is also a colonizing text: it has repeatedly authorized the subjugation of foreign nations and lands. Further, in view of the fact that the New Testament and many other Hebrew Bible books were born in imperialist settings, they are post-colonial books.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ See Byung-Mu Ahn, “Jesus und das Minjung im Markusevangelium,” in: Jürgen Moltmann (ed.), *Theologie des Volkes Gottes in Südkorea* (Neukirchener Verlag: Neukirchen-Vluyn 1984), 110-132.

⁶⁰ See Wonhee Anne Joh, *Heart of the Cross: A Postcolonial Christology* (John Knox Press: Louisville 2006). See also Rey Chow, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Columbia University Press: New York 2000), 19-50.

⁶¹ See Anna Runesson, *Exegesis in the Making: Postcolonialism and New Testament Studies* (Brill: Leiden 2010), 59.

⁶² See R.S. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford University Press: Oxford 2002); R.S. Sugirtharajah (ed.), *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World* (Orbis Books: Maryknoll / New York 2006, rev. and exp. 3rd ed.); R.S. Sugirtharajah (ed.), *Still at the Margins: Biblical Scholarship Fifteen Years After the Voices from the Margin* (T&T Clark: London 2008).

⁶³ See Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation* (Beacon: Boston 1992), 180.

⁶⁴ Musa W. Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (Chalice Press: Atlanta 2000), 15.

In Dube's understanding the Bible emerged in a colonial context and has been used for purposes of subjugation up until today, but it also contains anti-colonial strands that go beyond its colonializing elements. Dube also discusses postcoloniality, ethics, and feminism. She shows the influence of religion and biblical interpretation on African women and their oppression. Together with indigenous religions, Christianity in Africa still supports patriarchal systems. Dube tries to decolonize religious practices with hybrid strategies and hybrid spaces.⁶⁵

Dube's work is an important achievement; however, the deconstruction of categories seems sometimes in danger to get lost. How can feminist biblical exegesis react even better to postcolonial challenges between materiality and epistemic violence?

Several postcolonial exegetes have used the historical-critical method in an "integrative" or "inclusive" way in correlation to other methods. They always take into account the reader's context and experience in the widest sense and do not disqualify reading strategies that arise from local knowledge production or local archives.⁶⁶

Constructive Theology, Feminism, New Social Movements after Empire

The field of systematic or dogmatic theology is criticized because as a coherent dogmatic system it too often carries universalist exclusive structures. Today, these fields are further developed as "constructive theology" by theologians like Sallie McFague, Catherine Keller, Serene Jones, Stefanie Knauss and others.⁶⁷ Their focus reaches beyond truth claims about the interpretation of dogmatic sentences, looking at theological and ethical issues from an individual perspective and experience, and discussing issues such as the question of the survival of the world facing environmental problems, the question of love under globalized conditions, the question of trauma in a violated world,

⁶⁵ See Musa W. Dube, "Postcoloniality, Feminist Spaces, and Religions," in: Laura Donaldson / Kwok Pui-lan (eds.), *Postcolonialism, Feminism and Religious Discourse* (Routledge: New York / London 2002), 100-120. See also Dube's contribution to this volume.

⁶⁶ See Stephen D. Moore, *Empire and Apocalypse: Postcolonialism and the New Testament* (Phoenix: Sheffield 2006). See also Ulrike Auga / Bertram Schirr, "'Do Not Conform to the Patterns of This World': A Postcolonial Investigation of Performativity, Metamorphoses, and Bodily Materiality in Romans 12," in: *Feminist Theology* 22.4 (2014), 1-18.

⁶⁷ See Serene Jones / Paul Lakeland (eds.), *Constructive Theology: A Contemporary Approach to Classical Themes* (Fortress Press: Minneapolis 2005).

or the inclusion of visual arts in systematic theological approaches in search of new, open (poetic) languages.

In this context, the inter- and transdisciplinary debate between theologians and Gayatri Ch. Spivak was especially prominent and is recorded in the volume *Planetary Loves* (2011). This debate represents the attempt at the postcolonial deconstruction of the universal presumptions of theology and was a great achievement because Spivak's critique of epistemic violence in terms of "race", "class", and "nation" is highly relevant for theology.⁶⁸ However, Spivak's essentialist notion of "religion" remains problematic.⁶⁹ The question remains, how it is possible to deal better with these categories of knowledge in theology?

Postcolonial Imagination, Multitude, and the Critique of Neoliberalism

Kwok Pui-lan has been an important voice since the beginnings of postcolonial theology. She stresses the necessity of postcolonial imagination also and especially in theology.⁷⁰ Already in her earlier writings she uses Hardt's and Negri's critique of the neoliberal empire. In *Occupy Religion*, co-authored with Joerg Rieger, mentioned above, they look at the new social movement Occupy Wall Street and use the notion of the multitude for the elaboration of their theology.⁷¹ The questions they share with the work of Janet Jakobsen and Teresa Forcades i Vila (in this volume) are: how do we deal in theology and ethics with neoliberalism in a postcolonial world in the future? What are our societal visions?

Today, the perception of the public sphere and resistance within it changes in decisive ways.⁷² This has influenced the emergence of the field of public theology as a further development of political and liberation theology. Here faith-based protest is an issue as well as biopolitics and counter-discourses to empire. Trygve Wyller, for example, analyzes new concepts of solidarities in

⁶⁸ See Stephen Moore / Mayra Rivera (eds.), *Planetary Loves: Spivak, Postcoloniality, and Theology* (Fordham University Press: New York 2011).

⁶⁹ See my critique in: Auga, "Decolonizing Public Space".

⁷⁰ See Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*; Kwok Pui-lan (ed.), *Hope Abundant: Third World and Indigenous Women's Theology* (Orbis Books: Maryknoll 2010).

⁷¹ See Rieger / Kwok, *Occupy Religion*.

⁷² See Partha Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World* (Columbia University Press: New York 2004). See also Arjun Appaduraj, *The Future as Cultural Fact: Essays on the Global Condition* (Verso: London 2013).

non-legalized Swedish communities;⁷³ William Storrar studies non-citizen citizens as a challenge for public theology.⁷⁴

Beyond the Body

Postcolonial theology is based on questions arising with and within liberation theologies.⁷⁵ However, because of the emergence of postcolonial theory in different geographical and philosophical contexts, there seemed to be a slight divide between postcolonial and liberation theologies in the past. This gap is elegantly overcome in Mayra Rivera's work drawing on Latin American Studies and poststructuralism.⁷⁶ Her essay "A Labyrinth of Incarnations: The Social Materiality of Bodies" (in this volume) connects traditional (feminist) liberation theologies with insights from poststructuralist philosophy and postcolonial theory. Furthermore, it draws on the most current theoretical turns towards materiality and affect and applies them for the development of a theology of corporality beyond the "body". Rivera suggests that the explorations of social-material incarnations should characterize a new phase in theologies of the body. She develops concepts for future interpretations which allow to overcome the epistemic violence attached to notions of the "body", which used to be a sexualized, racialized, and perfectionized able body in dominant societal and theological discourses. Rivera innovatively suggests using the notion of "flesh" instead of "body" to achieve a new understanding of bodily materiality. However, the notions of "flesh" and "materiality" also must be rethought.

⁷³ See Trygve E. Wyller, "The Undocumented Embodied: Shaping the Space Where the Sacred and the Secular Intertwine," in: Trygve E. Wyller / Rosemarie Van Den Breemer / José Casanova (eds.), *Secular and Sacred? The Scandinavian Case of Religion in Human Rights, Law and Public Space* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht: Göttingen 2014), 221-236.

⁷⁴ See William F. Storrar, "Non-citizen Citizens: A Challenge for Public Theology," paper presented at "Postcolonial Theory as a Challenge for Theology," Faculty of Theology, Humboldt University Berlin, 31 May 2013. See also William F. Storrar / Andrew R. Morton (eds.), *Public Theology for the 21st Century: Essays in Honour of Duncan B. Forrester* (T&T Clark: London 2004).

⁷⁵ See Ivan Petrella, *Beyond Liberation Theology: A Polemic* (SCM Press: Norwich 2008).

⁷⁶ See Mayra Rivera, *The Touch of Transcendence: A Postcolonial Theology of God* (John Knox: Westminster 2007). See also Cathrine Keller / Michael Nausner / Mayra Rivera (eds.), *Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire* (Chalice Press: Atlanta 2004); Enrique Dussel / Eduardo Mendieta / Carmen Bohórquez (eds.), *El pensamiento filosófico latinoamericano, del Caribe y latino (1300-2000): Historia, corrientes, temas y filósofos* (Siglo XXI: Mexico City 2009).

Queer Theology and Precarious Postcolonial Sexualities

Queer theology scrutinizes societal discourses to overcome heteronormativity and epistemic violence in the broadest sense in dominant and liberation theologies and in society influenced by symbolic orders.

Queer theology is especially connected with the late Argentinian theologian Marcella Althaus-Reid.⁷⁷ Althaus-Reid works in the footsteps of classical theories of liberation in Latin America, challenging them and going beyond them, and combines them with queer theory. She applies Paulo Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed, which gives agency to marginalized people in grassroots communities in Latin America, to theology and uses this approach in marginalized contexts in Scotland. She claims that queer theology is an undertaking oriented toward base communities, be it in dissident medieval women's communities or in soup kitchens in Brazilian Favelas staffed by transvestites. Queer theology analyzes how throughout the history of Christianity excluded subjects try to achieve agency and self-representation, and how they actualize the Christian narrative in that. Althaus-Reid writes: "It is a fight for representativity, for a person reading theology to be able to be interpellated by the text, that is, by saying 'it is me; I recognise myself in this situation.'"⁷⁸

Queer theology works with the notions of performativity (Judith Butler) or transgression (Georges Bataille). Transgression includes the symbolic transgression of inscribed gender differences and heteronormative symbolic orders especially in church and tradition, and the rereading of classical Christian texts through the eyes of invisible, marginalized, stereotyped, stigmatized, "othered" subjects.

Another important representative of queer theology is the Welsh theologian Lisa Isherwood. In her study *The Fat Jesus: Christianity and Body Image*, Isherwood deals with marginalized bodies: the overweight, poor, persons of color, or with the body of the planet itself. She focuses on conservative Christian eschatologies and how they form alliances with neoliberal exploitation.⁷⁹ She responds with creative resistance by rereading forgotten theologoumena such as *energeia*, *dynamis*, and *emanatio*. With Isherwood, it becomes clear

⁷⁷ See Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics* (Routledge: London 2000). See also Marcella Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God* (Routledge: London 2003).

⁷⁸ Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology*, 89.

⁷⁹ See Lisa Isherwood, *The Fat Jesus: Christianity and Body Image* (Seabury Books: London 2008).

again that queer theology has an interest in embodiment theory as well as in ecological and cosmological questions.

For Patrick S. Cheng, “radical love”, as he describes it in his book *Radical Love*, is “a love so extreme that it dissolves our existing boundaries, whether they are boundaries that separate us from people, that separate us from pre-conceived notions of sexuality and gender identity, or that separate us from God”.⁸⁰ This book is a good introduction to important aspects in queer theology, which does consider the regulation of sexuality, but fails to understand it in terms of biopolitics and regulations of life. This biopolitical critique is necessary to overcome inherent violence, as postcolonial theory has shown: radical democracy needs radical love needs radical theologies of life.

Critical, Feminist/Queer, Postcolonial, Post-secular Theology of Life as Invention and Intervention

What are the challenges that arise for dominant and resistance theologies from activism and theory? They question notions of universalist truth claims, notions of individual and collective “identity”, notions of representation, democracy, freedom, and autonomy. They also challenge the violence present in economy, the precariousness of life, and the search for the good life. Therefore, we need responsible theologies which adequately respond to this crisis.

The subject of theologizing cannot be homogenized, but emerges from a complex interference of different, appearing, and disappearing subject formations through temporary alliances. Agency and human flourishing have to be understood in their particular contexts. Theological approaches can therefore only be seen as “minor theologies” (particular theologies) based on particular experiences.⁸¹

For the future of theology the following elements from postcolonial, post-secular and queer theories are particularly useful. 1) The fundamental insight into the interdependence between epistemic, sovereign, and economic violence. 2) It is important to understand the discursive character of resistance in contrast to dominant discourses in society. Political dissidence is resistance that is open to a new vision or project. 3) The aim of resistance is to remove all kinds of violence, which means that self-definition via the exclusion of the “Other” is unacceptable in theology. In order to disentangle violence from the

⁸⁰ Patrick S. Cheng, *Radical Love: An Introduction to Queer Theology* (Seabury Books: New York 2011), x.

⁸¹ See Auga, “Decolonizing Public Space”.

context of religion it is necessary to critique the production of knowledge. This entails the critique of the violence in/of religions, a turn to non-essentialized ideas of religion, and the acceptance of religion as a sphere of “emancipatory” new knowledge productions. 4) Feminist theology and the studies of religions has to include the critique of economic and biopolitical violence. 5) The focus should shift from identity and representational politics to performativity, subject formation, agency, and human flourishing also in the religious sphere. 6) Cornelius Castoriadis writes that “society is creation, and creation of itself: self-creation [... and thus] self-institution”.⁸² Consequently, I would like my theology to contribute to the radical social imaginary which enhances not only the self-institution of society but promotes agency and human flourishing. Everybody can participate in the imagining of new, open, inclusive social imaginaries in the quest for cohabitation without exclusion.⁸³

Already practiced and possible interventions for theologians might be the following: The extension of the notion of individual freedom to human flourishing. The formation of new alliances among activist movements and groups, and between activism and theory. The practice of (new) gestures of solidarity. The practice of new forms of representation. Rethinking economy and the triad of nation state – market economy – democracy. The (re-)formulation of notions of democracy and emancipation. To join new social movements. To call for actions. To decolonize/pray/act/perform/translate/queer.⁸⁴

Los enfoques intersectorial, feminista, con perspectiva de género, queer, postcolonial y postsecular son visiones especialmente sensibles a la violencia de los órdenes políticos y simbólicos de la sociedad, también del hablar teológico y religioso de los mismos. Simplificando mucho, se podría decir que la teología y la crítica de la religión subrayan, en común con la histórica liberación de contexto post-secular y queer y las teologías postcoloniales, la resistencia, la curación de carácter visionario de los textos y las prácticas religiosas. Sin embargo, a veces se proyectan críticas agresivas identitarias y esencialistas de la ideología, que aplican una epistemología postestructuralista y crítica de la ciencia y el cambio de la representación a la acción. El texto pretende introducir estos enfoques para promover el debate que podría ayudar a conducir a nuevas perspectivas en la teología feminista, teología crítica y los estudios religiosos.

⁸² Castoriadis, “Radical Imagination,” 323.

⁸³ See Judith Butler in: Judith Butler / Jürgen Habermas / Charles Taylor / Cornel West, *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere* (Columbia University Press: New York 2011), 70-91.

⁸⁴ See <http://www.queer-theological-college.weebly.com> for an initiative started by Ulrike Auga, Teresa Forcades i Vila and Lisa Isherwood.

Además, al conectar el debate con la ubicación de la Alemania Oriental (del congreso) el texto trata de poner de relieve la acción de la disidencia de Europa del Este que llevó a la revolución pacífica de 1989 y que influyó en la resistencia a la Primavera Árabe en 2011 y heredan el Movimiento Occupy y la protesta de Pussy Riot. El artículo se pregunta cómo un deseo de una sociedad más solidaria podría dar cuenta de la búsqueda actual de una sociedad más justa.

Muchos movimientos y movilizaciones políticas, religiosas y artísticas resistentes imaginaron una sociedad democrática y solidaria abierta, radical, no sólo más allá del socialismo real, sino también más allá del capitalismo y su democracia limitada. Estas movilizaciones mostraron actuaciones sorprendentes como alianzas entre mujeres laicas y religiosas, la paz y los movimientos ambientales y no menos importante el proceso ecuménico. Debido a que la experiencia y los conceptos de la disidencia del Este europeo casi no están presentes en los debates teóricos y teológicos postcoloniales, post-seculares y queer, así como en sus aplicaciones como, por ejemplo, el auto-imaginario político y cultural de Europa o en las ideas extendidas de colectividad como nuevos conjuntos, entonces pretendemos elaborarlas aquí.

Intersectional, feminist, gender-sensitive, queer, postcolonial and post-secular approaches are especially sensitive for the violence of societal or global political and symbolic orders and not least of theological and religious “speaking” itself.

Oversimplifying, one could say that postcolonial, post-secular and queer theology and critique of religion, together with historic contextual liberation theologies, underline the resistant, healing, visionary character of religious texts and practices. However they expand this sometimes violent, essentialist identitarian critique of ideology applying a poststructuralist epistemology and critique of science and shift from representation to agency. The text introduces these approaches to further a debate which might help to lead to new perspectives in feminist theology, critical theology and religious studies.

Furthermore, connecting the debate with the situation of East Germany, this paper highlights the agency of eastern European dissidence which led to the peaceful revolution in 1989 and which offered its idea of resistance to the Arab Spring in 2011, and then to the Occupy movement and the Pussy Riot protest. This paper asks how their urge for a more solidary society can inform the current search for a more just society. Many resistant political, religious, and artistic movements and mobilizations imagined an open, radical democratic and solidary society not only beyond the actually existing socialism but also beyond capitalism and its limited democracy. These mobilizations showed surprising performances and alliances between secular and religious women's, peace and environmental movements and not least the ecumenical process. Because the experience and the concepts of eastern European dissidence are almost not present in postcolonial, post-secular and queer theoretical and theological debates as well as in applications, for instance the political and cultural self-imagination of Europe or in extended ideas of collectivity like new assemblages, they are elaborated here.

Intersektionale, feministische, genderbewusste, queere, postkoloniale und postsäkulare Ansätze zeigen eine besondere Sensibilität für die Gewaltförmigkeit gesellschaftlicher oder globaler politischer und symbolischer Ordnungen und nicht zuletzt auch des theologischen und religiösen “Sprechens” selbst.

Vereinfachend lässt sich sagen, postkoloniale, postsäkulare und queere Theologie und Religionskritik unterstreichen gemeinsam mit den historischen kontextuellen Befreiungstheologien den widerständigen, “heilenden” und visionären Charakter religiöser Texte und Praktiken, erweitern jedoch deren bisweilen selbst gewaltvoll bleibende essentialistische identitäre Ideologiekritik um eine (poststrukturalistische) Wissens- und Wissenschaftskritik und bewegen sich von einer Repräsentationskritik zur Frage nach Handlungsfähigkeit (*agency*). In diese Ausrichtungen möchte der Text einführen, um auch mittels dieser Debatte zu einer breiteren Neujustierung feministischer theologischer Forschung und kritischer Theologie und Religionswissenschaft zu gelangen.

Darüber hinaus soll mit dem lokalen Bezug zu Ostdeutschland die politische und theologische Wirkkraft der Dissidenz Osteuropas, die mit zu den friedlichen Revolutionen 1989 führte und die Gedankengeberin für den Arabischen Frühling 2011 war, für die gegenwärtige Suche nach solidarischem Zusammenleben in der einen Welt fruchtbar gemacht werden, deren Genealogie sich über Occupy Wall Street zu Pussy Riot fortsetzt.

Zahlreiche widerständige politische, religiöse und künstlerische Mobilisierungen imaginierten eine offene, radikal demokratische und solidarische Gesellschaft, nicht nur jenseits des real existierenden Sozialismus, sondern auch jenseits des Kapitalismus und seiner begrenzten Demokratie. Diese Mobilisierungen wurden getragen von überraschenden Performanzen und Allianzen aus säkularen und religiösen Frauen-, Friedens- und Umweltbewegungen und nicht zuletzt vom ökumenischen Prozess. Da die Erfahrungen und Konzepte osteuropäischer Dissidenz sowohl in den postkolonialen, postsäkularen und queeren theoretischen und theologischen Debatten, als auch in Umsetzungen wie der politischen und kulturellen Selbstimagination Europas oder erweiterter neuer gemeinschaftlicher Assemblagen bisher nicht ausreichend diskutiert wurden, sollen sie hier zur Sprache kommen.

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