

Valburga Schmiedt Streck, Júlio César Adam,
Cláudio Carvalhaes (Eds.)

(De)coloniality and religious practices: liberating hope



INTERNATIONAL ACADEMY
OF PRACTICAL THEOLOGY
CONFERENCE SERIES

Valburga Schmiedt Streck, Júlio César Adam, Cláudio Carvalhaes (Eds.)

(De)coloniality and religious practices: liberating hope



INTERNATIONAL ACADEMY
OF PRACTICAL THEOLOGY
CONFERENCE SERIES

Cover painting Exodus by Flávio Scholles. Accessible in: www.fscholles.net

International Academy of Practical Theology. Conference Series
Volume 2 (2021)

Website: <https://iapt-cs.org>

ISSN: 2628-0000

Herausgeber:
International Academy of Practical Theology
Prof. Dr. Trygve Wyller (President)
Faculty of Theology
University of Oslo
Blindernveien 9
Domus Theologica
0371 Oslo
t.e.wyller@teologi.uio.no

Prof. Dr. Birgit Weyel (Executive Committee)
Faculty of Protestant Theology
Liebermeisterstr. 12
72076 Tübingen
birgit.weyl@uni-tuebingen.de

Published Free Open Access



Hosted and indexed by Index Theologicus (University Library Tübingen)
<https://ixtheo.de>

Book Print On Demand by
WiesingerMedia GmbH
Stuttgarter Str. 10
70736 Fellbach
wiesinger@wiesingermedia.de

Preface

With this 2nd volume of the International Academy of Practical Theology Conference Series, we commemorate the 30th anniversary of IAPT. Founded in August 1991 at Princeton Theological Seminary in New Jersey, USA by eight charter members, our organization upholds its commitment to the study of and critical reflection on theological thought and action. We have carried out this task particularly by attending to the various historical and cultural contexts of praxis and by striving to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion.

This volume also celebrates another milestone for IAPT: the academy's first biennial conference in Latin America. It is an anthology of keynote speeches and selected papers presented at the 2019 biennial conference hosted by Faculdades EST in São Leopoldo, Brazil. Focusing on the theme *(De)coloniality and Religious Practices: Liberating Hope*, this collection is organized into three topic areas: Decolonizing Theological Concepts and Practices; Religious Practices, Cultures, and Spiritualities; and Liberating Hope—Practical Theology in Action. It includes essays reflecting the global reach of our research and practices on subjects such as Latino/a/x theoethics, unlearning religion among GDR children from Namibia, the influence of the “Prosperity Gospel” in Brazil, a competency framework for ministerial formation in South Africa, and promoting interreligious transformation

among Christians and Muslims in Northern Nigeria, among others.

A professional organization like IAPT is built on the effective leadership and generative service of its members. So, please join me in thanking our editors, Júlio César Adam, Valburga Schmiedt Streck, and Claudio Carvalhaes, for creatively framing and managing this book project together with the other members of the editorial board.

Let us express our gratitude to our esteemed graduate assistants, Ivan Kipper Malacarne and Johannes van Oorschot. Ivan, a student at Faculdades EST, organized the conference series and served as copy editor. He also facilitated communication with the editors, authors, reviewers, and Open Journal System (OJS) administrators. Johannes, an IAPT associate member, managed the OJS administration from the University of Tübingen. To Isabella Mighetto, our London-based English language editor, Francesco Punzo, who did the layout and typesetting, and all those who generously contributed to the production of this volume, we give thanks.

We look forward to future volumes of the IAPT Conference, as we work daily toward seeing the academy's goals come to full fruition.

Faustino M. Cruz (IAPT President)

Prefacio

Con este segundo volumen de la serie de conferencias de la Academia Internacional de Teología Práctica (IAPT, por sus siglas en inglés), conmemoramos su trigésimo aniversario. Instituida en agosto de 1991 en el Seminario Teológico de Princeton en Nueva Jersey, Estados Unidos por ocho miembros fundadores, nuestra organización mantiene su compromiso con el estudio y la reflexión crítica sobre el pensamiento y la acción teológica. Particularmente, hemos llevado a cabo esta tarea atendiendo los diversos contextos históricos y culturales de la praxis y esforzándonos por el avance de la equidad, la diversidad y la inclusión.

Además, este volumen celebra otro hito para la IAPT: La primera conferencia bienal de la academia en América Latina. Es una antología de conferencias magistrales y documentos seleccionados presentados en la conferencia bienal de 2019 organizada por la Faculdades EST en São Leopoldo, Brasil. Enfocada en el tema de la *(de)colonialidad y las prácticas religiosas: liberación de la esperanza*, esta colección se encuentra organizada dentro de tres áreas temáticas: La Descolonización de Conceptos y Prácticas Teológicas; Prácticas, Culturas y Espiritualidades Religiosas; y Esperanza Liberadora—Teología Práctica en Acción. Incluye





ensayos que reflejan el alcance global de nuestra investigación y prácticas sobre temas como la ética teológica Latina/o/x, el desaprendizaje de la religión entre los niños en la República Democrática Alemana (RDA) de Namibia, la influencia del “Evangelio de la Prosperidad” en Brasil, un marco de competencias para la formación ministerial en Sudáfrica y la promoción de la transformación interreligiosa entre cristianos y musulmanes en el norte de Nigeria, entre otros.

Una organización profesional como la IAPT está construida sobre el liderazgo efectivo y el servicio productivo de sus miembros. Así que por favor únanse a mí en agradecimiento a nuestros editores, Júlio César Adam, Valburga Schmiedt Streck y Claudio Carvalhaes, por enmarcar y dirigir creativamente este proyecto de libro junto con los otros miembros de la junta editorial.

Agradecemos a nuestros estimados asistentes graduados Ivan Kipper Malacarne y Johannes van Oorschot.

Ivan, quien es estudiante de la Facultades EST, organizó las series de conferencias y sirvió como editor de textos. Además, facilitó la comunicación con editores, autores, correctores y los administradores del Open Journal System (OJS). Johannes, quien es un miembro asociado de la IAPT, dirigió la administración del OJS para la Universidad de Tübinga. A Isabella Mighetto, nuestra editora en inglés con base en Londres; Francesco Punzo, quien hizo el diseño y la composición tipográfica, así como a todos aquellos que contribuyeron generosamente en la producción de este volumen, les damos las gracias.

Esperamos los futuros volúmenes de las conferencias de la IAPT, mientras continuamos con el trabajo diario buscando que las metas de la academia se hagan realidad.

Faustino M. Cruz (Presidente, IAPT)

Prefácio

Com este segundo volume da Série de Conferências da *International Academy of Practical Theology* (IAPT) nós comemoramos o 30º aniversário do IAPT. Fundada em agosto de 1991 no Princeton Theological Seminary em New Jersey, EUA, por oito membros fundadores, nossa organização mantém seu compromisso com o estudo e a reflexão crítica sobre o pensamento e ação teológica. Cumprimos essa tarefa principalmente atendendo aos vários contextos históricos e culturais da práxis e nos empenhando em promover a diversidade, a equidade e a inclusão.

Este volume também comemora outro marco para a IAPT: a primeira conferência bienal da academia na América Latina. É uma antologia de palestras e artigos selecionados apresentados na conferência bienal de 2019 organizada pela Facultades EST em São Leopoldo, Brasil. Enfocando o tema *(De) colonialidade e Práticas Religiosas: libertando a esperança*, esta coletânea está organizada em três áreas temáticas: Descolonizando conceitos e práticas teológicas; Práticas religiosas, culturas e espiritualidades; e Libertando a esperança – teologia prática em ação. Inclui ensaios que refletem o alcance global de nossas pesquisas e práticas em assuntos como a teoética latina/a/x, desaprendizagem da religião entre as crianças da RDA da Namíbia, a influência do “Evangelho da Prosperidade” no Brasil, uma estrutura de competência para a formação ministerial na África do Sul e promoção da

transformação inter-religiosa entre cristãos e muçulmanos no norte da Nigéria, entre outros.

Uma organização profissional como a Academia Internacional de Teologia Prática baseia-se na liderança eficaz e no serviço generativo de seus membros. Assim, junte-se a mim para agradecer aos nossos editores, Valburga Schmiedt Streck, Júlio César Adam e Cláudio Carvalhaes, pela criação e gestão do projeto deste livro em conjunto com os demais membros do conselho editorial.

Expressemos nossa gratidão aos nossos estimados assistentes de pós-graduação, Ivan Kipper Malacarne e Johannes van Oorschot. Ivan, aluno da Facultades EST, organizou a série de congressos e atuou como redator. Ele também facilitou a comunicação com os editores, autores, revisores e administradores do Open Journal System (OJS). Johannes, um membro associado do IAPT, gerenciou a administração do OJS na Universidade de Tübingen. A Isabella Mighetto, nossa editora de língua inglesa residente em Londres; a Francesco Punzo, que fez o layout e a composição, e a todos aqueles que generosamente contribuíram para a produção deste volume, agradecemos.

Esperamos futuros volumes da Conferência IAPT, à medida que continuamos com o trabalho diário para ver os objetivos da academia se concretizarem.

Faustino M. Cruz (Presidente, IAPT)

Table of Contents

Preface/Prefacio/Prefácio.....	III
Introduction (Valburga Schmiedt Streck, Júlio César Adam, Cláudio Carvalhaes)	1
Decolonizing Theological Concepts and Practices	
Decolonial Praxis: Sowing existence-life in times of dehumanities (Catherine Walsh)	4
Decoloniality: Theory and Methodology (Cláudio Carvalhaes)	13
Decoloniality, Ecology and Sustainability (Wanda Deifelt)	22
Practical Theology and Decoloniality in Brazil: reflections on a method in process (Júlio César Adam, Valburga Schmiedt Streck)	32
Religious Practices, Cultures and Spiritualities	
God in National Constitutions: A Liberating Reference? (Robert Mager).....	42
Rethinking hospitality, resistance and the calling: Explorations of decolonial research strategies (Kaia Schultz Rønsdal)	50
The income gap between rich and poor: stealth colonialism (Raymond J. Webb).....	59
Douglas Davies' Transcultural Model of Grief (Auli Vähäkangas).....	67
Unlearning Religion: The "GDR Children from Namibia" between Postcolonialism and Decoloniality (Alexander Schulze)	75
"Liberation Theology opted for the Poor, and the Poor opted for [Neo-]Pentecostalism": Illustrating the Influence of the "Prosperity Gospel" in Brazil (Mark J. Cartledge)	82
Making progress or perpetuating power? A look at (de)colonial approaches in theologies of migration (Amy Casteel)	90
Sentipensando Latina/o/x Theoethics (Néstor Medina)	98
Liberating Hope: practical theology in action	
Decoloniality and Liberating Hope at the Border: The Case of El Faro Border Church in Friendship Park, California, USA (Susanne Johnson).....	105



Decoloniality and Inter-religious Transformation among Christians and Muslims in Northern Nigeria: A Practical Theological Approach (Oholiabs D. Tuduks)	113
(De)colonizing the image of female beauty and (de)commodifying women: the industry of plastic surgery in Brazil and Texas (Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner)	123
The de-colonization of the digital world and Practical Theology (Christoph Schneider-Harpprecht, Valburga Schmiedt-Streck)	130
De-Colonialization of Body, Spirit and Mind in the Memoir of Deborah Feldman (Constanze Thierfelder)	138
Liturgy in a decolonial key (Becca Whitla)	146
Developing a competency framework for ministerial formation from a postcolonial perspective: A South Africa contribution (Ian Nell)	154
The meaningful act of remembrance: creating space for memories evoked by the voices of decolonisation (Ferdinand Petrus Kruger)	165

Introduction

Valburga Schmiedt Streck, Júlio César Adam, Cláudio Carvalhaes

In 2019, the Conference of the International Academy of Practical Theology was held in Brazil, the first time in Latin America. We were immersed in the concepts of liberation and hope, both central motives of Liberation Theologies, deeply rooted in Latin American cultures. We gathered in São Leopoldo, a city in the South of Brazil, a place first inhabited by the indigenous Kaigangs and which in 1824 was the birthplace of German immigration to the area. Members and guests from over 20 countries attended the conference and contributed their knowledge and research. There were people from India, South Korea, China, Australia, Germany, Sweden, Belgium, Finland, Norway, Slovakia, Denmark, Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, South Africa, Ghana, Nigeria, Canada, the United States, Mexico, Ecuador, and Brazil. The conference was in both English and Portuguese, with simultaneous translation for the main lectures, and we had a translator for the paper presentations. Some attendees even learned a little bit of Portuguese.

The chosen theme for the Conference was *(De)coloniality and religious practices: liberating hope* which oriented the keynotes, roundtables, plenaries and paper presentations. Together, we all discovered the ways in which practical theology is and should be challenged by local knowledges. The conference didn't intend to show Latin America as a case study for theology or to offer an illustration of practical theology. Rather, the conference hoped to show that other forms of thinking and doing practical theology can be carried out away from Europe and the United States.

Latin America is still haunted by colonization, and coloniality is everywhere. The continent continues to be marked by social and economic contrasts, by violence and corruption, by ecological destruction, stealing and plundering. By contrast, cultural

and religious effervescence and diversity permeate all social levels, and hope and joy are an intrinsic part of our culture. The heritage of diverse and multifaceted spiritualities is a source of resilience for people, especially the poor.

People live at the crossroads of so many encounters, renewals, creations and transformation. Conviviality, food, hospitality, various forms of different forms of knowledge production rituals, sensualities, all forms of art, popular religion and pop culture are some expressions that connect us to various ways of living for an unfolding future. Undoubtedly, these cultural, social and religious manifestations always surprise us with their contradictions, power, and unexpected flourishing.

These paradoxical or contrasting realities are evident in the different ways in which Christian religions, theologies and institutions articulate their reflections and practical engagements, whether through traditional and contextual theologies, Pentecostal theologies, the prosperity gospel, Neopentecostal movements or interreligious crossings. Latin America's religious landscapes are certainly changing. Pentecostal and Neopentecostal churches are growing fast and are set to outgrow Roman Catholicism in the near future. We are also seeing the strengthening of Afro-Brazilian religions and Indigenous spiritualities. Buddhism and Islam are growing religions as well, and the fluctuation between major Christian religions and these religions is complex and extensive.

It is from within these complexities that we must think about the many forms of practical theologies: indeed this was the background to our preparation for the conference. Our Brazilian group organized two seminars prior to our event with Latin American practical theologians, Biblicists, sociologists, philosophers, artists and other people in order to





provide a more expansive notion of *Decoloniality* in this context.

The book you have now is the result of the keynote speeches and some of the papers presented during the conference. We kindly thank all our colleagues who participated in the Conference and presented papers, and especially to those who offered their contribution for this publication. This volume has been divided into the following three sections.

Decolonizing theological concepts and practices

In this first section, the articles discuss the theories, methods and approaches of decoloniality, describing and analyzing the roles of practical theologies in relationship to colonialism, postcolonialism, and decoloniality across local, regional and international contexts, paying particular attention to historical and socio-political markers. Moreover, the major keynote speeches and a selection of other papers dealt with a plurality of theological approaches, and the demand that practical theologies should position themselves to be rooted within local knowledges, from the grassroots engaging with local challenges and perhaps contributing to new cultures of liberation and hope. In the wake of critical theological approaches in Latin America, decolonial theology offers an opportunity to unveil and investigate the different mechanisms that construct and control the economy, genders and sexualities, subjectivities and knowledges from other forms of practices and thinking, power and privilege, as well as the earth itself.

Religious Practices, cultures and spirituality

The second section engages with religious practices, cultures and spiritualities. It explores the roles of practical theologies in diverse global contexts as well as diverse practices and religious pluralism, particularly where historical churches and/or theologies find themselves facing new religious challenges. The chapters look at religious, spiritual and cultural practices which unfold through topics such as hospitality, different forms of resistance, wage equity (income equality), power and violence. The authors cover religious identity formation, religion and national constitutions, religion and migratory move-

ments, contextual theologies and the new religious movements, such as neo-Pentecostalism. Finally, they describe to us the significance of cross-cultural mourning rituals and the notion of *sentipensar*.

Liberating Hope: practical theology in action

In the third and final section of the book, decoloniality is articulated within practical theology as a practice of hope. The authors go on to explore counter-cultural theology in churches located on the border, interreligious transformations between Christians and Muslims, beauty and the body and the image of God. We learn of various challenges to accessing the digital world, about memory, theological formation and liturgy.

The framework of decoloniality is new to many people. As editors of this book, we recognize that several of the texts presented here are the result of the authors' first approach towards the theme of decoloniality. For other contributors, they may be further along in their journey. We hope the book brings an unusual, innovative and thought-provoking variety of approaches and perspectives.

We thank the members of the editorial board and other members of the academy who diligently reviewed the submitted texts, corrected and decided to publish the texts that make up this book. We also thank Ivan Kiper Malacarne, postgraduate student of Faculdades EST, for his support in the editing of this volume.

The painting illustrating the cover is called *Exodus*. Local artist Flávio Scholes (www.fscholes.net) seeks to express the many exoduses that constitute Brazil and in particular, the region where we find ourselves today, the Vale dos Sinos. Through perpetual colonization and decolonization processes: of indigenous, African, European (primarily Spanish, Portuguese, German and Italian) and Japanese people, among several other groups, we are in constant and symbolic exodus. Some more than others. With this work of art, Scholes expresses the reality of the bodies and lives of people who are permanently re-constituting themselves – individually and as collectives – in the struggle to survive, to be recognized and respected as part of a lived reality that is in a spontaneous and violent transition. We thank him for granting permission to use his art.

Over the months in which we collected and organized this volume, the world was struck by the



Covid 19 pandemic and we still live in an unrecognizable world, with millions of people around the globe infected, and thousands dying. The economic crisis which brings with it unemployment, poverty, hunger is ubiquitous. To add to this, the planet is seriously in danger with droughts, flooding, criminal fires devastating forests and ecosystems such as the Amazon and Pantanal in Brazil, fires in the

United States and Australia. This brings us to the undeniable seriousness of the theme of (De)coloniality. We emphasize that practical theology cannot distance itself from these issues anymore and has a task to build and liberate hope into the future.

With celebration and gratitude we offer you this book

Decolonial Praxis: Sowing existence-life in times of dehumanities¹

Catherine Walsh

This text is concerned with two interrelated questions of the “hows” of decolonial praxis. How to struggle against the present-day colonial matrices of power and their growing practice of dehumanities? And, how to struggle for, think from, and sow an otherwise of re-existence-life? These questions and the reflections, thought, and actions that they open, give essence to what I understand as and describe in this text as decolonial praxis.

Preludes, Disclosures, and Revelations (a prologue of sorts)

I am not a theologian, but of course you already know that. I also have no relationship with organized religion, with the institutionalized structures of creed and faith, nor with the institution(s) of Church. In fact, from a young age I rejected all of this. My spirituality and ties to the Sacred —my “Spirit knowing” to use the phrase of M. Jacqui Alexander (Alexander 2005) — is intimately tied to my sociopolitics, feminism(s), and life experience lived mostly —for the vast majority of my adult years— in the margins and fissures of the West, first in alternative communes and later in Latino-Caribbean communities in the US, and in the last 25 years in Ecuador/Latin America/AbyaYala, where the close ties to Indigenous and Black communities and movements, at these communities’ and movements’ request, have opened other logics of the sacred, of existence, of life.

Yet it was the “practical theology” of a US Catholic priest —specifically his thought-practice of politics and liberation theology— that first introduced

Catherine Walsh is Emeritus Professor and director of the Latin American Cultural Studies doctoral program at the Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar-Ecuador, where she also coordinates the Afro-Andean Documentary Center, the largest archive of Black collective memory in Latin America. She is the author of several hundred publications in various languages, and has been an invited professor and speaker in five continents.

me to the meaning/reason of oppression, liberation, and sociopolitical struggle. It was 1968, the year I turned 16. This priest brought a group of us youth, organized in a kind of study-group with him in a small Massachusetts town, to Chicago to attend a Catholic Youth Convention but, above all, to witness the “Democratic Convention”. That is to witness not what occurred inside the Convention but on the streets where tens of thousands of protesters rallied against the political status quo, the Vietnam War, and the assassination several months before of Martin Luther King. The aggressively violent response of police riot squads, and the levels of mass bloodshed they caused, provoked, from then-on, a radical change in the US political and social landscape. The analysis with this priest of what we witnessed and lived that day —a sociopolitical/theological analysis and reflection on the system of power and oppression — remains with me to this day. It

1 Keynote talk presented to the IX Congress of the International Academy of Practical Theology, Sao Leopoldo, Brazil, April 5, 2019.

was also key in helping me understand – and denounce a year later – in the Catholic High School that I attended, the complicity of the institution of the Church in this system of power. Some years later, in the 1980s when I had the opportunity to work closely with Paulo Freire (now under grave attack by the Brazilian government), I began to see the intertwining of theologies and pedagogies of liberation, pedagogies/methodologies/theologies that, as Paulo would say, do not necessarily need, in praxis, the institutions of religion or schools. Such praxistical posture of course, was present in the work of Leonidas Proaño in Ecuador, Gustavo Gutierrez in Peru, Ernesto and Fernando Cardenal in Nicaragua, Oscar Romero in El Salvador, and still today in the work of Leonardo Boff and Frei Betto in Brazil, to name just a few. But also, and over many centuries, it is passed on and lived by Indigenous and African-descended people in their praxis-based philosophies and pedagogies of the sacred and the spiritual and/as existence-life.

For me today, it is the question of the “hows”, in particular two-interrelated “how” questions: how to struggle against the present-day colonial matrices of power and their growing practice of what I will describe later as dehumanities, and how to struggle for, think from, and sow an otherwise of re-existence-life, that give essence to what I understand as and will describe here as decolonial praxis.

I. Existential Beginnings

The simple life of those who preceded us,
their particular ways of understanding
collective well-being and wealth
are a mirror so that the new generations
can measure the value of their inner being and
the greatness of their ancestral philosophies.

Abuelo Zenón (García and Walsh 2017)

I begin with the words of *Abuelo Zenón*, wise elder, sage, and philosopher of/for existence. It is Zenón, a real and symbolic grandfather-ancestor, who continues to walk the collective memory of the Black peoples of the *Gran Comarca*, the Great Black Territory of the Colombo-Ecuadorian Pacific, and their ancestral praxis-based thought rooted in lived existence. It is a thought-praxis constructed before and against the states that, as Zenon says: “made us what we never were, what we never wanted to be” (García and Walsh 2017, 33). It is a praxistic thinking with-

out individual owners, rooted in Mother Earth (or what Zenon calls “Mother Mountain”), and planted in territory as a philosophy, as a principle of faith, as a collective proposal to sustain dignity, existence, and life.

How are we to sustain dignity, existence, and life today, I ask, in these times of violence-war-death? And, in a related sense, how to denaturalize this situation-reality, a question that recalls a similar one posed a number of years ago by the philosopher-theologian Franz Hinkelammert. Such questions are particularly key today in Brazil, as many know all too well. This past March 14th (2019) was the one-year anniversary of the killing of the Rio de Janeiro City Councilwoman Marielle Franco; Marielle, Afro-Brazilian, lesbian, and favela-dweller, shot down in broad daylight on a busy Rio street. To this day, her assassination goes uninvestigated, her killer unknown.

Marielle and Brazil are certainly not alone. How to sustain dignity, existence, and life today is a central question in all of this territory: a territory that Indigenous peoples in a take-back naming refer to as *AbyaYala*, land in full maturity, land of vital blood. And it is a question, I suspect, that is also present throughout the Global South, and increasingly in the Global North (with its own “Souths”). But there is another related question that I also want to ask: how to listen, and how to *learn to unlearn to relearn* from and with these philosophies-knowledges-thought-praxis of existence-life, philosophies/pedagogies and maybe even theologies of sorts that are part of continuous and persistent processes of resistance, re-existence, and re-creation?

In fact, Abuelo Zenón himself reflects these persistent and continuous processes, processes that mark a decolonial attitude, to use the expression of the Puerto Rican Fanonian philosopher Nelson Maldonado-Torres. For Maldonado-Torres, this attitude recalls that proposed at the beginning of the 20th Century by W.E.B. Dubois, that which “demands responsibility and willingness to take many perspectives, particularly the perspectives and points of view of those whose very existence is questioned and produced as dispensable and insignificant” (Maldonado-Torres 2008, 8). It calls up what Black feminist thinkers such as Sylvia Wynter and Audre Lorde have referred to as relational ways of seeing the world, including the relation between privilege and oppression. It brings to the fore an *actitud quilombola* —to recall the Bahian collective with this name—, what Neil Roberts understands as



a freedom-based stance of marronage, what Edizon León describes as *cimarron* thought, and what Betty Ruth Lozano details as the epistemic insurgencies and life-pedagogies of Blackwomen (which she writes as one word) (Roberts 2015; León 2015; Walsh and León 2006; Lozano 2019). Taken together, these life-pedagogies and insurgencies, forms of cimarronaje, and decolonial and quilombola attitudes point to and conjure up re-existence in the sense that Adolfo Albán gives to the term; that is: all of the mechanisms, strategies, actions that Afrodescendant communities have used, and continue to use, to reinvent, redefine and resignify life in conditions of dignity and self-determination (Walsh 2018a).

Abuelo Zenón, in this sense, signifies and symbolizes re-existence, re-existence in/as decolonial praxis. Zenón is a being you cannot see. Some in the Black communities of Ecuador say that he was physically present some years ago, the maternal grandfather of another teacher-wise elder who recently went to meet his ancestors: Juan García Salazar. Some say that after Zenón passed, he returned; or maybe, they say, he never left. Today his words, his philosophies, and his praxis-based thinking continue, recalled and positioned most especially by Juan García. Within Afro-Ecuadorian communities, Zenón is understood as the ancestor who brings Black diasporic existence-based thought into one single voice, a voice that as García describes, is “sparing, simple, and of our own, without additions;...a voice that dismantles words that are not our own, words that Zenón uses as counterwords. ...When Zenón speaks the people speak. Tradition and memory are talking” (Walsh 2019, 129). It is Zenón, says Juan García, who sows and cultivates existence-life; part of a present that calls forth and walks with the past while at the same time helping us to move forward.

Abuelo Zenón endures—in present time and tense—, giving guidelines and advise to the existence-based struggles of those who identify as women and men (or as neither or both), to those whose humanity is denied, and to those living beings (of the rivers, forests, mountains, Mother Earth, and sea) that the system of capitalist, extractivist, racist, patriarchal, anthropocentric, modern / colonial power is killing; the system of power that is killing us all. Certainly, Zenón and Juan García have much more to offer here as ancestor-spirit re-existence teacher-guides, as practitioners of decolonial praxis. I will return to them at the end of my talk. However, now I wish to open some deeper reflections on these current times, on the cries, practices, and growing

institutionalization of what I understand as dehumanities.

II. The Cries

I cannot speak of the framework that I am weaving here, of philosophies, existence, life and decolonial praxis-thought, without starting from the cries, from what thinkers like Gloria Anzaldúa and Frantz Fanon associated in their times with “the colonial wound.” I am referring to the cries provoked today by what the Zapatistas refer to as the capitalist hydra with its many regenerating heads, and the devastating storm that is not just coming but is upon us right now. And I am referring, in consonance with many in AbyaYala, to the cries against the current lived reality of violence-war-death taken to the extreme with their multiple dehumanities.

Of course I too, as may be true with many of you, have a history of cries, some more recent and some long present. The problem is that, until recently, I had learned to keep them within; it is a problem, I suspect, that is not mine alone. I am referring to the cries that take form, grow, swell and dwell in the belly and gut, cries that get stuck in the throat and that seldom come out, precisely because the system, including the institutions (i.e., families, schools, universities, the church) in which we are formed (and de-formed) and may even work, teach us the discipline of individual and individualized silence.

It was in 2014 that my cries began to come out, shortly after *Ayotzinapa*, the attack by forces of the Mexican narco-state on a group of students from a rural teacher-training school, a school known for its activism and critical thought. Three students were killed and 43 made to disappear, their whereabouts still unknown. In the days after, I organized a vigil and remembrance in my University in Quito. Through a telephone connection marked by weeps and wails, we listened to the stark account of one of the survivors. We covered the walls with the faces and names of the 43, an act that occurred throughout the AbyaYala and beyond, including globally via social media. And we shared our anger, indignation, disgust, horror, and pain; *Ayotzinapa* and the *Ayotzinapas* that crudely evidence the extent of the complicities of the colonial matrices of power, and of savage capitalism taken to the extreme.

Several weeks later I was invited to be part of an International Conference at the Nacional Autonomous University of Mexico-UNAM, an 80th birth-

day celebration and homage to the Argentinian/Mexican philosopher of liberation Enrique Dussel. The Conference began with the words of welcome of the organizers and University authorities. Ayotzinapa was not mentioned by them or by the first speakers. When it was my turn to speak, I asked the large audience present, the authorities, panelists, and Enrique himself, how this complicit silencing/silence was possible. It was a silence and silencing that seemed especially out of place in a Conference that proposed to celebrate “the life that is liberation” affirmed in the work and word of Dussel. The University authority sitting next to me whispered in my ear “we do not talk about this [Ayotzinapa] here.” My anger and indignation refused suppression and silence. My cries came out and since then I have refused to contain them.

As I said to Enrique and to the audience at UNAM, to remain silent is to be complicit with the violence. It is to succumb to the pedagogies of fear and to be part—whether willingly or not—of the growing project of dehumanization and dehumanities, a project of death, appropriation, extirpation, and extraction that, from Mexico to Brazil, aims to eliminate all (including beings, knowledges, and philosophies, practices, and pedagogies of existence, and life) that hinder its advance, dominion, and power.²

Certainly silence, with the indifference it often suggests, is not—nor has it ever been—an adequate response to violence, oppression, and domination. Those engaged with philosophies, pedagogies, and theologies of liberation know this well. I recall the “cries” voiced by the Ecuadorian practitioner of Liberation Theology Leonidas Proaño in sonorous dialogue and shared indignation with Paulo Freire (Proaño 1993). But, of course, those who know it even better are the people who live the daily realities, threats, and fears of disappearances, gendered and racialized violences and “cleansings”, feminicides, racial-ethnic-genocides, epistemicides, antracides, territorial displacements and disposessions, police and military repression... To this we can add the violences that occur daily in universities; gendered, racialized, and epistemic violences with, as I will argue later, constitute their own practices and enabling of dehumanities.

Certainly it is necessary to voice cries against the physical, psychological, epistemic, spiritual and ex-

istence-based violences that seek to violate, denigrate, invade, discipline, control, and silence bodies, voices, minds, spirits, souls, and rebellion; to recognize, hear, and make cries of indignation, anger, and of organization. Yet the cries themselves, as we well know, are not enough. As sonorous expressions against the present realities of violence-death-war and for an otherwise, the cries announce and pronounce. However, they do not necessarily get at the depth and profoundness of the circumstance, peril, and danger, nor do they, in and of themselves, reveal the systematic character of the violences, or what I have begun to consider and describe as the new configurations of coloniality, that while global, are once again—as was the case more than 500 years ago—using Latin America as a central testing ground. There is much I could say about these configurations, however, I will center my comments here on one particularly ill-fated mode of power: what I refer to as “dehumanities”.

III. On Dehumanities

I understand “dehumanities” as the present-day institutionalization and institutionality of violence-war-death, an institution and institutionality that not only aims to wrest the humanity of the majority, but also to redefine and reframe humanity itself. Let me give some concrete examples.

The first pertains to two “public” feminicides that began 2019 in Ecuador. One was of Martha, object first of gang rape (I say “object” because with this act they tried to objectify her, remove her subjectivity and humanity). The men—supposed friends—then killed her, throwing her, like trash, over a ravine. The other feminicide was of Diana, stabbed multiple times by her partner in a street full of “people”, although no one, including the police, paid attention until someone identified the killer as Venezuelan and she—the victim—as Ecuadorian.

Upon receiving the news, Ecuador’s President Lenin Moreno organized a press conference in which he called for the public to form “citizen brigades” against Venezuelans because any of them could, he said, be part of those formerly incarcerated groups that, according to him, Maduro was/is sending to Ecuador. Immediately the improvised-authorized “brigades” ran through the streets of this city and others hunting Venezuelans. Rumors were that many people were injured (although the official press said nothing). A few hours later, Presi-

2 See Walsh 2018b and also Dussel’s response in the Epilogue of this same book.



dent Maduro sent three planes for all who chose to return to Venezuela. President Moreno gave permission for one plane to leave. The hunting continued...

Another announcement from the president soon followed. To counter the growing violence in the country, he said, we must (re)establish in schools and universities a curriculum of ethics, civics, and love for the *PATRIA* (the homeland). Neither Diana, nor Martha, nor the names of the women who are killed every 50 hours in Ecuador (the official count), were named or mentioned. With their deaths, their subjectivity-humanity died too. Neither was there any mention of course of the hundreds and hundreds of girls and boys raped and/or sexually abused in just this last year, in the same schools and by the same teachers who will now make the new curriculum “innovations”. I ask: is this not all part of the growing dehumanities? (Dehumanities, of course, that the Catholic Church is also familiar with).

A second example. It is November 2018, and I am in Mexico on a multi-city speaking tour, travelling by bus. Through the bus window, I see trailer trucks pass by, one after the other. I remember what I was told a few days ago by some friends: that the trailer trucks carry many “things”, including the bodies of the disappeared (47,000 by some “official” accounts), some still alive and others not. I recall what they told me about the trailer trucks that began to appear a few months before in the neighborhoods of several cities, refrigerator trucks calling out by loud speaker for the residents to come out and see if one of their disappeared was among the frozen bodies piled up inside (of the estimated 36,000 unidentified).³ Trucks that also take bodies to medical schools; corpses-specimens for the universities of “excellence”, for the “scientific” study of what we continue to call “higher” education. As I travelled on the bus, I still had in my mind the trailer trucks I saw several days before in Mexico City, the trucks from which I saw descend 100 Hondurans and Central Americans (part of the Migrant Caravan on the way to the US border) that had been made to disappear and then re-appear. Meanwhile, the television on the bus (like the screens at the airport) projected advertising on the “magical tourism” promoted by the then-government of Peña Nieto. You can visit “magical” towns and peoples, said the tourist publicity,

see the beauty of nature, and even do a “cleansing” of the evils of stress and urban tension.

... It is November 2018 and although López Obrador has not yet assumed the presidency, his projects are circulating in the media. One of them: the “Mayan train” is already in construction, destined to pass through southern Mexico, including, “inevitably” some contend and “strategically” I say, through “autonomous” Zapatista territories. The “Mayan train” which will take tourists to enjoy nature and the “pristine” beaches (not yet Cancunized), to consume the water that is almost gone and to “tour” the state-caused misery of Mayan peoples. A train and tour without prior and informed consultation and consent as required by the Constitution. Even its name is annoying and dehumanizing, says the Subcomandante Zapatista Moises, not only because it puts us on “tour” (as objectified spectacle, to recall the phrase of the cultural studies practitioner/theorist Stuart Hall), but also in the name itself that negates the linguistic and cultural diversity of Tsotsil, Tzeltal, Tojolabal, Chol, and Mam peoples.

The examples go on and on. I think of the 8 Indigenous and Black leaders killed and the many more critically wounded in these last days of March-April 2019 in Cauca, Colombia as communities prepared for the regional and nation-wide *Minga*, a collective mobilization and work-effort that questions the government’s and the state’s continued disrespect and negation of life, territory, justice, democracy, and peace, a narco-para-state that is enemy of the people and that makes and maintains the violence-death-war machine.

I am speaking of dehumanities institutionalized, perpetuated, executed, and justified by states and governments of both the Right and Left (if those terms, which I personally doubt, still even apply). Dehumanities often justified—whether explicitly or implicitly—by intellectuals on the Left who continue to believe that the solutions are in governments and state, in better policies, laws, and projects, including ones that name decoloniality, as was the case in Ecuador in the government of Rafael Correa, and most recently in Maduro’s Venezuela with the formation of an Institute of Decoloniality. For me, all of this is part of the emergent “decolonial dangers”, one of which is the idea that decoloniality can be legislated and enacted “from above”, institutionalized within the very institutions that form part of the capitalist-patriarchal-colonial order/disorder, within states that as the Añuu and Wayú intellectual

3 Figures cited by Lluvia Cervantes in the panel “Sembrar vida donde está la muerte,” Universidad Central, Bogotá, Colombia, February 5, 2019.

and Venezuelan university professor José Ángel Quintero Weir argues, are no longer national (if they ever really were) but corporate, that function not in benefit of society (if we can still use that word), but in benefit of capital and the income of the governments that sustain it and the interests of the associations and corporations; that is, the corporate state (Quintero 2019).

Of course, dehumanities are also part and parcel of universities today, of the increasing commodification of knowledge and the corporativization and transnationalization of public higher education. From Mexico to Argentina, the connections of public universities with extractivist industries (fracking, mining, and oil), genetic bioprospecting, and other projects of dispossession-war-death, are well documented. “Cities of knowledge” already in operation in Mexico (“Pachuco”) and Ecuador (“Yachay”), both with South Korean financing and technological know-how, position knowledge as a new productive matrix in which the ancestral knowledges of Indigenous and Black communities are considered as commodities, without the necessity, of course, of the ancestors, communities, or peoples themselves; epistemic extractivism taken to new depths.

Up against these realities, the social and human sciences are myopic and silent. Some say that their own survival consists in keeping their gaze within, distancing themselves from social reality, from the demands of real people who fight *for* life and humanity (this understood broadly in non-anthropocentric terms), and who fight *against* dehumanity. The Argentinian socially committed-philosopher Maria Eugenia Borsani speaks of the growing presence of dehumanized, dehydrated human and social sciences, of the field of the so-called humanities on the way to their own death. In some countries, the humanities and social sciences have already been eliminated (e.g., in 2015, the Ministry of Education in Japan eliminated the social sciences in 60 universities replacing them with areas that “better respond” to society’s needs). In Brazil, the project is to “cleanse” universities of Black, Indigenous, and gay students and professors, of “vagabond” women, prohibit discussions that criticize government and engage issues of gender, sexual diversity and non-Christian religions, encouraging students to film disobedient professors, and to reestablish “traditional values” (read: white-conservative Christian-heteropatriarchal-western “universal” values), thus taking the dehumanities in higher education to

even greater horrific extremes. The establishment of what is called (almost always in English) the “Global University” is one more example: an institution tied to the political-financial power of the conservative evangelical church and its allies, centered in “universal” values, and a curriculum that is functional to the global productive, technological and professionalizing order-disorder and most often on-line to avoid the “problems” that can occur with human contact. One more direct manifestation of the project of violence-war and its path to discipline, reform, and recolonize humanity.

Of course, education is not the only institution under assault, so too is religion. Brazil knows this well, with African-descendant practices and philosophies/theologies, and the Liberation Theology associated primarily with the progressive wing of the Catholic Church, under direct attack, an attack that interweaves politics, racism, and the perceived problem of a so-called gender ideology. Here there are new mechanisms, apparatuses, and institutions, and institutionalizations of dehumanities, including an evangelicalism that the Franco-Moroccan journalist and Rio resident Lamia Oualalou describes as the “theology of prosperity”; “a logic that says to its adherents you have the right to everything: health, a good material life, and not in the next life but now!” (Febbro 2018). Through market strategies, and the penetration of various powers, says Oualalou, including in judicial apparatus, politics, the police, and even the jails, evangelical churches have taken over in Brazil and are seeking to do so elsewhere. It is a preaching without theological arguments and most often without the Bible, a sort of individual individualized humanism that simultaneously advances the interests and accumulation of capital, and the discipline, control, and pacification of the masses, most especially the Black and Indigenous poor, which, in the case of Brazil, includes the territory and populace of the favelas.

Brazil is not alone. Throughout the region a new political-religious-heteropatriarchal alliance is taking form in which conservatives of the Catholic Church are also involved. It is an alliance that the so-called “progressive” Ecuadorian president Rafael Correa, defined as a necessary “return to human nature”; to “women who look like women, and men like me who appreciate our masculinity”, a necessary move to address “this extremely dangerous ideology of gender...the barbarism that are issues not of the Lefts or Rights, but a moral concern” (Granda 2017, 77). An alliance that has pushed the levels of



violence against women and persons who identify as LGBTI. An alliance of multiple political use, reflected in Alvaro Uribe's discourses and diatribes against the Colombian Peace Accord plebiscite including his tweet: "the need to stimulate family values...defend our religious leaders and moral pastors" (cited in O'Boyle 2016, n/p). An alliance present in the re-election of Sebastian Piñeira in Chile in 2017, the coup in Brazil of Michel Temer, the campaign and election of Duque in Colombia, and of course in the campaign, election, and continued presence of Trump, to mention just a few.

...By now it should be clear what I mean by the institution and institutionalization of dehumanity(ies)...

More than 50 years ago, Frantz Fanon made explicit the direct relationship of dehumanization and colonization, the latter understood as a model of continuous power that is both political, ontological, epistemic and existential. For Fanon, decolonization necessarily implies re-humanization, learning to unlearn and negate negation. In a similar vein, Lewis Gordon argues that it is the existential lived reality of the situation/condition of humanity negated that produces Black existential thought, thought/philosophies that affirm the condition of humanity of people whose very existence is denied (Gordon 2000). For both Gordon and Fanon, and for many more whose humanity-existence-life is negated, the question is how to continue living.

IV. The Hows of Praxis

I return to my questions of the "hows" expressed at the beginning of this talk. How to struggle against the present-day colonial matrices of power and the growing practices of dehumanities and dehumanizations? How to denaturalize the situation of violence-death-war? How to sow and sustain dignity and existence-life? And, in the same vein, how to struggle for and how to plant and cultivate the otherwise of existence-re-existence-life that is decolonial praxis? Questions that necessarily open reflections on praxis itself, and on what I refer to as decolonial cracks and the praxis of fissure.

Praxis, in a Freirian sense, is "an act of knowing that involves a dialogical movement that goes from action to reflection and from reflection upon action to a new action" (Freire 1985, 50). It is reflexive and reflective, critical, theoretical, and pragmatic. It is intentional in that it acts upon and in reality: to

transform it, aware of its own processes and aims. And it is grounded in a critical humanism of inquiry and intervention that chooses existence and life over the dictates of dehumanities and the colonial, capitalist, patriarchal system. As Paulo Freire once said, "for apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human, Knowledge emerges only through invention and reinvention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other" (Freire 1985, 58).

Moreover, as an analytic perspective, sociopolitical standpoint, and pedagogical-methodological stance, praxis enables us to transcend the linear precepts, binary-based suppositions, and outcome-oriented views of western knowledge, research, and thought. It helps us think from and with the ongoing processes of decolonial shift and movement rather than simply with and from decoloniality as paradigm, consequence, and position. And it helps give presence to relation, the relation and correlate, to use Sylvia Wynter's term, of action-reflection-action, but also of present-past; the (co)relationality that grounds ancestral non-Western knowledges, worldviews, and life practices, and that orients a perspective, prospect, and proposition of struggle *for* a different model of life, living, knowing, and being in and with the world.

Praxis, of course, takes many forms; the praxis of Liberation Theologies are certainly examples. But the praxis/es that most interest me today are not the ones conceived with and from the totality of the system, not those centered on the liberation of the masses, on wide-scale transformation, and on Revolution; praxis that has HOPE in capital letters. For me, the struggle today is not from the totality, but from its fissures and cracks. My struggle and wager are for the praxis that exists despite the system, challenging it, transgressing and transcending it, and making it crack. For me, it is in the cracks and fissures where an otherwise of existence-life continues to take form, where the conditions of negation are negated, where affirmation and hope (this in smaller letters) are created and lived.⁴ The praxis of cracking, the praxis that opens, extends, and con-

⁴ Recalled here is Leonardo Boff's text "The Political Strength of Hope" where he repeats the sentence of Saint Augustine: "Hope has two beloved daughters: Indignation and Courage; Indignation teaches us to reject things as they are, and Courage inspires us to change them" (Boff 2017).

nects the cracks, and that sows within them, is — again for me— what makes decoloniality a verbality (to use Rolando Vázquez's expression) (Vázquez 2012); that is, an action of simultaneous doing-thinking-sowing-cultivating-creating-re-existing-living.⁵

V. Decoloniality and/as the Sowing of Existence-Life

Decoloniality, for me, is not an abstract theory nor a new critical paradigm. It is a perspective, stance, and proposition of thought, analysis, sensing, making, doing, feeling, and being that is actional (in the Fanonian sense), praxistal, and ongoing. Moreover, it is prospectively relational in that it looks, thinks, and acts with the present-future-past, including with the peoples, subjects, and situated and embodied knowledges, territories, and struggles that push toward, advance, and open possibilities of an otherwise. It is in this sense that decoloniality can be understood as a process, practice, and project of sowing seeds; of cultivating, nurturing, and growing, always vigilant of what the Zapatistas refer to as the storm brewing, the catastrophe that is now upon us thanks to the incredible capacity of regeneration of the capitalist hydra, and relatedly, the continual reconstitution of the coloniality of power.

In the 2015 Zapatista organized seminar or “seedbed” of critical thought, the Insurgent Subcomandante Galeano asked participants for “the seed that questions, provokes, encourages, pushes us to continue to think and analyze: a seed so that other seeds listen that they have to grow, in their own way, according to their own calendar and geography” (Comisión Sexta del EZLN 2015, 33).

From the context of the Great Comarca of the Afro-Pacific, Juan García Salazar and Abuelo Zenón remind us of the seeds sowed by peoples of African origin in the lands of the Americas, seeds of ancestral knowledge, philosophy, memory, and tradition, of resistance and of and for life (García and Walsh 2017). These are the seeds, they say, that need to not just be remembered but also re-sown in contemporary times and with attention to the present-day reality of deterritorializations, dispossessions, expro-

priations, co-optations and false inclusions, and the recoloniality of power, being, knowledge, and nature.

Decolonial praxis, as I understand it, is just this: the continuous work to plant and grow an otherwise of existence-re-existence-life despite and in the borders, margins, and cracks of the dehumanities described here, dehumanities that are part and parcel of the new configurations of the dominant prevailing order/disorder.

The pedagogies of this praxis are multiple. They are sown and grown in the contexts of decolonial struggle, wherever and however this struggle is conceived, situated, and takes form. And they are sown and grown in the methodologies and/as pedagogies (to recall Freire) of struggle itself. I am thinking of struggles that walk asking and that ask as they walk, and of struggles that bring to the fore the forces of the sacred, ancestral, spiritual, and creative. I am thinking of all those struggles against the dehumanities described here, against the modern/colonial matrices of power in their myriad manifestations and faces. And I am thinking of all those struggles —and all those efforts, strategies, processes, and practices- to push, enable, create, and construct a decolonial praxis and a decolonizing otherwise.

It is praxis, as Enrique Dussel reminds us, which makes the path (Dussel 2014). And it is the sowing and growing that give root to praxis; a sowing and growing that herald life in an era of violence-death-war, and that give cause to decoloniality as a process, practice, project, and praxis of radically “other” thinking, feeling, sensing, being, knowing, doing, and living.

I close, as I opened, with Abuelo Zenón: “Sow in order to be again,” Zenón says, “sowings and re-sowings of existence-life” (in García and Walsh 2017, 41); sowings absolutely necessary in these times of violence-war-death, of dehumanities taken to the extreme.

References

- Alexander, M. Jacqui. 2005. *Pedagogies of Crossing. Meditations on feminisms, sexual politics, memory, and the sacred*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Boff, Leonardo. 2017. “*The Political Strength of Hope*”. <https://leonardoboff.wordpress.com/2017/07/03/the-political-strength-of-hope-2/>.
- Comisión Sexta del EZLN. 2015. *Pensamiento crítico frente a la hidra capitalista*. Mexico: EZLN.

5 For an extended discussion and examples, see my Part One “Decoloniality in/as Praxis,” in Walsh 2018a. Also see Walsh 2017.



- Dussel, Enrique. 2014. *16 Tesis de economía política: interpretación filosófica*. Mexico City: Siglo XXI.
- Dussel, Enrique. 2018. "Epílogo." In *Del monólogo europeo al diálogo inter-filosófico. Ensayos sobre Enrique Dussel y la filosofía de la liberación*, coordinated by José Guadalupe Gandarilla and Mabel Moraña, 421–440. México City: UNAM.
- Febbro, Eduardo. 2018. "Entrevista con Lamia Oualaloe. Por qué crece el evangelismo en Brasil y qué consecuencias políticas tiene?" *Viento Sur*. <https://vientosur.info/spip.php?article14291>.
- Freire, Paulo. 1974. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum.
- Freire, Paulo. 1985. *The Politics of Education: Culture, Power, and Liberation*. Translated by Donaldo Macedo. South Hadley: Bergin and Garvey.
- García Salazar, Juan, and Catherine Walsh. 2017. *Pensar sembrando/Sembrar pensando con el Abuelo Zenón*. Quito: Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar/Ediciones Abya-Yala.
- Gordon, Lewis. 2000. *Existencia Africana. Understanding Africana Existential Thought*. New York: Routledge.
- Granda, Maria Paula. 2017. *El macho sabio. Racismo y sexismo en el discurso sabatino de Rafael Correa*. Quito: CAAP.
- León, Edizon. 2015. "Acercamiento crítico al cimarronaje a partir de la teoría política, los estudios culturales y la filosofía de existencia." PhD dissertation, Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar, Quito. <http://repositorio.uasb.edu.ec/handle/10644/4679>.
- Lozano, Betty Ruth. 2019. *Aportes a un feminismo negro decolonial. Insurgencias epistémicas de mujeres negras-afrocolombianas tejidos con retazos de memorias*. Quito: Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar and Ediciones Abya-Yala.
- Maldonado-Torres, Nelson. 2008. *Against War. Views from the Underside of Modernity*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- O'Boyle, Brendan. 2016. "Did an Anti-LGBT Panic Help Defeat Colombia's Peace Deal?" *Americas Quarterly online*. <https://www.americasquarterly.org/article/did-an-anti-lgbt-panic-help-defeat-colombias-peace-deal/>.
- Proaño, Leonidas. 1993. *Educación liberadora*. Quito: Corporación Editora Nacional.
- Quintero Weir, José Angel. 2019. "La emergencia de Nosotrxs II." *Pueblos en Camino*. <https://pueblosencamino.org/?tag=jose-angel-quintero-weir>.
- Roberts, Neil. 2015. *Freedom as Marronage*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Vásquez, Rolando. 2012. "Towards a Decolonial Critique of Modernity: *Buen Vivir*, Relationality and the Task of Listening." In *Capital, Poverty, Development: Denktraditionen im Dialog: Studien zur Begreifung und Interkulturalität* 33, edited by Raúl Fornet-Betancourt, 241–252. Wissenschaftsverlag Mainz: Achen.
- Walsh, Catherine and Edizon León. 2006. "Afro-Andean Thought and Diasporic Ancestrality." In *Shifting the Geography of Reason: Gender, Science, and Religion*, edited by M. Banchetti-Robino and C. R. Healey. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press.
- Walsh, Catherine. 2017. "Gritos, grietas y siembras de vida: entretejiendo lo pedagógico y lo decolonial." In *Pedagogías decoloniales. Prácticas insurgentes de resistir, (re) existir y (re)vivir*, edited by Catherine Walsh, Vol. 2. Quito: Ediciones Abya-Yala.
- Walsh, Catherine. 2018a. "Decoloniality in/as Praxis." In *On Decoloniality. Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*, W. Mignolo and C. Walsh, 13–102. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Walsh, Catherine. 2018b. "Interculturalidad, transmodernidad y (des)humanidad(es). Una carta a Enrique Dussel desde Abya Yala/América del Sur." In *Del monólogo europeo al diálogo inter-filosófico. Ensayos sobre Enrique Dussel y la filosofía de la liberación*, coordinated by José Guadalupe Gandarilla and Mabel Moraña, 405–418. México City: UNAM.
- Walsh, Catherine. 2019. "Lewis Gordon: Existential Incantations that Cross Borders and Move Us Forward." In *Black Existentialism. Essays on the Transformative Thought of Lewis R. Gordon*, edited by Danielle Davis, 121–134. NY: Rowman and Littlefield.

Decoloniality: Theory and Methodology

Cláudio Carvalhaes

The author describes the work of decoloniality within Christianity and proposes a methodology for this process, drawing on anthropophagy, perspectivism, carnival and social movements from Latin America. To take on the theological decoloniality option, one needs to re-consider the sources, foundations and practices of an universal Christianity and re-read it from local communities, its instances of power, presences and absences. Influenced by the indigenous people of Rio Grande do Sul and the Xingu, Indigenous epistemologies, we are called to dream not only about a religion of humans, but also dream of animals, mountains, soil, water, seeds, and nature.

Introduction¹

Welcome to Brazil-il-il-il: a country that lives between the first and fourth worlds. The first world is the few ruthless people who control the power: agribusiness, bankers, and landowners. The second world is the voraciously greedy upper class, corrupt politicians, TV owners, social media, and religious leaders. The third world is a prejudiced middle class that hates poor people while dreaming of being rich. And the fourth world is the vast majority of its inhabitants: all poor, white, indigenous, black, *almost black*, all very poor.

Welcome to Brazil: the country of high coloniality where imported “cordial racism” is a potent weapon of domination that has been hidden for years and is now on public display. The *very nice* Brazil we all once thought existed has recently shown its true face and it is much scarier than many of us Brazilians ever imagined.

Welcome to a terribly Christian, imperialist, religious Brazil: formed by the union of a right-wing

Cláudio Carvalhaes, Associate Professor of Worship at Union Theological Seminary – New York City. His work and research centers on liturgy, liberation theologies, decolonial studies, performance theories, and ecologies. His upcoming book is on eco-liturgical liberation theology. His recent books are *Liturgies from Below: Prayers from People at the Ends of the World* (Abingdon Press, 2020) and *Praying With Every Heart – Orienting Our Lives to the Wholeness of the World* (Cascade Books, 2021).

Catholic church with neo-Pentecostal churches. Their shared agenda is “family, tradition, and property”, and they support the most radically conservative forms of living and repressive policies. Welcome to a country where stratified mainline Protestants range from neo-Calvinism and its vicious ethics of suppression and control, to a small number of churches and pastors offering a counternarrative, standing outside the game because they are a very small presence, without much power.

Welcome to a country of religious diversity with a variety of Afro-religions who suffer from a certain Christianity that has historically specialized in annihilating anything sacred to Afro-religions, destroying temples and threatening the lives of their leaders.

The current president of Brazil-il-il was elected based on his approval of torture and promises to

¹ This article was presented as a performance-lecture with movements and many layered symbols, some of them you can see in the pictures. Also people watched the 2019 samba music from Estação Primeira de Mangueira: *História Pra Ninar Gente Grande* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F9nRZt86zbc>) during the lecture.





arm the population, exterminate Indigenous people, slaughter the Black population, rule over women, abandon children, leave the LGBTQ community openly exposed to patriarchal structures of violence, and deliver the Brazilian economy to the Chicago neoliberal school of Milton Friedman. Welcome to a living nightmare, one that has always been here for all of the oppressed communities! Brazil's president is a worse version of the USA's Trump and a similar version of the Philippines' Duterte.

In spite of all the above, we do have many enchanting attributes. We are a land of beautiful intersections and unique differences! A country of many passages. If you ever read Clarice Lispector or Guimarães Rosa, listened to Caetano Veloso or Gilberto Gil, saw the Grupo Corpo and felt the soul of the people of Bahia, or have been immersed in the endless wisdom of our Indigenous people, you will see the eternal brilliance of this country. In spite of many historical attempts of domination by brutal and ignorant groups of white settlers and renters of the nation, our plurality is an antidote to fascism through our varied earthly landscape, the people's miscegenation in confused hybridities, untamed religious mixtures, social complexities, rich epistemologies, and fusions of feelings and thinking. We carry the vast intricacies of Native worldviews; we are the expanded systems of the African Orixas, the Africanization of the Tai Chi, the wild and outrageous *malemolence* (fluidity, impropriety) that makes peoples of white orientations furious, we are the fullness of guiltlessness, and the soaring of sensual delightful bodies in fusions. Here philosophers make songs and singers write compendiums of social histories. We live from reversed anthropologies, people's counter-theologies, invented spiritualities, transverse liberation theologies and practices from the people below. We both are and are not the church, anti-church ministries, unhinged pastoral ministry, and creativity beyond the pale.

So even before welcoming you to colonial Brazil, we should welcome you from Abya Ayala, the name given to the Americas by the Kuna-Tule people. From São Leopoldo, and all the regions here, we must honor the life of the Arachás, Carijós, Caingangues, and other ancestral first nations.

Decoloniality

When we speak of decoloniality, we speak of ways to detach and unlearn from the imperialist-colo-

nizing movement that is still alive today, the civilizing and conquering forms of European renaissance and modernity. We are the result and the embodiment of European thought gone universal. We are black, white, brown, yellow and red, but almost all Black because of the "denigrating" processes created by Europe: to de-nigrate, that is, to make all non-Europeans, niggers, Blacks. In meeting the barbarous Muslims and Jews of Europe and then the almost-human Indigenous peoples of the Americas, and the almost-Black humans of Africa, European thought developed its entire framework of mirror images and created an imperialist civilization process of exclusion that fashioned ways of assigning differences and offering identities and similarities from unique ways of thinking, acting, perceiving, believing, feeling and even defining what human being was supposed to be. When Europeans told us what was right, they also told us what was wrong.

The construction of Western Europe occurred through the extensive control of the global slave trade market by trans-Atlantic voyages, used to plunder the non-European world with its religious logic, "civilizing" mission, and distribution of diseases. Colonialism, a consequence of imperialism, was formed by multiple arms of civilizing domination: economics, politics, extraction, slavery, law, health, and religion.

The force of this new dominant condition of geo-political imposition makes European thought (organized from abstract fictions) become a universal theory and practice. From their villages, European thinkers have become universal necessities. For example:

Kant's reason and categorical imperatives would also become reason and categorical imperatives in the New World;

The theological-Christian perspective of Hegel's history, clearly a European history, now becomes universal, and the (Christian European) Spirit of history is the absolute spirit that becomes an overpowering force over any other spirit;

The hierarchical structuring of Western thought was presented by Heidegger through the division between humanity and the rest: animals and plants. "Man" has language while animals do not. By rejecting other forms of communication as language, animals are assigned to a lower category while humans are consequently above other creatures;

Descartes's "proof of existence" through thinking as a condition of being, fundamentally individ-

ualized, crushed other ways of being and thinking not done from the cartesian modes of perception;

The onto-theological thinking of Marx defines Indigenous people as the past of history, while also designating whites, from capitalism, as the future of history;

There is no humanity except through the lens of European epistemologies. There is no nature except that organized in a hierarchical binary of man-nature, established by modernity. There is no politics except in the expressions of the politics of emancipation of modernity. There is no God but the God of European Christianity. There is no Jesus but the Jesus re-read by the Greeks and European theologians. There is no other knowledge but modern epistemology. There is no body but the body erected in modern functions and definitions. There is no pleasure, or joy, except those ordained and not ordained by Freud, Lacan, or Reich. There are no rights but modern human rights. There is no understanding of religion other than the European. There is no economy except in the forms erected by the social clashes of Greek-Christian-European democracy. There is no beauty but the fine arts of European museum aesthetics. There are no ontologies other than Modern Ontology, as defined by rationalism.

And for all that, there is so much to criticize of liberation theologies.

We have become the great epistemological backyard of Zoo-Europe.²

We must therefore employ an epistemological decolonization, which Anibal Quijano called *epistemological reconstitution*, and offer other interpretations beyond modernity to regain forms of thinking and creating knowledge from other places of the world. Philosophy, anthropology, history, and fundamentally, theology are places drenched with modernity, where space for other interlocutors serves only as an *illustration* that further intensifies the endless light of modernity. From this groundless ground, Christianity speaks from an incomplete and faulty set of ideas which take concrete forms of exploration that are always ahistorical and disembodied.

In this epistemological reconstitution we seek what Walter Mignolo calls the “colonial difference”

that hides in the colonality of the processes of destitution and shows itself clearly but also opaquely in all modern denotative thinking (Mignolo and Walsh 2018, 186). This is what Mignolo calls the *matrix of colonial power* (Mignolo and Walsh 2018, 111).

This notion of *matrix of colonial power* was already at the center of the word colonialism, formed by *colon*, *cultus* and *culture*. Alfredo Bosi in his book “The Dialectics of Colonization” says that colonization is the taking of land, culture and “religion” as an ancestral memory, “a totalizing project whose driving forces can always be sought at the level of the colon: occupy a new ground, exploit their possessions, submit their natives” (Bosi 1992, 15).

With colonization, we lose our *vincularidad*, our attachment with the land. “Colo” is the cultivation of the earth as well as the cultivation of the self. Hence, with the loss of this connection, this fundamental link, we create a way of cultivating ourselves that will always be suspended from the earth. Accordingly disconnected, we live a spirituality desperately lacking a grounding place, a lack that gives itself to endless false promises of affection or imaginary beliefs. With our de-linked life and uprooted bodies from the earth, our desires also become uprooted and become that which can hide this broken link. With regard to the religious aspect of this de-attachment, colonialism cuts off the *re-actualization* of our origins made possible by the re-memorialization of the ancestors of the earth. With this colonial cut-off, people who once drew their greater connection from ancestors attached to the land, are now lost. As lodgers and paying occupants of the land, land which is seen by the Zooropa as *Terra Nulius*, we search for heaven without understanding the earth. We are eschatological masters of time and ontological renters of space.

Against this colonial occupation and detachment from the land and history, decoloniality seeks old forms of *vincularidad*, other knowledges and other tastes, other looks, other ways of thinking, feeling, acting, living and bonding with the earth. Decoloniality seeks other forms of life and other forms of love. Catherine Walsh suggests we decolonize modern European thoughts by re-linking us to peripheral thoughts and finding other ways to *re-exist*, *resurface*, and *re-emerge* (Mignolo and Walsh 2018, 6).

For Martinique thinker, Franz Fanon, “Decolonization, which proposes to change the order of the world, is seen as a program of absolute disorder”

2 This is a play on words in Portuguese: the word Europe can be pronounced in phrases that when spoken in a rapid manner sound like one is saying “zoo-europe.”



© by Miriam Löhr

(Fanon 1968, 17)... But it is precisely this absolute disorder that decoloniality asks for. Because it is in this dis-order that we can find freedom and liberation. Walter Mignolo speaks of the necessary disintegration of the Western power matrix, of the de-annexation of the structures of modern coloniality, especially forms of understanding, and the use of political structures as nation-states.

Thus, all decolonial ways of thinking are forms of de-linking, de-europeanizing, and promoting the de-annexation of Renaissance and modernity, which are totalitarian and totalizing forms of knowledge and forms of life. However, along with this decoupling and detachment, decoloniality is a simultaneous process of re-linking and relationality with other marginal, alternative, land-related knowledges within a decolonial plurality.

Decoloniality wants to be transversal, border crossing, celebrating the thoughts that are born from the co-influence of other people who are not only European, entangled in the complication and co-implication of various thoughts from below that flee from the totalitarian univocal epistemic thinking of Europe. As decolonialists, even as Christians, perhaps, we should speak no more of an essence of eternal uni-

versal that has always existed which we must represent somehow throughout the world. We will not buy into denotative epistemes, which always speak concretely from abstract ideas. On the contrary, we speak from the materiality which we live in, the touch, the smell, the pain, the oppression, the feeling, the wind that blows where we are, the human beings who join the humanity of fish, the feelings of the mountains and the human presence of the jaguar. Then we will imagine what and who we are.

Let us now think of some decolonial methodological forms that work within what Enrique Dussel calls trans-modernity or the fifth age of the world, or which Eduardo Viveiros de Castro calls high-modernity.

Methodology

I wanted to speak in detail about anthropophagism, perspectivism and carnival. But since I do not have time, I am going to make an amalgam of everything.

Tupi, or not tupi that is the question
(de Andrade 1928, 47).

Anthropophagism is a gift of the Indigenous peoples from Brazil to the world. Anthropophagism or cannibalism was the ritual of eating enemies. When Europeans arrived in Brazil and came into contact with Tamoios and Tupi-Guaranis, several of the Europeans were eaten by these Indigenous peoples. The ritual of cannibalism was a conjunction of factors, but fundamentally, as Eduardo Viveiros de Castro puts it, “what was intended was this alterity as a point of view about the Self... a paradoxical movement of reciprocal self-determination from the point of view of the enemy” (de Castro 2015, 233–234).

The anthropophagy of Oswald de Andrade, “intuited on the Brazilian vocation to incorporate the other, to add and multiply and to transform the languages using all the logics, one kind of turns to the other, for a Brazil that was not them” (Wisnik 2012). Anthropophagy will read everything: adapting everything, creating and re-creating an amalgam of new thinking, new lives for their communities. In this way, modernity is not forbidden, but redone, re-read, abandoned, eaten and shitted, reinvented in whatever means necessary. In this way, Oswald de Andrade’s anthropophagy is not about the devouring of the other in order to triumph mercilessly but rather, the addition of the perspective of the other as one’s own perspective.

Anthropophagy will open the space for the coming of perspectivism

Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, perhaps one of the most important voices of our time, elaborated a deep and visceral analysis of Amazonian Indigenous ontologies and made connections with modern thinkers to remove their aura of unique speech. Castro does with anthropology what we need to do with practical theology. He entered the Indigenous world and from there rephrased the forms of anthropology and put in check its scientific status. As an inhabitant of high-modernity, he created a “counter-anthropology – a certain idea of anthropology modified and subverted by Indigenous anthropologies presenting an “Amerindian thought” debugged, generalized, and simplified so that it could be confronted polemically with ours” (de Castro 2015).

To seek the Indigenous perspective was to put Eurocentrism itself in perspective with two egalitarian views of life and relations. Just as Castro understood Indian mythology, he also understood philos-

ophy: as a mythology. He imploded the binary of savages versus moderns and thus made us all see savagery as the work of the moderns. “I wanted to call attention to the strict dependence of philosophy with its ‘pre-philosophical’ moment, that is, the non-philosophical, which is its mythical soil, from which all the themes and concepts of Western philosophy and metaphysics are born and thus organize its geographical orientation, its locality, undoing the universality of local myths.” Castro affirms his radical ontological anarchism as a methodological position of principle and practice of anthropology and as an exercise in the permanent decolonization of thought as the self-determination of Amerindian peoples (de Castro 2015).

For Castro, it took a “deforming projection of our dominant intellectual tradition based on the indigenous world,” in order to elevate the conditions of our gross and convenient modern irrationality to its processes of production of knowledge and exploitation. He engaged decoloniality without getting involved in decolonial theory itself by practicing bricolage, stealing things from Europe as a “poacher, one who goes in and steals things hidden in the land of others.” Put another way, “I’m only interested in what is not mine” as de Andrade says, or to “understand the ideas of others to radicalize it even more,” in the words of Castro (de Castro 2015).

If anthropophagism and perspectivism both work with Indigenous thinking, carnival will be the hybrid movement of this Brazilian amalgam working alongside Black people, as a way of criticizing modernity and its children: coloniality, the concept of race, and slavery.

Carnival is the theory of decoloniality in practice. Beyond the “golden showers” and neoliberal agendas of exceptionally cruel and ignorant presidents, carnival is the knowledge and practice of a people who create larger-than-life festivals and re-size, re-read, and re-create the country’s life as it presents itself to us. For Orlando Calheiros, “samba does not create a political conscience, samba is the political consciousness already awakened from these ‘poor and peripheral’ people... a criticism made through poetry, through music, through an aesthetic. [The singer] Bezerra da Silva spoke of this aspect explicitly when he affirmed that ‘the favelas get beaten up always and samba is its defense’” (Calheiros 2019).

This year the samba school winner in Rio de Janeiro was the famous “First Station of Mangueira.”



From his samba-enredo, “Lullabies to Put Adults to Bed,” part of the history of Brazil was recounted by 3,500 samba school components. The carnival artist Leandro Vieira explains the plot of the school: “is a look at the history of Brazil more interested in the missing pages. The story of Indigenous, Blacks and Poor, popular heroes who never found space in the official books and we never learned about in schools. So, we are giving prominence to those who never had prominence in the history of Brazil. “The opening float said: I want a Brazil that is not in the official picture.”

Inside that float, the official portraits displayed are central figures in Brazilian (official) history, while outside the official car, real Indigenous and Black people. The dancers in front of the car represent history in another way. At one point the central figures leave the car, which is the place of prominence in history, and while they are out of the car, the audience realizes that their bodies are tiny, showing how infinitely smaller they are when compared to the historical presence of Blacks and Indigenous people in this country.

At the end of the show, the yellow-green flag of Brazil that reads “Order and Progress” becomes the pink and green flag of the Mangueira School, which reads: “Indigenous, Blacks and Poor!” In the last car, Mangueira remembers Marielle Franco: a Black woman born in the Maré favela, a lesbian, a council woman in Rio de Janeiro, who was murdered last year and whose case has not yet been resolved. As Eliane Brum states, Marielle “was the embodiment of a movement that came from the interiors of the deep forgotten strength of Brazil. Marielle embodied an uprising that did not die with her but has been massacred in recent years. Marielle represents a creative uprising that dreams of another Brazil, who wanted to cross the oligarchies cheerfully with their bare feet as they did during this Carnival – towards another way of being Brazilians, in the plural” (Brum 2019).

Decoloniality in its deepest expression!

The Theory of Decoloniality Extended

As we look at Latin America we see immense movements that create new worlds. Like the Indigenous Zapatista National Armored Movement in Mexico, the MST – Movement of the Landless People, the Peripheral Collectives of Brazil, the Cocaleros of Bolivia (Ochoa 2014), the Afro-Andean and

Afropacíficas resistances of Colombia³ La Via Campesina,⁴ all the washerwomen, seed planters, urban workers, the National Indigenous Conference in Ecuador and the entire Indigenous struggle spread throughout Latin America where its leaders are being devoured by the system. However, where there is coloniality there is decoloniality. And resistance forms the backbone of our people. Indigenous resistance and the Black Quilombos have always fought against colonization by pulsing with life and alternative knowledges. Resistance and resilience are the way of being of our Amerindian people.

These groups challenge us theologically to do the following:

To consider the earth as the central grounding place of all living and thinking and the whole ecological biome as a correlated living being without hierarchies;

To consider resistance as the only way of living in the world;

To acknowledge that women are the target of violence from the global-white-military-hetero-patriarchal-fascist state;

To insist on women as fundamental in the organization of life and leadership of movements;

To consider the possibility of organizing life without any European presupposition, be it religious, political or economic;

To consider the ways in which the “religions” of Indigenous and African traditions can become a guiding framework to re-link us to the earth and to create fruitful and extensive connections with other forms of life.

Theological Decoloniality: An Option

Against the annihilation of Black, Indigenous and queer people and all “minorities,” and against the destruction of the planet, the neo-liberal/neo-Pentecostal challenge, the looming threat of agribusi-

3 “Hacia El Buen Vivir. Desde lo cotidiano-extraordinario de la vida comunitaria. Una invitación para comprender la acción política, cultural y ecológica de las resistencias afroandina y afropacífica Columbiana.” http://biblioteca.clacso.edu.ar/clacso/se/20190118032420/Ubuntu.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3soZlcitEU9_VkPTA_3FqGpSsNQFsmBboGmn2-yZi7fsNgA7loz5t5PxA.

4 The Peasants Way, An International Organization That Works For The Sovereignty Of Food <http://viacampesina.org/en/>.

ness and fascism, the war against women, there is an immense necessity to offer pastoral alternatives and theological practices that can carry new forms of life and survival. Christianity must offer ways to disconnect thinking from that which does not offer results in everyday life, in the re-existence of peoples, in the resurgence of other forms of experience and in the re-emergence of other connections and loyalties. Fundamentally, Christianity must have a commitment to decolonization and an understanding of decoloniality, as Walter D. Mignolo correctly states: Christianity in its original forms was a non-Western religion which became a Western and imperial religion (Mignolo 2012).

It is necessary to make a transubstantiation of Christianity. That is, to eliminate the European substance of our faith and transubstantiate it in other ontologies and practices. For if we eat God at the Eucharist, in an anthropophagic way, the whole process of digestion is itself a sacred process. Transubstantiation happens in our body, making its way from our mouth through the digestive tract and through our intestines. Thus, the end of the Eucharist is the defecation of God. Holy Shit! Being taken by God, we decolonize the presence of God through the process of anthropophagy. Our religious methodology is given in the body and not in the spirit. The itinerary? From mouth to ass. We eat, we are eaten, we de-link, dis-connect, re-exist, re-emerge, always in new fluidities and potentialities. As Enrique Dussel says, Christianity must return to its messianic origins before Constantine (Mignolo 2012).

We need those who show us this form of messianic Christianity. Like the work of Camilo Torres Restrepo, Oscar Romero, Pedro Casaldáliga, Cardinal Arnáiz, Ernesto Cardenal, Hélder Câmara. However, our history always leads us to speak about the Christian men who fought, while we speak very little of other religions and of women. Therefore, new forms of epistemological decolonization of theology must come from other religions, from other ontologies, from other mythologies, from other worldviews, and fundamentally from women.

“Brazil, our time has come to listen to Marias, Mahins, Marielles, Malês.” Says Mangueira samba.

A feminist Christianity made with the crossing of non-Christian women like Mother Menininha do Gantois, Luiza Mahin, Tuira Kayapo.

A feminist Christianity crossed by the presence of theologians who recreate the Christian world from the poorest women, like Ivone Gebara and

Nancy Cardoso, two of the most important Brazilian theologians who have never been able to teach in Brazilian patriarchal universities because they are radical, living on the shores and peripheries of Amerindia. Without the theological and biblical teachings of Gebara and Cardoso, and many others, there will be no decolonial theology in Latin America.

A feminist Christianity must be traversed by the pastoral presence of Dorothy Stang, a Queer Christianity, crossed by the various human sexualities, whose deviant presence of André S. Muszkopf nourishes us with a theological queerness. A Black Christianity as in the works of Ronilso Pacheco. A Christianity complete with the presence of communities where full people live with physical challenges and social abandon and who are usually expurgated from public spaces.

We need a Christianity shaped by African Brazilian religions, Afro-Indigenous religions like Jurema and ancestors connected to the earth. We need re-readings of Christianity that do not *aim at* saving Christianity, but rather, problematize the most basic elements of the Christian faith. Fundamentally we need Christianities that start with the process of colonization and its land-grabbing.

We are in desperate need of a Christianity whose Jesus Christ will not be a representation of God transformed into an idea, but rather, an earthly epistemology crossed by other ontologies. Jesus as humus as we are humus. In this confluence, in this Christianity of many detours, unexpected associations and contrary to itself, we will give space to new life movements that can move along with the pace of life and other forms of life beyond the human. For our commitment is not with historical Christian traditions, but with the honoring of life present in the ministry of Jesus.

Perhaps we need more ontological anarchism to guide our religious lives (de Castro 2019). Perhaps we need a return to the Indigenous world. For without the Indian gaze, we will be white, almost all white, and we will have no world to live in.

The Decolonial Wound – The World from the Losers’ Viewpoint

The decolonial wound unites us towards decoloniality. If in the first movement of liberation theology we began with the option for the poor in more generalized ways, engendered by European thought,



new forms of liberation theology seek forms of choice for the poor from wounded, oppressed, and forgotten bodies. Thus, decoloniality broadens and even challenges the option for the Poor from the decolonial wound. As Mignolo explains:

Decoloniality becomes a process of recognizing the colonial wounds that are historically true and still open in the everyday experience of most people on the planet... It is a heterogeneous historico-embodied move, it perceives the wound of coloniality hidden under the rhetoric of modernity, the rhetoric of salvation. Decoloniality is at once the unveiling of the wound and the possibility of healing (Mignolo 2013).

The decolonial wound is our poison-remedy!

A New Pastoral

Juan Luis Segundo in his book *Acción Pastoral Latinoamericana, Sus Motivos Occultos* warned us about the church's lack of mobility to move into the demands and challenges made urgent and necessary throughout the whole continent. The church needs not only to understand, but to change. Already in 1972, he pointed to our fears as the impediment to necessary change and action. He told us that we were afraid of ourselves, of the salvation of the masses and of the gospel, that we would not know what to do with ourselves if those changes occurred.

Fearful of change due to the markers of Empire in the very bones of Christianity, the Catholic and Protestant churches saw their faith weakened, which made space for the Pentecostal church to rise. The neo-Pentecostal churches are growing in leaps and bounds in Brazil with a new wing of a colonial gospel that has been remodeled according to the contours and meanings of neoliberalism, filled with highly militarized prejudices and following the irrationality of extractivism and state exceptionalism.

On the other side of this gradient are the incredible works of the Catholic *Pastoral Commission of the Earth*, working within the most needed areas of the country, CIMI, the Indigenous Missionary Council working closely with Indigenous people, and the presence of CEBI: *Ecumenical Center For Biblical Studies* and the protestant work of Júlio César Adam, Valburga Schmiedt Streck and Ronilso Pacheco, creating a decolonial work of practical theology without fear. With them and their people, a new decolonial and liberating practical theology is proclaimed. We must stand in solidarity with those

who are in the most dangerous conditions and situations.⁵

Conclusion – The Ability to Dream

I end this talk filled with contradictions and complexities that I cannot solve. I must confess that all I have been able to hear these days are the Indigenous shamans telling us that very soon the sky will be falling on our heads. That is the end of the world. They tell us that we need to learn to dream in other ways. To dream the dreams of forests, rivers and animals. In order to do that we must move away from the anthropocentrism of theology. There is way too much about humans! Enough of that! Any discourse or practice related to God must be in flux with the earth. That means a decodification of the theological systems and an entering into a flow of living based on the flying of the birds, the pollination of the bees, the swimming of the dolphins, the pathways under the soil of the worms, the roots of the trees, the lives of the plants, the ways of the onça.

The Xama Yanomami Davi Kopenawa in his book *The Falling Sky: Words of a Yanomami Shaman*, a must-read for all of us, says this:

Whites only treat us as ignorant because we are different from them. But their thought is short and obscure; it cannot go far and elevate itself, because they want to ignore death. (...) Whites do not dream far like we do. They sleep a lot, but they only dream about themselves (Denowski and de Castro, 2017, 2112–2116).

5 We need a pastoral work that includes interreligious dialogue. In fact, it is necessary to decolonize even ecumenical thought, which is organized around European notions of religion. We need a pastoral work that articulates the theologies of liberation, the decolonial discourses and practices of the end-of-world peoples, and work with new and old reordered rituals. Also, we need to create new forms of decolonial love. The Christian understanding of love is based on the European literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. We love from individualized forms and feelings of love without care for the neighborhood. We need to return to the love of Jesus and to his Jewish roots that demand love as a place open to strangers. Perhaps we can learn a new form of love alongside the local Kaigangs, whose culture is based on the production of relationships and not on relationship to production. They can teach us a de-romanticized love, a love whose centrality of the fruit called pinhão brings together a whole community. Thus, it takes both a decolonial turn in liberation theology and a liberation theology in decolonial turn to help us think in new ways.



Fundamentally, decoloniality would be the art of no longer dreaming about ourselves. That's why I end with Gilberto Gil's song *Indio do Xingu* (Gil 1991).

References

- "Estação Primeira de Mangueira: História Pra Ninar Gente Grande." (Video) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F-9nRZt86zbc>.
- "Hacia El Buen Vivir. Desde lo cotidiano-extraordinario de la vida comunitaria. Una invitación para comprender la acción política, cultural y ecológica de las resistencias afroandina y afropacífica Columbiana." http://biblioteca.clacso.edu.ar/clacso/se/20190118032420/Ubuntu.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3soZlCitEU9_VkPTA_3FqGpSsNQFsmBboGmn2-yZi7fsNgA7loz5t5PxA.
- Bosi, Alfredo. 1992. *A Dialética da Colonização*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras.
- Brum, Eliane. 2019. "Quem mandou matar Marielle? E por quê? Bolsonaro, que governa o Brasil pela administração do ódio, deveria ser o maior interessado em desvendar o crime". *El País*. March 13, 2019. https://brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2019/03/13/opinion/1552485039_897963.html?fbclid=IwAR1H-pRCJQbpwYRSVOI-pA7Lbr1R_0heqVHDlSu6HHR41CVGlrM3bj-FUU8k.
- Calheiros, Orlando. 2019. "O Apogeu Da Resistência Alegre E Da Consciência Política Na Passarela Do Samba. Entrevista Especial Com Orlando Calheiros." <http://www.ihu.unisinos.br/587367-o-apogeu-da-resistencia-alegre-e-da-consciencia-politica-na-passarela-do-samba-entrevista-especial-com-orlando-calheiros>.
- Danowski, Déborah, and de Castro, Eduardo Viveiros. 2017. *The Ends of the World*. Malden: Polity Press.
- de Andrade, Oswald. 1928. "Manifesto Antropófago." *Revista de Antropofagia*, São Paulo, May 1928: 3.
- de Castro, Eduardo Viveiros. 2015. "Conferência com Eduardo Viveiros de Castro." (Video) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=neWz33m6dgl&t=4649s>.
- de Castro, Eduardo Viveiros. 2015. *Metafísicas canibais: Elementos para uma antropologia pós-estrutural*. São Paulo: CosacNaif.
- de Castro, Eduardo Viveiros. 2019. "On Models and Examples Engineers and Bricoleurs in the Anthropocene." *Current Anthropology* 60: 296–308.
- Fanon, Frantz. 1968. *Os Condenados da Terra*. Translated by de José Laurênio de Melo. Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira.
- Gil, Gilberto. 1991. "Um Sonho." In *Parabolicamará* CD. EUA and Canada: Gege Edições / Preta Music. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B4Ev-m2hf1U>.
- Mbembe, Achille. 2017. *Critique of Black Reason*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Mignolo, Walter D. and Walsh, Catherine E. 2018. *On Decoloniality*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Mignolo, Walter. 2012. "Delinking, Decoloniality & Dewesternization: Interview with Walter Mignolo (Part II)." <http://criticallegalthinking.com/2012/05/02/delinking-decoloniality-dewesternization-interview-with-walter-mignolo-part-ii/>.
- Mignolo, Walter. 2013. "Decolonial AestheSis: Colonial Wounds/Decolonial Healings." https://socialtextjournal.org/periscope_article/decolonial-aestheSis-colonial-woundsdecolonial-healings/.
- Ochoa, Ursula Durand. 2014. *The Political Empowerment of the Cocaleros of Bolivia and Peru*. US: Palgrave Macmillan.
- The Peasants Way*. An International Organization That Works For The Sovereignty Of Food. <http://viacampesina.org/en/>.
- Visnik, Jose Miguel. 2012. "Festival Adaptação – Pré-Balada Literária + Sarau de Poesia." (Video) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PHGnEufj3mI&t=3195s>.

Decoloniality, Ecology and Sustainability

Wanda Deifelt

Colonialism has left a long shadow over the Latin American continent. Among its many side-effects are environmental degradation and a population struggling to maintain itself in sustainable ways. Exploitation of natural resources, enslavement of peoples, and the elimination of indigenous populations are among its painful consequences. Colonialism refers not only to economic disparities and ecological threats but encompasses an empire mentality that continues to assail us. To a great extent, religion has served as an ideological scaffolding, to justify the sacrifices required from the most vulnerable and disenfranchised. While the entire planet groans in pain, humanity can no longer limit itself with mainstream views of development and theological discourses that condone this destruction. However, instead of despairing, we are invited to envision sustainable ways of dwelling on the land, embracing ways of life that honor the intersections between economic, environmental, and social wellbeing. To enable this, it is paramount to reclaim theological discourses and practices that maintain life in abundance and affirm the dignity of all living creatures. This can be done through an ecological approach – studying the *oikos*, the house and the multiple households we inhabit: our personal bodies, social bodies, and the body of the entire planet.

Introduction

From the way we dress to the programs on television that we watch, from the music we listen to, to the news we pay attention to, there is a hierarchy of values that is deeply influenced by a colonial mentality. Colonialism can be defined as the conquest and control of other people's lands and goods, but it is also an introjection, an imposition, and eventually an appropriation of the colonial mentality as one's own – and this is called coloniality (Mignolo 2011, 2).¹ Although my observations refer primarily to colonialism and coloniality as experienced in Latin America and the Caribbean, it should be noted that colonialism is a recurrent and widespread

Wanda Deifelt is a Brazilian theologian and scholar currently teaching at Luther College, in Decorah, Iowa, USA. Her areas of expertise are contextual theologies (primarily liberation and feminist), embodiment, and interdisciplinary studies.

feature of human history.² It usually comes with the label *empire*: Roman, Mongolian, Ottoman, British, American, etc. Latin America, too, has had its empires, including among indigenous populations. Not only the notable Aztecs and Incas, in the 15th century, who extracted tributes in services and goods from other indigenous groups, but also their most

1 Coloniality refers to the logic at the basis of historical colonialisms, related to the colonial matrix of power or coloniality of power (Mignolo 2011, 2).

2 A current example is the recent exchange between Mexico and Spain on the issue of colonialism, with Mexican president, Obrador, demanding Spain apologize for the atrocities committed against indigenous people (Burgen and Agren 2019).

recent iterations – with nations of the continent eager to exert power over others.

Deconstructing Colonialism

It is important to remember that, in Latin America and the Caribbean, the concept of civilization came hand-in-hand with how human beings were positioned within empires. Europeans eventually labeled the Mayans, Incas and Aztecs as civilizations because they had a hierarchical structure: there were rulers and ruled, those who decided and those who obeyed (Hanke 1959). What made the Aztecs the strongest empire was also the amount of violence used to ensure its domain. They were known for practices that included human sacrifice, as part of the religious ceremony that they believed appeased their gods to spare them from suffering. Those indigenous communities that were egalitarian, rotated leadership, or did not comply with European notions were labeled as barbarians. They were deemed savages, others, inferior beings without the capacity to make decisions on their own.³

From the colonial practices of pillaging land and people, enslavement of indigenous and African populations, forceful conversions to Christianity, and robbing human beings of their dignity, to the modern practices of neo-colonialism that pervade hearts and minds, Latin American history is a history of institutionalized looting. Although it may have started in 1492, when Christopher Columbus first arrived at the island of Hispaniola (modern day Dominican Republic and Haiti), its legacy continues well into the 21st century. Recently, corruption and mismanagement have become topics for populist right-wing rhetoric, but the reality is that the appropriation of public assets for private gain and using personal influence for public prestige are a trademark of Latin American and Caribbean politics and economics. Cleptocracy, rather than democracy, has been the longest running system in the continent.

Eduardo Galeano's magnum opus, *The Open Veins of Latin America*, maps this quite well. First published in 1971, it was considered so dangerous for its critical views that the military governments

of Chile, Argentina and Uruguay banned it. Galeano was exiled for detailing the pillage Latin America and the Caribbean have suffered. He not only denounces it, but illustrates how the mentality of the colonizers has pervaded and continues to influence social, political and economic decision-making.⁴

The effects of colonialism are felt on both the land and its people. In post-Columbus Latin America and the Caribbean, their population became victims of enslavement and genocide. The riches of the land, the bodies that inhabited this land, and the land itself were plundered. For the longest time, the economy of the continent could be summarized as an "after-dinner" economy, that is, everything one takes after the main meal: coffee, sugar, cocoa, tobacco, and rum. When markets fluctuated in Europe or the United States, these were the first items taken off the grocery list. More recently, exploitative trade deals and political alliances reveal not only a dependence from developing nation on international empires (e.g. the US and more recently China) but also the creation of national elites who collaborate with and benefit from the exploitation of their fellow citizens. Galeano's book is particularly revealing of the historical willingness of Latin American leaders to defend foreign interests. It details a string of murderous US-backed dictators and the arrangements made to cover up this bloody history in the form of neocolonialism:

These so-called local elites inherited the colonial state whose function was not to serve the colonized but to exploit them. Classical colonialism ostensibly ended when these local collaborators demonstrated, through training and internalization of colonial values, their proclivity to serve as auxiliaries of neocolonialism (Bulhan 2015, 243).

An update of Galeano's book would certainly include the expropriation of wealth and the environmental degradation that the latest iteration of colonial interests – neoliberalism – has bestowed upon the continent. The town of Brumadinho in Brazil illustrates the way in which international conglomerates are able to exploit natural resources without accountability towards local populations and environmental safety. Tragedy struck on January 25, 2019, when the rupture of a tailings dam in Bru-

³ Quijano argues that the colonial structure of power resulted in a caste system, ranking Spaniards at the top and those that they conquered at the bottom due not only to their different colour skin but also their presumably inferior culture (Quijano 2007, 168–178).

⁴ Similar views are presented by authors such as Carlos Rodrigues Brandão, Orlando Fals Borda, Boaventura de Sousa Santos, etc.



madinho, released a mudflow that covered houses, animals and people. At least 206 people died as a result of the collapse, and the environmental impact of the toxic mud is still being assessed. The dam is owned by Vale, the same company involved in the 2015 Mariana dam disaster, also in Brazil. The Mariana dam was an iron ore tailings dam, and its rupture killed 19 people and was described, at that time, as the worst environmental disaster in Brazilian history. “The level of toxicity in the tailings is not yet clear, but iron oxide can choke river sand and poison the surrounding vegetation. It can also compact the soil, preventing new growth of plants on land. Three years after the previous disaster, water from the affected Doce River is still legally unfit for human consumption in 90 % of monitoring stations” (Watts 2019). Around 60 million cubic meters of iron waste flowed into the Rio Doce, causing toxic mudflows to pollute the river and its estuary.

Like many other cash-strapped countries, the economies that stem from colonial, neocolonial, or neoliberal policies are not concerned with sustainable practices that ensure the wellbeing of the land and its people. To the contrary. Cash-crops such as sugar cane, coffee, cocoa, and more recently soy beans and cattle are geared towards profit at the expense of environmental and human sustainability. They foment slash and burn, deforestation, and heavy use of pesticides and herbicides. Agro-business replaces family farms because industrial-size ventures are seen as more profitable than organic farming and cooperatives.

In his book, Galeano renders Latin America a continent blessed with bountiful natural resources that has been systematically stripped of its wealth while its people remain among the poorest on earth, with high levels of infant mortality, illiteracy and child prostitution. Missing from Galeano’s account, however, are the movements of resistance that never allowed the colonizing discourse and practice to prevail. Not reported are the micro and macro modes that opposed colonialism, engaging historic figures such as Zapata, Tupac Amaru, and Toussaint L’Ouverture. The history of colonialism is also filled with attempts of decoloniality. This resistance, carried out by movements within civil society and revolutionary struggles cannot be deemed as inconsequential.

Take the rebellions of enslaved people, for example. In 1835, in Salvador, Bahia (Brazil), a small group of slaves and former slaves, inspired by Mus-

lim teachings, rose up against the government (Reis 1993). This uprising is known as the *malê* revolt, as Muslims were known, from the Yoruba, as “*imales*”. Even if their revolt was suppressed, they were part of the long tradition of resistance and resilience, similar to the Haitian revolution (1791–1804). Further, when systematic and structural changes were not complete, there were always movements that were inspired by hope. Runaway slaves formed communities that subverted the logic of subservience and racism. *Quilombola* communities, formed by runaway enslaved people, continue to thrive. Today, many of these communities are engaged in sustainable agriculture, production for self-consumption, and selling their surplus crops at local markets. In addition to these, the Quilombola community in São Lourenço, RS (which I recently visited) also produces artwork that celebrates their Afro-Brazilian heritage, displayed through, among other mediums, paintings of strong black women as a celebration of their role as keepers of the culture.

While there are individuals and communities drawing on the power of resistance and resilience to curb the power of colonialism, there are also efforts to minimize the history and the effect of colonialism itself. In Spain, for instance, there is an attempt to rewrite Spanish colonial history by labeling it as the “black legend” (*leyenda negra*). It claims that “colonialism” was allegedly invented (like *fake news*) by people outside of Spain to instill a feeling of guilt and shame onto the Spaniards. In the words of one of the founders of the Spanish Civilization Foundation, Borja Cardelús, “We need to improve the self-esteem and cohesion of Spaniards when it comes to their shared history and what they have contributed to humanity... Hernán Cortés and Francisco Pizarro brought ‘a far more humanitarian system’ to the Aztec and Inca empires they conquered” (Jones 2018). In other words, we are witnessing a 21st century re-hashing of the arguments used by 15th and 16th century conquistadors – that the expansion of the Iberian empires was also an expansion of Christendom, bringing along civilization and an elevation of the native soul.

The argument needs to be made that colonialism is real. In spite of the attempts to minimize its effects and “re-write” history, the imbalance in power and access to goods that colonialism generated must be recognized. It continues to leave a lasting shadow over countries all over the world. The first challenge for scholars involved with the teaching and practice of theology is memory. How can we memorialize

the tragedies of colonialism without dwelling on victimization? Can the memories of past oppressions help devise ways to overcome them in the present? How can we emphasize agency in the midst of structures that deny the power of grassroots initiatives (similar to those we visited in our field trips during this conference) or gloss over them as romantic exceptions instead of viable alternatives? Is it possible to honor the pain of the land, lamenting our tragedies, while still remaining hopeful?

The complexities of colonialism and the intersectionality needed to dismantle it

Before Eduardo Galeano, Frantz Fanon had also addressed the effects of colonialism. Frantz Fanon was born in 1925, on the Caribbean island of Martinique, which was then a French colony. During WWII, Fanon joined the French army and, after being stationed in Morocco and Algeria, served in the battle of Alsace. He experienced severe racism in Europe. For example, when the Allied forces crossed into Germany with photojournalists, Fanon and his fellow Afro-Caribbean soldiers were not included in any of the photos. The regiment was “bleached” of all non-white soldiers. Another example of racism, as he recalled, was that white women freed by black soldiers preferred to dance with fascist Italian prisoners instead of Fanon and his fellow Afro-Caribbean soldiers (Gordon 2015). After the war Fanon returned to Martinique to finish his baccalaureate education, but eventually went to France to study medicine and psychiatry. After qualifying as a psychiatrist in 1951, Fanon worked in France for a while but found his way to Algeria (1953), where he stayed until his deportation, in 1957.

Fanon’s life may present helpful insights for practical theology because it reflects the paradox of identity both as a result of colonialism and its resistance. In his book, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), Fanon criticized the dehumanizing effects of colonialism upon individuals and nations. The book is “an indictment of the violence and savagery of colonialism which he ends with a passionate call for a new history of humanity to be initiated by a decolonized Third World” (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, “Frantz Fanon”). One of the ways colonialism takes shape is through the mind. The oppressed always believe the worst about themselves. Fanon was able to address the trauma of being categorized as an “inferior other” by a dominant racist culture, and

from this place recuperate a sense of identity, purpose, and belonging.

Fanon helps us understand why people vote against their own interests, why they support those who are only looking out for themselves, or who believe that criticism based on evidence can be dismissed as fake. He dissects the colonizing project that makes people not want to step out of the colonizing pattern and mentality, but rather wish to be colonized by a bigger and better power. Fanon names this hierarchical worldview as the definition of the black human being as “negro.” It is not only a label based on race, but it constitutes an ideological construction with its own reverberations. Based on psycho-analytic observations, Fanon reflects on the trauma of colonialism and its effects: it promotes negative attitudes towards other black people and Africa, normalizes attitudes of debasement, and presents itself as the only way being in the world – so much so that no other alternative appears to be possible (Fanon 1965).

The difficulty of overcoming the sense of alienation that negritude sets up as necessary for the black human being lies in learning to see oneself not just as envisioned and valued (that is, devalued) by the white dominant culture but simultaneously through a perspective constructed both in opposition to and independently from the racist/racialized mainstream, a parallel perspective in which a black man or woman’s value judgments—of oneself and of others of one’s race—do not have to be filtered through white norms and values. It is only through development of this latter perspective that the black man or woman can shake off the psychological colonization that racist phenomenology imposes (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, “Frantz Fanon”).

Besides race and class, also gender identity has been a source of alienation and stigmatization. Feminist theory has explored value judgement and stereotypes that affect women and all those who embrace gender fluidity. Judith Butler identified the conformity to binaries – male/female, rich/poor, black/white, or colonizer/colonized – as a performance. Feminist, womanist, and queer theologies draw from the notion of performativity to explain why women, for example, suffer under male gaze. Women need to perform femininity, and in Brazil this means exposing our bodies while hiding our brains. Women conform to what we perceive as the expectations society has for us, considering that a woman’s value is her beauty and sensuality. The reduction of human beings to certain characteristics limits human potential and universalizes these



traits in order to create systems of oppression and perpetuate social hierarchies.

While decoloniality has been used to refer to the intellectual break away from the colonizers' ideas that made the colonized feel inferior, it also refers to the process of self-determination – whether as individuals or nations – that can range from nonviolent revolutions to wars of national liberation. We assume that, in the same way countries want to break the yoke of colonial power and become independent, human beings long for autonomy and agency. We may believe that people seek liberation and self-determination. But Fanon observes that the colonized mind adopts the mindset of the colonizer, claiming it as its own, thus introjecting a sense of worthlessness. It is not only more convenient and safer to have others making decisions on one's own behalf, but one's very capacity to make these decisions is questioned. In this entrapment, self-determination is not only a fraught concept but is also seen as a threat.

Brazilian educator Paulo Freire echoes Fanon's ideas in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Freire points out that the oppressed have a dual existence. Because "being human" is a privilege of the oppressors, those who are oppressed internalize the oppressors' mentality because the dominant group is seen as normative. To be human, then, is to emulate the oppressors. In a capitalist and consumerist society, to be is to have. Those who belong to the dominant groups understand that it is their privilege to both possess material goods, but also people. People are dehumanized and turned into objects, who can be owned and disposed of. For Paulo Freire, through consciousness raising, those who have been historically subjugated can reclaim their own agency. But this liberation is neither an individualistic effort nor something that can be done for others. He states: "While no one liberates themselves through their efforts alone, neither are they liberated by others" (Freire 1972, 42). This process of liberation happens through mutual support and encouragement, *with* each other, but not *for* the other. Finally, Freire points out that those who are oppressed also have the capacity to become oppressors. They can reverse the roles and use the same tactics used by their oppressors.

Fanon and Freire do not have an idealized view of those who have been historically marginalized and disenfranchised. Both name the perils of a mere turning the tables in the struggle for liberation, to seize privilege and social positions while replicating the same structures of hierarchy. A decolonization

that simply replaces the settler elite by a native elite that continues to exploit its population is no decolonization. It is merely a change in ownership.

An aspect that needs further attention in Fanon's and Freire's analyses is a more nuanced understanding of oppression. This is one of the contributions of feminist theory and theology. Authors such as Ivone Gebara and bell hooks point out that the lines between oppressor and oppressed are not always as clearly delineated as Fanon and Freire describe. In some situations, a person can be privileged while in other situations, they may be discriminated (Hooks 2015). In the complex web of power, there are intersections of oppression and privilege. Navigating and negotiating these different realms and levels requires awareness of the power dynamics themselves and the honesty needed to assess one's own role in them.

But a colonized mindset often prevents this critical approach, including assessing the role that religion itself – and Christianity in particular – plays in theologically justifying social stratification, including the enslavement of indigenous and African peoples. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the model of Christendom extended the colonial power of Iberian countries while also expanding the rule of the Roman Catholic church in the new lands. The model adopted by the Roman Catholic church, prior to the Second Vatican Council, was one of tacit agreement with colonial oligarchies. In terms of ethical deliberation, it was the church that decided on behalf of its members what constituted a morally correct way of life. Protestant churches were late arrivals to the continent, but they largely complied with the status quo and left ethical decisions for the individuals to make, granted that they were biblically sound. A more recent phenomenon is the growth of Pentecostal and Neopentecostal churches. While there are exceptions, the majority of these churches have individual pastors or bishops promulgating a list of dos and don'ts (rooted in biblical literalism) while prominently featuring prosperity theology and praise worship.

The description of these different traditions is an over-simplification, but its function is to illustrate the role religion played in the past and continues to play in the present. While the historical symbiotic relationship between Church and State served to pacify indigenous and enslaved peoples and justify socio-economic exploitation, the advent of contextual theologies (such as liberation, feminist, black, womanist, indigenous and queer, among others)

uses religious discourse and practice to empower those who are disenfranchised. These liberation theologies emphasize agency, the role of people and communities vis-à-vis a colonial mentality. They relate to what Paulo Freire described as consciousness, the awareness of one's place in the world and the ability to intervene in reality in order to change it.

There is no authentic change in the way we treat each other and the environment if there is not also a change in our way of thinking. Thus, the second challenge for scholars involved with the teaching and practice of theology is how to foment and embolden these initiatives of consciousness raising. Is it possible to draw from the memories of colonialism and identify their current effects (through neoliberal politics or economics, for instance) upon human beings and the environment? How can this awareness create greater ecological consciousness, helping individuals and communities see beyond immediate financial rewards on to the wellbeing of future generations? How can religion – and Christianity in particular – be a catalyst for change?

The interplay between colonialism, environmental degradation and unsustainable practices

Sustainability is defined as development that “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Brundtland 1987). While sustainability tends to focus on the interplay between profit, planet, and people, I would like to draw on the concept of *buen vivir* that is rooted in the worldview of the Quechua peoples of the Andes, *sumak kawsay*. It describes a way of doing things that is community-centric, ecologically-balanced and culturally-sensitive. Eduardo Gudynas explains that *buen vivir* is an unfolding philosophy. It describes “a way of life and a form of development that sees social, cultural, environmental and economic issues working together and in balance, not separately and hierarchically as at present” (Balch 2013). Latin American theologians have been attuned to this, particularly within the CETELA and Aby Ayala networks. In many of his books, Leonardo Boff refers to these initiatives, while also pointing out the connection between social inequalities and the impact this has upon escalating natural destruction (Boff 1995). Ecofeminism, too, has articulated this holistic perspective (Gebara 2002).

These environmentally-conscious approaches point out the limits of current development models and the strain left on the environment and its inhabitants.⁵ Furthermore, they postulate that theologies that reinforce dichotomies between body and soul, reality and eschatology, creation and the divine, individual interests and collective needs also must be critically evaluated. Environmental degradation affects plants, animals, soil, water, and people.⁶ Taking the case of illegal mining in the Brazilian Amazon – known as *garimpo* – for instance, one can easily see its impact in a broader sense, involving deforestation, the pollution of rivers with the dumping of mercury, the trade in drugs and arms, alcohol, prostitution, and human trafficking. It has negative impact on forest communities as well as the natural habitat.⁷ A map of illegal mining in the Amazon, released in December of 2018, shows the scale of pollution and damage to the environment, but it also offers a window into the world of crime that mining creates.⁸ The environmental crisis requires a theological response, calling churches and communities of faith to denounce environmental abuses and stand by those who are most deeply affected.

This theological approach requires that scholars and activists be well informed. Modern colonialism (also called neoliberalism) does more than extract goods and wealth from a conquered country – it restructures economies, drawing individuals and communities into a tangled web involving the flow of human and natural resources. It impacts the most vulnerable, such as indigenous populations, since they are seen as an impediment to progress.⁹ This interconnection between natural exploitation and its detrimental effects can also be illustrated in historical terms, between colonized and colonial countries, when slaves were trafficked from Africa to the

5 For further reading on the effects of mining – also small scale – in the Amazon area see the following article: Phillips 2018 and Phillips 2019b.

6 Seen as lucrative, but mining towns are often the last resort for people without other options: “There was no authority, there was prostitution, hired killings, [forced] disappearances and people trafficking... There was every kind of illicit business and all types of crimes with a lot of female victims, including minors” (Collins 2019).

7 Data on deforestation can be found at: Carrington 2019.

8 The effect of illegal mining and its environmental impact is further analyzed in this essay: Phillips 2018.

9 The painful results of deforestation are noted among indigenous populations: Phillips 2019a.



Americas, West Indian plantations produced sugar for consumption in Europe, and raw cotton was moved from India to be manufactured into cloth in England and then sold back to India. In whichever direction human beings and materials travelled, “the profits always flowed back into the so-called ‘mother country’” (Loomba 1998, 3–4)¹⁰.

Nowadays, international capital bypasses “countries” (which are often seen as burdens because of taxation and environmental regulations) by creating supra-national conglomerates that continue the pattern of colonial exploitation. The end result is that, in the name of a free market, profit is extracted and is not reinvested locally, while the social and environmental responsibility for clean-ups and treatment of diseases, among other problems, falls on local populations. The outcome is that the most vulnerable are left to fend for their own survival.¹¹ This environmental injustice is also a theological problem, as certain communities (particularly poor, indigenous, and people of color) are disproportionately exposed to pollution and its effects on health and environment with unequal protection and access to the laws, regulations, and governmental programs to ensure their wellbeing.

The intersection between profit, people, and planet requires a careful balance – and that is at the basis of sustainability (Watts 2019). The focus of sustainability is to save natural resources and the human environment while also preventing deterioration of economic and social development.¹² The United Nations correctly identified that environmental problems were global in nature and that it was in the common interests of all nations to establish policies for sustainable development, including policies regarding carbon emissions to reduce greenhouse effect. The Paris Agreement, for in-

stance, signed in 2016, is a global response to the threat of climate change. This careful balance between the wellbeing of the planet and its inhabitants requires ethical reflection and deliberation, a task for which scholars involved with the teaching and practice of theology are well equipped to address.

Sustainability – that the needs of the present can be met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs – is an invitation for action and reflection. It requires that empathy and compassion be extended not only to our current generation (whom we see) but also to future generations (whom we do not yet see). This echoes Jesus’ own words (1 John 4: 20–21), proclaiming love towards all of God’s children, whether they be near or far.¹³ In a time in which immediate rewards trump future benefits and ostentation of material goods surpasses the wellbeing of the *oikos*, there is needed for a profound reflection on humanity’s purpose and reason to be. In this, religious communities are vital agents of transformation. Already in the 1970s the World Council of Churches (WCC) articulated the need for broad paradigms to tackle environmental degradation and socio-economic disparities. In its 1983 assembly in Vancouver, the WCC encouraged member churches to address environmental concerns as part of a common effort to promote Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation (known as the JPIC process) (Deifelt 2016).

Our fixation with immediacy affects how we think sustainably about the resources needed by future generations (and how they are impacted by deforestation, water management, the use of pesticides in our foods, etc.) as well as our relationship to other human beings. It demands that we also address the *us* in sustainability, i. e., the human component of it and how it relates to decoloniality. I do not want to rehash a sensationalistic approach to sustainability and ecology – sometimes broadcasted as climate change sending people to therapy (Tsjeng 2019). Indeed, many people feel overwhelmed and paralyzed because there is so much to be done. But while it is true that nobody can address everything that jeop-

10 Loomba’s argument is that the flow worked in both directions: slaves and indentured labor as well as raw materials were transported to manufacture goods in the metropolis, or in other locations for metropolitan consumption, but the colonies also provided captive markets for European goods.

11 The plight of the urban poor, for instance, is exemplified by the population living on top of garbage without access to sanitation or safe drinking water: Cancian and Ladeira 2019.

12 The foundational work on this is the Brundtland Report, which can be downloaded as a copy of the UN General Assembly document A/42/427: https://sswm.info/sites/default/files/reference_attachments/UN%20WCED%201987%20Brundtland%20Report.pdf.

13 1 John 4:20–21: “Those who say, ‘I love God,’ and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also” (New Revised Standard Version).

ardizes the life of the planet, it is equally true that everybody can do something to promote life and its flourishing. Sometimes, it is more manageable to focus on a particular facet of a current issue and from there reflect on its causes and effects on a broader scale. This interlinking and overlapping approach is called intersectionality.

Kimberlé W. Crenshaw introduced the term *intersectionality* to address the marginalization of black women within not only antidiscrimination law but also in feminist and antiracist theory and politics (Crenshaw 1991). Since then, the theory and practice of intersectionality has generated the kind of interdisciplinary and global engagement that also characterizes the work done by theologians, scholars, and practitioners. Human experiences are intersectional, and intersectional experiences are greater than the sum of racism and sexism and classism and ageism or speciesism. The notion of intersectionality helps us better understand the human experience – the particular and complex manner in which colonialism has subordinated peoples and communities – and it can also help us better assess our impact on the planet and envision sustainable solutions.

Modern slavery is a good example of how multiple issues intersect. A recent report in *The Guardian* exposed the state of slavery in the 21st century (Hodal 2019). According to research compiled by the International Labor Organization (ILO), more people are enslaved today than any other time in history: one in 200 people is enslaved. While there were around 13 million people captured and sold in the transatlantic slave trade, today an estimated 40.3 million people are living under some form of slavery. What constitutes slavery? Being forced to work against one's will, being owned or controlled by an "employer" (exploiter), having limited freedom of movement, being treated as a commodity, or bought and sold as property. Women and girls make up 71 % of modern slavery victims; children comprise 25 % (circa 10 million).

Enslavement means being dehumanized. It is the denial of one's human rights and fulfillment of basic needs. Whether the means of enslavement is human trafficking or forced marriage, migration or threats of deportation, it is also deeply intertwined with other issues: incapacity to farm because of climate change, scarce resources to maintain family livelihoods, gender gaps in accessing education or jobs, and a growing divide between haves and have-nots. It is undeniable that modern slavery is a profitable

business: "A forced laborer generates roughly \$ 8,000 in annual profit for their exploiter, while sex traffickers earn an average of \$36,000 per victim" (Hodal 2019). It is estimated that modern slavery generates \$150 billion in profits per year.¹⁴ Human lives are commodified and the wellbeing of the planet jeopardized in order to generate revenues.

Vitor Westhelle once explained the effect colonialism has on its people by paraphrasing the famous Brazilian saying "There is no sin South of the Equator." He addressed sin and suffering in the Latin American context by deconstructing the mentality of objectification and idealization that is superimposed onto the land and its people. The continent was invented so that it could be discovered, he argued. Its possibilities are given within the constraints of the known and the imagined, as voyagers who claim to discover something that has always been there. The concept of sin, in Latin America, is a "a plea to abandon an imaginary paradise for a real life of risk and danger, or, perhaps better said, be a plea to leave hell imposed by a fantastic hope. But this hope can only be named by the voice of a people who knows and tells the story of their mistakes, their vileness, and their fall." (Westhelle 1998, 248–249). Besides the abuse of human rights and environmental mismanagement, to justify the sacrifice of life and land on behalf of progress is a sin that demands action.

A defeatist stance might argue that it is impossible to tackle this structural sin; that it is our human predicament and our propensity for wrongdoing. Modern slavery and deforestation are reduced to current expressions of humanity's original sin. But perhaps this despondent state of mind itself constitutes an example of coloniality. As Fanon stated, "In order to assimilate the culture of the oppressor and venture into his fold, the colonized subject has had to pawn some of his own intellectual possessions." (Fanon 1963, 13)¹⁵. The colonial mentality is so per-

14 The International Labor Organization presents comprehensive statistics on the nature and scope of forced labor. See <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/forced-labour/statistics/lang--en/index.htm>.

15 "The choice concerning violence that the colonized native must make, in Fanon's view, is between continuing to accept it—absorbing the abuse or displacing it upon other members of the oppressed native community—or taking this foreign violence and throwing it back in the face of those who initiated it. Fanon's consistent existentialist commitment to choosing one's character through



vasively incorporated among subaltern peoples that they believe nothing can be done to alter current affairs. They see others, who are similarly oppressed, as either a competition and threat to the little gains they have made (where they fight over the crumbs falling from the table) or they use their status and privilege to ensure that they too can exercise a modicum of power by diminishing others (exemplified by the multiple configurations of perceived hierarchy of white folk in relation to indigenous peoples, colored people vis-à-vis blacks, or economically poor men exerting dominion over the women in their own class). The outcome is that somebody is always worse off, prone to stigmatization, or deserving of their lot. Theologians would agree that oppressed and colonized people turning against each other, exerting violence and dehumanization, is an expression of original sin. A decolonial approach would go further and say that these abuses are a sin against our origins, against the good in creation that God envisions, and the abundant life Jesus proclaimed.

In this context, the final challenge for scholars involved with the teaching and practice of theology is to propagate a message of transformative hope and solidarity. An alternative to the construction of social and economic “others” is an intersectional approach in which differences are not used to discriminate, but rather to build coalitions of mutual empowerment and advocacy (Deifelt 2015). Can our theological endeavors create greater awareness about other people’s plights, their struggles and hopes? Likewise, can it foster common initiatives and activities that promote the type of life together that is at the core of *buen vivir*, where the wellbeing of creatures and creation alike are ensured? Can we imagine and work towards a time and place in which human ability can transform us and the world into a household of hospitality and care for the entire creation? I hope so and trust that, together, we can envisage and strive for this to become reality. As Desmond Tutu so wisely said, “What is the quality of life on our planet? It is nothing more than the sum of our interactions. Each kindness enhances the quality of life. Each cruelty diminishes it” (Tutu 2011, 7).

one’s actions means that decolonization can only happen when the native takes up his or her responsible subjecthood and refuses to occupy the position of violence-absorbing passive victim” (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, “Frantz Fanon”).

References

- Balch, Oliver. 2013. “Buen vivir: the social philosophy inspiring movements in South America.” <https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/blog/buen-vivir-philosophy-south-america-eduardo-gudynas>.
- Boff, Leonardo. 1995. *Ecology and Liberation: A New Paradigm*. Maryknoll: Orbis.
- Brundtland, Gro Harlem. 1987. “Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future.” <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/5987our-common-future.pdf>.
- Bulhan, Hussein A. 2015. “Stages of Colonialism in Africa: From Occupation of Land to Occupation of Being.” *Journal of Social and Political Psychology* 3 (1): 239–256.
- Burgen, Stephen and David Agren. 2019. “Spain hits back at Mexico in row over colonial right abuses.” https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/mar/26/spain-hits-back-at-mexico-in-row-over-colonial-rights-abuses?utm_term=RWRpdG9yaWFsX0d1YXJkaWVuVG9kYXlVUy0xOTAzMjY%3D&utm_source=esp&utm_medium=Email&utm_campaign=GuardianTodayUS&CMP=GTUS_email.
- Cancian, Natália and Pedro Ladeira. 2019. “Famílias em Belém vivem sobre o lixo à espera de obra iniciada em 2006.” <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/cotidiano/2019/10/familias-em-belem-vivem-sobre-o-lixo-a-espera-de-obra-iniciada-em-2006.shtml>.
- Carrington, Damian. 2019. “‘Death by a thousand cuts’: vast expanse of rainforest lost in 2018.” https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/apr/25/death-by-a-thousand-cuts-vast-expanse-rainforest-lost-in-2018?utm_term=RWRpdG9yaWFsX0d1YXJkaWVuVG9kYXlVUy0xOTAzMjY%3D&utm_source=esp&utm_medium=Email&utm_campaign=GuardianTodayUS&CMP=G-TUS_email.
- Collins, Dan. 2019. “Inside La Pampa: the illegal mining city Peru is trying to wipe out.” https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2019/mar/25/la-pampa-the-illegal-mining-city-peru-wants-wiped-out?utm_term=RWRpdG9yaWFsX0d1YXJkaWVuVG9kYXlVUy0xOTAzMjY%3D&utm_source=esp&utm_medium=Email&utm_campaign=GuardianTodayUS&CMP=GTUS_email.
- Crenshaw, Kimberle. 1991. “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color.” *Stanford Law Review* 43 (6): 1241–1299.
- Deifelt, Wanda. 2015. “Heterotopic Citizenship.” In *Kirche – befreit zu Widerstand und Transformation/ Church – Liberated for Resistance and Transformation*, edited by Karen L. Blooquist and Ulrich Duchrow. 161–178. Berlin: LIT Verlag. [Die Reformation radikalisierten/ Radicalizing Reformation Bd./Vol 5].
- Deifelt, Wanda. 2016. “Out of Brokenness, a New Creation: Theology of the Cross and the Tree of Life.” In *Eco-Reformation: Grace and Hope for a Planet in Peril*, edited by Lisa E. Dahill and James B. Martin-Schramm, 55–70. Eugene: Cascade Books.

- Fanon, Frantz. 1963, 2004. *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press.
- Freire, Paulo. 1993. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum.
- Galeano, Eduardo. 1997. *The Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Gebara, Ivone. 2002. *Out of the Depths: Women's Experience of Evil and Salvation*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Gordon, Lewis R. 2015. *What Fanon Said: A Philosophical Introduction to His Life and Thought*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Hanke, Lewis. 1959. *Aristotle and the American Indians: a Study in Race Prejudice in the Modern World*. London: Hollis & Carter.
- Hodal, Kate. 2019. "Slavery affects more than 40 million people worldwide – more than at any other time in history." https://www.theguardian.com/news/2019/feb/25/modern-slavery-trafficking-persons-one-in-200?utm_term=RWRpdG9yaWFsX0d1YXJkaWVuVG9kYXIVUy0xOTA3Mjg%3D&utm_source=esp&utm_medium=Email&utm_campaign=USMorningBriefing&CMP=usbriefing_email.
- Hooks, Bell. 2015. *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. New York: Routledge.
- International Labor Organization Data Initiative on Modern Slavery. 2015. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_norm/@declaration/documents/publication/wcms_364025.pdf.
- International Labor Organization Statistics on Forced Labor, Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking. 2017. <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/forced-labour/statistics/lang--en/index.htm>.
- Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. "Frantz Fanon." <https://www.iep.utm.edu/fanon/>.
- Jones, Sam. 2018. "Spain fights to dispel legend of Inquisition and imperial atrocities." <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/apr/29/spain-black-legend-inquisition-conquistadors>.
- Loomba, Ania. 1998. *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*. London/ New York: Routledge.
- Mignolo, Walter. 2011. *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*. Durham: Duke UP.
- Phillips, Dom. 2018. "Illegal mining in Amazon rainforest has become an 'epidemic'." <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/dec/10/illegal-mining-in-brazils-rainforests-has-become-an-epidemic>.
- Phillips, Dom. 2019a. "'We are fighting': Brazil's indigenous groups unite to protect their land." https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/mar/04/we-are-fighting-brazils-indigenous-groups-unite-to-protect-their-land?utm_term=RWRpdG9yaWFsX0d1YXJkaWVuVG9kYXIVUy0xOTA3Mjg%3D&utm_source=esp&utm_medium=Email&utm_campaign=GuardianTodayUS&CMP=GTUS_email.
- Phillips, Dom. 2019b. "Amazon gold miners invade indigenous village in Brazil after its leader is killed." https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jul/28/amazon-gold-miners-invade-indigenous-village-brazil-leader-killed?utm_term=RWRpdG9yaWFsX0d1YXJkaWVuVG9kYXIVUy0xOTA3Mjg%3D&utm_source=esp&utm_medium=Email&utm_campaign=GuardianTodayUS&CMP=GTUS_email.
- Quijano, Anibal. 2007. "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality." *Cultural Studies* 21 (2–3): 168–178.
- Reis, João José. 1993. *Slave Rebellion in Brazil: The Muslim Uprising of 1835 in Bahia*. London: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Tsjeng, Zing. 2019. "The Climate Change Paper So Depressing It's Sending People to Therapy." https://www.vice.com/en_au/article/vbwpdb/the-climate-change-paper-so-depressing-its-sending-people-to-therapy.
- Tutu, Desmond, and Mpho Tutu. 2011. *Made for Goodness: And Why This Makes All the Difference*. New York: HarperOne.
- Watts, Jonathan. 2019a. "The river is dying: the vast ecological cost of Brazil's mining disasters." https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jan/29/the-river-is-dying-the-vast-ecological-cost-of-brazils-mining-disasters?utm_term=RWRpdG9yaWFsX0d1YXJkaWVuVG9kYXIVUy0xOTA3Mjg%3D&utm_source=esp&utm_medium=Email&utm_campaign=GuardianTodayUS&CMP=GTUS_email.
- Watts, Jonathan. 2019b. "World's food supply under 'severe threat' from loss of biodiversity." https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2019/feb/21/worlds-food-supply-under-severe-threat-from-loss-of-biodiversity?utm_term=RWRpdG9yaWFsX0d1YXJkaWVuVG9kYXIVUy0xOTA3Mjg%3D&utm_source=esp&utm_medium=Email&utm_campaign=USMorningBriefing&CMP=usbriefing_email.
- Westhelle, Vitor. 1998. "O Tamanho do Paraíso: Pressupostos do Conceito de Pecado na Teologia da América Latina." *Estudos Teológicos* 38 (3): 248–249. Text available in Portuguese at http://www.periodicos.est.edu.br/index.php/estudos_teologicos/article/view/766.

Practical Theology and Decoloniality in Brazil: reflections on a method in process

Júlio César Adam, Valburga Schmiedt Streck

If we understand practical theology in Latin America to be the theoretical reflection of religious praxis from the paradigm of decoloniality, what would its method be? Practical theology's method in Latin America has been in close dialogue with liberation theology and its *see-judge-act* method. This means that doing practical theology in this context has always been strongly related to the practice of exclusion and socio-political vulnerability. All theology was seen as a second action, since practice and life, in the context of the poor, was the *locus theologicus par excellence*. What does this mean from a decolonial perspective? From a decolonial perspective, would the *see-judge-method* be the most appropriate? To what extent would the perception of reality be influenced by this paradigm? To what extent would judging from scripture and theological tradition be a way of reinforcing a certain form of coloniality? Likewise, to what extent would action, as religious practice (the ministry of religious forms in the context of culture and society) express decoloniality? On the other hand, Latin America has contributed on an international scale, to research practices in human and social sciences, such as Participatory Research (Carlos Rodrigues Brandão and Paulo Freire) and Participatory Action Research (Orlando Fals Borda). This paper therefore problematizes the question: which method would best serve practical theology in Latin America from a decolonial perspective?

Introduction

In the book *Teologia Prática no Contexto da América Latina*, practical theology is understood as the theoretical reflection of religious praxis (Hoch 2011, 32). Considering this definition, what would practical theology from a decolonial perspective look like, especially if one asks about its method? Reflection on the method of practical theology in Latin America over the last decades has been in close dialogue with liberation theology and its *see-judge-act* method.¹ Practical theology done from a Latin American *liberationist* perspective has challenged practices of exclusion and named issues of socio-political vul-

Júlio César Adam is a Doctor in Theology (University of Hamburg – 2004) and Professor of Practical Theology at Faculdades EST (São Leopoldo/RS, Brazil). He has worked and researched on the following subjects: Liturgy, Homiletics, Spirituality, Social Movements and Liberation Theology, Media, Pop Culture and Youth, Lived Religion.

Valburga Schmiedt Streck is a Professor of Practical Theology and Pastoral Counselling. She is an Associated Researcher at Faculdades EST in São Leopoldo, Brazil, and was Professor of Social Sciences at the Unisinos University. She has worked with families in slum areas for over a decade and coordinated the graduate program of Theology and HIV/Aids in Latin America. She is also a Couples and Family Therapist.

1 The *see-judge-act* method of Cardinal Joseph Cardijn, incorporated in 1960 by Pope John XXIII in *Mater et Magistra*, was consecrated as a path to follow by Latin American churches (IHU 2012).

nerability. Theology was seen as the *second step* (Gutiérrez 1979, 24) since practice and life, especially in the context of the poor, was the *locus theologicus par excellence*.

Discussions about decoloniality and practical theology take us to the following question: What does this mean from a decolonial perspective? From a decolonial perspective, would liberation theology's *see-judge-act* method be the most appropriate? To what extent would seeing the reality be influenced by this paradigm? To what extent would judging from scripture and theological tradition be a way of reinforcing a certain coloniality? Likewise, to what extent can *action*, religious practice, the ministry of religious forms in the context of culture and society, express decoloniality?

The question about the need to decolonize practical theology or theology also points to its methodology. Can liberation theology, often criticized for being a concept of modernity, help us to support the search for a method in practical theology towards a decolonial understanding? How can a decolonial practical theology strengthen the task of finding new democratic dynamics that promote dialogue with and between the diversity of cultures, whilst decolonizing power, knowledge and being.

In the search for methods that helped to influence practices and also research methodologies in theological practices and education that originated in the liberation movement and in the beginnings of the decolonial discussion, two concepts should be considered: Participatory Action Research and Popular Education. This paper therefore poses the question: which method will serve practical theology in Latin America from a decolonial perspective and how is it possible to revisit methods already being used, and articulate them in the decolonial understanding. There is an urgent need for leadership in education, for insertion in small communities as well as in academic reflections and research integrating practical theology into the public sphere, a so-called public theology.

It is important to emphasize that this approach to method and decoloniality in practical theology will be made from the Brazilian context, especially in a Protestant context, of which the authors are part. At the same time, it intends to look at the broader context, both geographic and confessional, something that, despite the great differences in reality, characterizes research in this context (Susin 2012; Estermann 2012).²

In the first part, two methodologies that come out of the liberation movement and are at the source of the decolonial movement will be briefly presented. In the second part we will focus on the methods used in practical theology, analyzing them from the perspective of decoloniality. In the last part, conclusions will be drawn to analyze aspects of a method from a decolonizing perspective that can be used for practical theology.

Revisiting the origins of a proposal of decolonial methodology in Latin America

The 1950s and 60s were marked by a variety of social movements in the world, such as Woodstock, the civil rights movements and the Prague Spring. Likewise, in Brazil and in Latin America many groups were organizing and there was an effervescence of calling for social justice. Among these progressive political leaders, we also find a cry for justice in the churches, especially in the Catholic Church. This movement generated a strong theological reflection with a focus on practice and was called Liberation Theology. Latin American theologians like Leonardo Boff, Ivone Gebara, Paulo Evaristo Arns, Gustavo Gutiérrez, Helder Câmara, Hugo Assmann and many others from the Catholic Church; Richard Shaull, Ruben Alves, José Miguez Bonino, Marcella Althaus-Reid and others from the Protestant Churches made a significant contribution in terms of reflection and publication, especially in the 1970s and 1980s. In the field of Popular Education, we have Paulo Freire and Carlos Rodrigues Brandão in Brazil and Orlando Fals Borda in Colombia.

The methodologies of popular education and participatory action research (PAR) have been widely used in the social sciences, among which we include theology, especially practical and pastoral theology developed in connection with popular education and PAR, often in the contexts of social movements. It is important to mention that Helder Câmara, since the beginnings of the *base communities* in Recife, used Freire's concept of conscientization associated with the method of *see-act-judge* (Condini 2014). It was a time of social struggles and resistance throughout the world, but in particular in

2 Liberation theology in Latin America had an ecumenical character among Christian churches from its beginnings, while the decolonial movements goes further in-

cluding larger cultural/religious movements in the continent, as for example the Andean theology.



the Global South, in search of transformation and social inclusion.

Paulo Freire is the most widely known and cited Brazilian educator. His best known work is *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). Influenced by Franz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (Fanon 2008), Freire understands that the oppressed incorporates the oppressor in his thinking and in their conception of the world. "The very structure of their thought has been conditioned by the contradictions of the concrete existential situation by which they were shaped" (Freire 1972, 30). Paulo Freire understood that it is through liberating education that it is possible to construct an alternative way of thinking. He denounced social exclusion, and worked with popular classes in mobilizing, organizing and empowering them for social inclusion. His work provides the basis for popular education that became a strong pedagogical movement in Latin America.

For him, the whole pedagogical process is intimately connected with culture and history, and thus represents a rupture from colonial pedagogies that were deeply rooted in the Latin American continent. It can be said that Freire breaks with the old model of education where the educator was always right and gives the student a voice. This means that the learner is seen as the subject of his story and not as an object. The valuation of popular wisdom is another mark of this pedagogical conception and offers the possibility for the construction of ancestral worldviews from the histories of the subjects' ancestors. Eurocentrism is questioned, as remembered by Dussel's criticism that in Latin America, history and the episteme were concealed by the Europeans (Dussel 1998). As a result, popular cultures are empowered and the culture of popular groups is valued. In this way, Freire understands that people begin to mobilize for citizen participation by restoring their subjectivity and questioning the coloniality of power.

Paulo Freire repeatedly denounced "banking" education, the culture of silence, cultural invasion, violence, the patriarchy, racism, the exploitation of poor and developing countries by rich countries of the Global North. He argued that scientific dependence on developed countries renders the people of underdeveloped countries impotent in their capacity to build knowledge (Freire 1972).

It can be said that the beginning of popular education and of social movements linked to the academic world took place in the 60s, germinating a Latin American thought that opposes Eurocentrism

and coloniality. Paulo Freire did not use the term decolonial but is considered one of the movement's precursors (Mota Neto 2016, 119). He developed his theory and praxis among theologians, politicians, workers, artists who were articulating the ideas and experiences of resistance against dictatorships and repression, across the Latin American continent.

Paulo Freire's methodological approach was developed and spread across the continent as an expression of hope for a better world. According to Streck it is becoming a "pedagogy in movement, not only because being dynamic it does not allow itself to be fitted into narrow schemes, but also because it is umbilically linked to popular social movements, increasingly becoming an indigenous pedagogy, a feminist pedagogy, a black pedagogy, a pedagogy of the landless and homeless" (Streck 2013, 361). Theology too, from the 70s onwards, has been greatly influenced by Paulo Freire and his method of popular education. His Pedagogy of Conscientization through generative words and generative themes was also adopted by grassroots communities and, according to Susin "it is a method in which one not only learns to take the word, but that by taking the word it implies becoming a subject and a social actor" (Susin 2012, 201).

Oppression and liberation are key concepts in Freire's theological and religious understanding and praxis. Enrique Dussel, Leonardo Boff, Ruben Alves, Juan Luis Segundo and other theologians have analyzed Freire's concepts and have integrated them into their reflections. Freire's work as consultant for education at the Word Council of Churches had certainly influenced the development of his theological perspective, as well as having influenced the development of his theological perspective and the acceptance of his ideas in theological circles.

Orlando Fals Borda worked with Richard Shaull as well as Camilo Torres³, in Colombia, who together introduced him to liberation theology. He studied Sociology in Bogotá and in the United States and dedicated himself to working and researching with

3 It should be mentioned that Fals Borda was influenced theologically and ethically by the ideas of John Mackay's Spanish Christ, Camilo Torres with the "efficacious love" and Richard Shaull's liberation theology. It was a time of convergence of Protestant and Catholic theologians as well as a convergence of theology and social sciences with the understanding that Christian life signified solidarity with the oppressed and the need to change unjust situations.

popular classes as a professor of sociology. He recognized the importance of popular culture, the feelings behind actions and how everything is connected to people's daily lives⁴. He understood the vastly different experiences of different groups, and the importance of dialogue in order to learn about their experiences. He understood that a university must participate, and not hold itself separate from these experiences and the knowledge of the local population. He advocated for the overcoming of Eurocentrism and said that education in universities must be in terms of everyday life, bringing together academic disciplines as well as non-academic knowledge and ways of knowing (Fals Borda, 2009).

In a similar way to Paulo Freire, Fals Borda used PAR (Investigación Acción Participativa – IAP) to produce knowledge with and for marginalized communities. He helped organize and foster social movements. For him, PAR is a political pedagogical project, not simply a method for investigation. It is a strategy of knowledge production that educates the popular classes towards a more just and solidary society (Fals Borda 2010, 205).

In the text *El problema de la autonomía cultural in Colombia*, Fals Borda says that the following paths to overcoming colonialism should be taken into account:

- The creation of a science of its own on the scale of the people and at their service, reducing the adoption of a sophisticated science of consumption, designed for the privileged classes;
- The creation of an interdisciplinary science starting with the incubation of research projects and using interdisciplinary techniques; the formation of scientific and cultural reference groups in Colombia and Latin America;
- The development of a science that reveals existing mechanisms of exploitation and domination, nationally and internationally, as well as contradictions inherent in our current economic and social system;

The formation of an intellectual committed to the revolutionary autonomist effort, to produce science and culture as a natural emanation of his social conscience and not as a simple wage earner (Fals Borda 2010, 132).

4 Fals Borda's commitment to social problems comes from the influence of his friend Camilo Torres. Camilo Torres and Gustavo Gutiérrez studied together in Louvain. Both influenced Fals Borda with their ideological convictions and social praxis alongside local people, and a commitment to working with people who are excluded became very important to him.

Fals Borda considered Paulo Freire a predecessor of this method and indeed, both point out ways for subaltern groups to reflect on their situation and find ways to escape the situation of coloniality. Today, both are considered references to a decolonial pedagogy, identifying ways for marginalized groups to be empowered and to reflect on their situation of oppression.

According to Catherine Walsh, Fanon, Freire, and Fals Borda are key pedagogues in this search for an epistemological policy (Walsh 2013, 62). In this framework, the social educator moves forward with the oppressed, together, as an actor of resistance, facing adverse situations via a critical reading of the world.

Looking to theology, especially practical theology, we understand that the method proposed by Freire and Fals Borda helps, as an "instance of the interrelationships within and among the different components of educational or theological activity: the social structure, the actors, the aims, the contents, the strategies" (Preiswerk 1995, 283). Indeed, "In the field of theology, the question of method is a profoundly pedagogical question: how to learn is not an instrumental question, since the object of theology escapes apprehension, empirical verification and manipulation; how to learn God, how to learn faith is not, in the first place, a question of Christian education or catechesis, but of fundamental theology" (Preiswerk 1995, 283).

The method of Practical Theology in question.

Paulo Freire and Fals Borda's reflections on decolonial methods in education, theology and practical theology are fundamental. Even though the authors did not develop their propositions specifically for practical theology, their investigations focus on the liberating and transformative practices of education and sociology in this context. For this reason, they are of vital importance for our question regarding a decolonial method in practical theology in the Latin American and Brazilian context. These assumptions will be summarized at the end of this study.

Not much has been written about a method in practical theology in Brazil and Latin America. In this study, we are considering two specific texts on method: the text by Lothar Hoch, "Reflections on the Method of Practical Theology" (Hoch 1998, 63ff), but focused on the Brazilian Protestant sphere,



and the much more recent text by Olvani Sánchez and Alex Vigueras, “La cuestión del metodo en Teología Práctica” (Sánchez and Vigueras 2019, 155ff), which is more focused on the Catholic context of the Grupo de Santiago.

A certain method is also required to reflect on these selfsame methods used by practical theology (Hoch 1998; Sánchez and Vigueras 2019) and to analyze the methods from the paradigm of decoloniality) A necessary first step is to understand the context of the church, theology and practical theology from which we speak, and then to think about the role of the method used in practical theology. In other words, Latin American theological work is marked by understanding reality as the first methodological step.

As a first approach to understanding the theological and ecclesial context, we can say that the church is marked by practice and action, as discussed above. From the beginning of the mid-twentieth century, we witness a rather pragmatic church and theology: from popular Catholicism influenced by the Vatican II, through to the social advances of historical Protestantism, all the way to Pentecostalism, the churches and their theologies, which are concerned with accounting for its context and communicating with its people. Practices and pastoral work are developed as a way of dealing with social demands, human and relational crises, spiritual effervescence or resistance against abuses of power. This practical emphasis of the church is essential to theology, especially practical theology, and its method. On the other hand, this concern with the context leads to certain tendency to reduce practical theology only to practices, to pastoral work, to ministry techniques (Libânio 1998).

In theology, the methods and methodologies adopted were often a set of techniques used in practical work, ministry and social service of the church than they were a critical and theological reflection on practice. It should be mentioned that sometimes practical theology has allowed itself to be understood as the area and discipline responsible for accounting for pastoral practices, and that alone. Human and social demands, vulnerabilities and political and economic atrocities often required immediate action. At other times, neither pastoral practice nor reflection were concerned with method but were merely satisfied to adapt their methodologies while developing the work, improvising and justifying their way of doing theology as something only linked to that particular situation. The line of

the Spanish poet Antonio Machado, “Caminante no hay camino, el camino se hace al andar” [Walker there is no path, the path is made while walking] is an apt illustration of the way in which practical theology has its own practical way-of-doing (Preiswerk 1995, 291). All this points to the importance of reflecting on the method of practical theology.

A major text concerning the method is that written by Lothar Hoch at the end of the 90s, arguing for the importance of a method for practical theology as a way to counteract its spontaneity and to ensure research and theoretical reflection in the field. In this chapter, the author reinforces the definition of practical theology as the hermeneutic of Christian practice whose double objective is to examine the practice of the Church and the lived reality of faith, thus promoting communication between Christian tradition, the Church and the world, as we saw earlier (Hoch 1998, 63).

In his text, Hoch discusses the difficulties in the conception of a method for practical theology, due to difficulties in the definition of practical theology; limitations in the reflection on the relationship between practical theology and other theological disciplines; the importance of the distinction between practical theology and pastoral work; and the distinction between the methods of the other sciences and the specificity of the methods of practical theology. This has been another trend of the method of practical theology: to adopt methods from other sciences, especially those of sociology.

Regarding the relationship with pastoral work, one question that Hoch addresses is whether we can follow Floristan’s proposition⁵ to use the method of pastoral practices in liberation theology, the *see-judge-act* method (Catholic Action) as an “inductive” method of practical theology. According to Hoch, this method leads to a certain narrowing of liberation theology itself, restricting it to its political dimension and not contemplating religious and cultural experience more broadly (Hoch 1998, 66). It would be even more complicated to adopt this method for practical theology, since it is, as an academic discipline, the *theory* of Christian praxis and not just Christian praxis itself.

5 As a critical reflection on the practice and the experience of faith in the Church and in society, practical theology re-emphasizes the importance of reflecting on its method, both for theological reflection and for concrete practice.

On the specificity of the method in practical theology, Hoch suggests that there are at least two methodological perspectives: one that is more general regarding theory and practice, which ensures the proper identity of practical theology in relation to other disciplines, but also a more particular perspective that has to do with the different subdisciplines of practical theology. Hoch suggests that there are at least two methodological axes in practical theology, one of a more general nature that relates theory and practice, which guarantees the proper identity of practical theology vis-à-vis other disciplines, and another of a more particular nature that has to do with the different subdisciplines of practical theology. The author draws attention to the effectiveness of the methods adopted by other sciences, which can allow us to perceive the practice of faith and reality. In short, he states that “the method of practical theology serves the operationalization of theology insofar as it promotes interdisciplinary transit: between practical theology and the other theological disciplines; between the subdisciplines of practical theology among themselves; and between practical theology and the other sciences” (Hoch 1998, 70).

To finalize his considerations on the method in practical theology, Hoch proposes a method for the discipline that considers theory and practice dialectically as interdependent terms. This interdependence is still a challenge in theology, since rational and intellectual theory and exercise still emerge as being of greater importance. According to Hoch, “Practical theology is the discipline that keeps alive the awareness that it is precisely this dialectic between theory and practice, spirit and body, between faith and action that engenders a legitimate Christian methodology and praxis that participates in God’s action in history in the deployment of his Kingdom” (Hoch 1998, 73). In view of this, Hoch presents mediations with which the method of practical theology will have to deal: the mediation in gender relations; the mediation between reason and experience of faith; the mediation between Christian tradition and new forms of religiosity; and the mediation of alternative values to those that govern this century, such as globalization, human stratification, the commodification of relationships and life, the weakening of institutions; the very loss of the notion of viable alternatives to the current models.

From the above-mentioned tendencies about the “methods” adopted in the doing of theology, often

the theological method of practical theology was equated with the method of liberation theology, *see-judge-act*, something Hoch himself questions when referring to Floristan’s proposal, as we have seen above. We consider it important to reinforce this differentiation and also to reflect on the *see-judge-act* method itself. In the early 1990s, in a critical study about liberation theology and its method, Vitor Westhelle already drew attention to the limits of the method itself as part of the crisis of liberation theology.

Although not always explicit, I believe that this method has been used in a more generalized way than is normally supposed. We find fundamental elements of the method in liberal theology of the last century [...]. It is the distinction between observation and interpretive theory. [...] I think that the basic problem of this method lies in the overstretching of the relationship between the reality to be analyzed and the domain of faith, between seeing and judging, observation and interpretation, situation and message, divided into two distinct methodological steps: socio-analytical mediation and hermeneutical mediation (Westhelle 1990, 17).⁶

Specifying the problem, Westhelle writes:

In the first methodological step, in the socio-analytic mediation, the analysis of faith is dispensed with and reality is reduced to social, economic and political factors recognized as the ultimate determinants of the production and reproduction of life. As assumption it is tacitly assumed that faith does not have a social texture, that is, it is not a conditioning factor (Westhelle 1990, 18).

In the mid-1990s, Matthias Preiswerk published an article, the result of a lecture at the Faculdades EST, about method in liberation theology and Popular Education (Preiswerk 1995). The author’s criticism is not specifically about the *see-judge-act* method, but the theological methods themselves. According to the author, the question of method leads to the real questioning of people in Latin America in the face of the different demands of concrete life, and this should not be the work of intellectuals, something that resonates with the ideas of Fals Borda and Paulo Freire. For him, the only relevant question is about human beings, not only about political-economic dimensions. In his article, Preiswerk asks whom do the theological and educational methods serve in Latin America. The author will also ques-

6 His criticism of the method is also found in the chapter on the pastoral of the land.



tion the magical use of the of the *see-judge-act* triad, which risks being diluted into pragmatic moralism.

His understanding of method is rather pragmatic: “Method is connected to the way things are done to achieve what is expected” (Preiswerk 1995, 282). Deploying this definition, the author proposes that it is necessary “to speak of method as a system of relations, as a structure of thought and of action, as inspiration that assumes ruptures, disconnections, the distances between the subjects with their own desires and needs, the goals they intend to achieve, the processes to achieve those goals, the obstacles offered by the context” (Preiswerk 1995, 283).

Thus, we see that early on, in the more specific reflection on the method used in theology and more specifically in practical theology, there was a concern to find a method that would in fact contribute to a theological doing involving theory and practice (Hoch) and contribute to the processes of liberation and transformation (Westhelle and Preiswerk). The *see-judge-act* method, innovative as it was, especially considering practical action as a starting point and a point of arrival, was still seen as limited, within a decolonial framework. We agree with this criticism. As relevant as the *see-judge-act* method has been to theological practice, its simple adoption as a method of practical theology does not solve the lack of a specific method for the discipline and does not contribute to reflections on decoloniality.

We believe that from Freire and Fals Borda, we have the basis to think about ways to establish a decolonial method for practical theology. Both authors start with the concrete context of oppression (Freire) and with the popular classes (Fals Borda). In addition, both are concerned with the concrete lives of people and groups, with daily life and with individual experience in the processes of awareness and liberation, whether through liberating education or through participatory action research (PAR). The methodological proposal for theological education based on the intercultural paradigm of Preiswerk corroborates our proposal (Preiswerk 2011, 399ff).

The reflection on the method in practical theology by Sánchez and Viguera (Sánchez and Viguera 2019) corroborates the assumptions of Freire and Fals Borda. For Sánchez and Viguera, the community of faith and the people who belong to it are the subject of practical theology and consequently protagonists in the development of a method.

Indeed, when time comes to discuss the procedural dynamics of practical theology, one assigns a different value to a method that intends to resort to the communities

in order to investigate them, from one that seeks to work with them to carry out the investigative projects. Likewise, one proceeds distinctly when looking at the community as an addressee of the already elaborated theological elaborations than when one recognizes in it and in its practices, the fertile soil to construct new theological knowledge (Sánchez, Viguera 2019, 160)⁷.

In their methodological proposition, the authors value what is unique, the concrete individual in a precise situation, the *kairós*, to the detriment of the objective and generalized readings of the human being and the context; narrativity appears as the most suitable way of approaching reality and its unique character; corporeality is considered as a key to meaning, uniqueness and experience and therefore must be considered in the method of practical theology (Sánchez and Viguera 2019, 160–162). In addition, the authors, like Fals Borda, consider interdisciplinarity as fundamental for interaction with the reality with which one wants to theologize (Sánchez, Viguera 2019, 162ff).

Conclusions: Decolonizing methods in Practical Theology

Within the theme of the 2019 IAPT conference “Decoloniality and religious practices: liberating hope”, in São Leopoldo, Brazil, we propose broadening reflections and criticisms of the methods of practical theology, based on the paradigm of decoloniality. Decoloniality sharpens reflection and intensifies criticism of the methods adopted. Our main question is: What are the consequences when we reflect on the method of practical theology from the decolonial paradigm? Or, how to decolonize our academic methods, their distance from experiential and practical questions, epistemological ties, etc.? What would a decolonial method in practical theology look like?

7 En efecto, a la hora de discutir sobre las dinámicas procedimentales de la teología práctica, se valora de forma diferente un método que pretenda recurrir a las comunidades para investigar sobre ellas, a uno que busque trabajar con ellas en la realización de los proyectos investigativos. De igual manera, se procede de forma distinta cuando se mira a la comunidad como destinataria de las elaboraciones teológicas ya elaboradas, que cuando se reconoce en ella y en sus prácticas el suelo nutricional para construir nuevo conocimiento teológico. (Sánchez, Viguera 2019, 160).

More than a concept, decolonial studies are a new way of perceiving local (and global) reality through its differences, subtleties, diversities, fragments, alterities, disruptions and social, cultural, corporal, sexual, political and religious alternatives, not just what is established and standardized.

[...] to talk about postcoloniality means to question and deconstruct the dynamics of identification that inspire the colonial forces, exposing their own weaknesses through the heterogeneities inscribed in such a Subject, with the intention of making visible the intrinsic bifurcations that characterize the global context, which allow its constant malleability, transformation and opening towards new forms of sociocultural construction (Pannotto 2016, 34).

The decolonial paradigm intensifies the examination of culture, daily life, body and person, emphasizing in particular, difference: those aspects that do not fit into homogeneous patterns of systems and absolute truths and that are therefore seen as weak, fragile and vulnerable. Within this paradigm, liberation theology itself and its method can be questioned. Based on various postcolonial and decolonial studies, Nogueira Baptista notes criticisms of liberation theology. One criticism relates to Western categories as a means of liberating the victims of the neo-colonial Western system itself. Based on Simón P. Arnold's writing, the author points out three serious problems in liberation theology such as not questioning the continent's Christianity, its historical legitimacy and its ecclesiocentrism and clericalism; its difficulty regarding original cultures and religious expressions; and its lack of foresight regarding the failure of the left and the advent of postmodernity. This criticism is also related to the adopted method, as pointed out above (Baptista 2016, 503f). Westhelle summarizes his criticism by pointing out the dependence of liberation theology and its methods on the Enlightenment.

Even though Westhelle and Preiswerk's critiques of the method of liberation theology (and popular education), do not use the concept of "decoloniality" or "postcoloniality,"⁸ they point to questions that

are now in tune with the decolonial paradigm. Hoch, in his chapter, also pointed to questions that practical theology would have to address: mediation in gender relations; the mediation between reason and experience of faith; the mediation between Christian tradition and new forms of religiosity; and the mediation of alternative values other than those that govern this century, such as globalization, human stratification, the commodification of relationships and life, the weakening of institutions; the very loss of the notion of viable alternatives to current models. Convergently, the methodological proposal of Sánchez and Viguera, seeks to overcome academic and conceptual analyses distanced from the concrete reality of life, with their experiences, narratives and corporealities, taking into account the *kairós* of the life and faith of concrete communities and people (Sánchez and Viguera 2019, 166ff). All these aspects are part of the decolonial paradigm.

Further questions could be added, such as the hermeneutics of lived religion, everyday spiritualities and religiosities, the force of narratives present in life, in literature, in the movies (Adam, 2018); the relations of practical theology with the arts and popular expressions, with other knowledge and utopias of indigenous traditions (such as *Buen Vivir*) and ancestral traditions (Adam, Schmiedt Streck and Streck 2018). Considering these questions, the method of practical theology will have to be rethought, reinforcing the relationship between theory and practice, practical wisdom (*phronesis*) (Miller McLemore 2016, 56), but mainly broadening and deepening the vision we want to have of practices, taking into account people – in their lives, bodies, relations, struggles, beliefs, hopes and dreams.

In 2018, 13.5 million people in Brazil were living on US\$1.9 a day, according to the World Bank (World Bank 2020). This number is equivalent to the entire population of Bolivia, Cuba, Belgium, Greece and Portugal. It affects mainly black people and mulattos, especially black women and children. There has been a record rise in poverty in the last seven years, due particularly to neoliberal policies implemented by governments.

Furthermore, evangelical Neo Pentecostal Churches have grown immensely throughout the Continent and have moved into politics. In some cases, they have even supplanted the state, challenging democracies and supporting corruption. The Roman Catholic Church and the historical Protestant Churches were also affected by Pentecostalism,

8 In the entire book *Teología Práctica no Contexto da América Latina*, including the reissue of 2011, the terms "decoloniality" and "postcoloniality" do not appear, similar to what Kwok Pui-Lan and Stephen Burns (Pui-Lan and Burns 2016) also observed when they analyzed the book edited by David Ford, *The Modern Theologians* (Ford 1989; 1997).



resulting in taking on similar positions to the Evangelical concept of morality, political understanding, racial discrimination, etc. Perhaps then, the rich legacy of the liberation movement of the past and the decolonial ideas in a search for a method can be likened to Ariadne's thread: called upon to find a way out of the labyrinth.

We understand that popular education (Freire 1970) can help deconstruct a Europe-centered or Eurocentric theology and support communities in their formative process, recognizing them as subjects of their own history. At the same time, the interaction with the academy, especially in theology courses on dialogue with social movements and communities can find major inspiration in the work of Fals Borda. Decoloniality challenges theology to take part in dialogue and to articulate actions with other cultures and theologies without judging and condemning them. The task is to find new ways of conceptualizing the conflictful realities and to sustain a critical reflection that brings hope to human beings and to the natural world, for a just and sustainable future.

References

- Adam, Júlio C. 2018. "Preaching promise and hope: models of preaching and lived religion in Latin America." *International Journal of Practical Theology* 22: 174–192.
- Adam, Júlio César, Valburga Schmiedt Streck, and Danilo Romeu Streck. 2018. "Pensamento na fronteira e teologia prática: um diálogo com o suma kawsay / suma qamaña ou buen vivir." *Estudios Teológicos* 58: 262–277.
- Baptista, Paulo Agostinho Nogueira. 2016. "Pensamento decolonial, Teologias pós-coloniais e Teologia da Libertação." *Perspectiva Teológica* 48 (3): 491–517.
- Condini, Martinho. 2014. "Fundamentos de uma educação libertadora. Dom Helder Camara e Paulo Freire." Paulus: São Paulo.
- De Mori, Geraldo, and François Moog. 2019. "El proyecto común del Grupo de Santiago: por una teología fundamental de las prácticas pastorales." In *Teología Práctica: contextos y conceptos*, edited by Olvani Sánchez, Marcela Mazzini, and Geraldo de Mori, 15–24. Bogotá: Editorial Javeriana.
- Dussel, Enrique. 1998. *Ethics of Liberation: In the Age of Globalization and Exclusion*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Estermann, Josef. 2012. "La transformación intercultural de la teología de la liberación. Ruptura epistemológica e irrupción de lo indígena." *La teología de la liberación, cuarenta años después: Reto e desafíos. Alternativas* 19 (44): 129–158.
- Fals Borda, Orlando. 2010. *Antología*. Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia.
- Fals Borda, Orlando. 2019. *Uma sociologia sentipensante para América Latina*. Bogotá: CLACSO.
- Fanon, Franz. 2008. *Black Skin, Black Masks*. New York: Grove Press.
- Ford, David (ed.). 1989. *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology since 1918*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Ford, David (ed.). 1997. *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology since 1918*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Freire, Paulo. 1970. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Herder and Herder.
- Gutiérrez, Gustavo. 1979. *Teologia da libertação: perspectivas*. 3. ed. Petrópolis: Vozes.
- Hoch, Lothar Carlos. 1998. "Reflexões em torno do método da Teologia Prática." In *Teologia Prática no contexto da América Latina*, edited by Christoph Schneider-Harpprecht, 63–67. São Leopoldo: Sinodal.
- IHU. 2020. "Catequese Libertadora, a prima-pobre da Teologia da Libertação?". <http://www.ihu.unisinos.br/noticias/514569-catequese-libertadora-a-prima-pobre-da-teologia-da-libertacao>.
- Libânio, João Batista. 1998. "Apresentação." In *Teologia Prática no contexto da América Latina*, edited by Christoph Schneider-Harpprecht, 7–10. São Leopoldo: Sinodal.
- Miller-McLemore, Bonnie. 2016. "Teologia Prática: Reforma e transformação na epistemologia teológica." In *Reforma: tradição e transformação*, edited by Iuri Reblin and Rudolf von Sinner, 35–67. São Leopoldo: Sinodal/EST.
- Mota Neto, João Colares. 2016. *Por uma Pedagogia Decolonial na América Latina: Reflexões em torno do pensamento de Paulo Freire e Orlando Falls Borda*. Curitiba: Editora CRV.
- Panotto, Nicolás. 2016. *Religión, Política y Poscolonialidad en América Latina: hacia una teología posfundacional de lo público*. Madrid/Buenos Aires: Miño y Dávila.
- Preiswerk, Mathias. 2011. *Contrato intercultural: crisis y refundación de la educación teológica*. La Paz, Quito: Plural, CLAI, Sinodal.
- Preiswerk, Mathias. 1995. "A Questão do Método na Educação Popular e na Teologia da Libertação." *Estudios Teológicos* 35 (3): 279–291.
- Pui-lan, Kwok, and Stephen Burns. 2016. *Postcolonial practice of ministry: leadership, liturgy, and interfaith engagement*. Lanham/London: Lexington Books.
- Sánchez, Olvani; and Alex Viguera. 2019. "La cuestión del método en Teología Práctica." In *Teologia Prática: contextos y conceptos. Reflexiones del grupo de Santiago*, edited by Olvani Sánchez, Marcela Mazzini, and Geraldo Mori de, 155–175. Bogotá: Editorial Pontificie Universidad Javeriana, Facultad de Teología.
- Streck, Danilo R. 2018. "Territórios de resistência e criatividade: Reflexões sobre os lugares da educação Popular." In *Educação Popular: Lugar de construção social*, edited by Danilo R. Streck and Maria Teresa Esteban, 356–369. Petrópolis: Vozes.



- Susin, Luiz Carlos. 2012. "Teologia de la liberation: De onde venimos y de dónde vamos?" In *La teologia de la liberación, quarenta años despues: Reto e desafios. Alternativas* 19 (44): 13–26.
- The World Bank. 2020. Project Information Document (PID). Concept Stage | Date Prepared/Updated: 11-Mar-2020 | Report No: PIDC27934. documents.worldbank.org.
- Walsh, Catherine. 2013. "Lo pedagógico e lo decolonial: Entrejendo caminos." In *Pedagogías decoloniales: Prácticas insurgentes de resistir, (re)existir, y (re)vivir*, edited by Catherine Walsh, 23–68. Quito: Ediciones Abya-Yala.
- Westhele, Vítor. 1990. "A assim chamada crise de identidade da CPT (notas para um debate)." In *Luta pela terra: caminho de fé*, edited by Marcelo Barros Souza, Vítor Westhele, and Ivo Poletto, 33–52. Goiânia/São Paulo: CPT/Loyola.
- Westhelle, Vitor. 1990. "15 notas sobre a presente situação teológica na América Latina." *Jornal Sem Censura* (CADES): 17–21.

God in National Constitutions: A Liberating Reference?

Robert Mager

Practices referring to God may be religious, cultural, or political. Theologians are most accustomed to religious practices. However, the drafters of political constitutions, who engage in a rare but highly significant political practice, often invoke references to God, even in modern secularized countries. Currently, 114 constitutions refer to God (and seven others refer specifically to Allah). At first glance, those references could be overlooked as remnants of a past era; as a columnist wrote, “a constitution says more about where a country is coming from ... than about how the nation is now, or where it wants to go” (B. C. 2013). But as we shall see, those references testify to very salient political issues, and they are normally analyzed as such, either from a historical, political or legal perspective (Dietze 1956; Domingo 2016; Ibán 2016). Adopting a theological point of view, I will explore the different ways in which God is referred to in national constitutions and the significance of such mentions.

Introduction

This telling example, worthy of being quoted at length, is the very beginning of a modern constitution:

IN HUMBLE SUBMISSION to Almighty God,
Who controls the destinies of nations and the history
of peoples;
Who gathered our forebears together from many
lands and gave them this their own;
Who has guided them from generation to generation;
Who has wondrously delivered them from the dangers
that beset them;
WE, who are here in Parliament assembled, declare that
whereas we
ARE CONSCIOUS OF OUR RESPONSIBILITY towards
God and man;
ARE CONVINCED OF THE NECESSITY TO STAND
UNITED
To safeguard the integrity and freedom of our country;
To secure the maintenance of law and order;
To further the contentment and spiritual and material
welfare of all in our midst;

Robert Mager is a French Canadian theologian from Quebec. He has taught Christology and Fundamental Theology at Université du Québec (Trois-Rivières, 1994–2004), and Practical Theology at Université Laval (Quebec City, 2004–2015). He has served as Officer, Secretary and Vice-president of the International Academy of Practical Theology (2011–2017). He has authored many articles on the fundamentals of practical theology, religion in modern Quebec, and theology of action.

ARE PREPARED TO ACCEPT our duty to seek world
peace in association with all peace-loving nations; and
ARE CHARGED WITH THE TASK of founding the Republic
of ... and giving it a constitution best suited to the
traditions and history of our land:
BE IT THEREFORE ENACTED ...

A theologian can hardly remain insensitive to this political document's faithful tone. It exudes breadth and vision. The god it refers to is the God of history, who sets God's people free, and leads them to a promised land. Modern exegesis has insisted on the centrality of this redemption narrative in the Bible. Various liberation theologies have built on it exten-

sively, albeit in a renewed perspective centered on issues of poverty and injustice (Cone 1974; Rowland and Corner 1990).

But it is sobering and unsettling to realize that the above-quoted sentences introduce the 1961 Constitution Act instituting apartheid in the Republic of South Africa.¹

This example raises a few questions, which will underlie the following reflections. What is happening when God is explicitly invoked in a national constitution? What are the theological underpinnings of such invocations? Can those references to God be considered “liberating” in any way?

There are clear limitations to my brief inquiry. My perspective is predominantly theological. I only consider explicit references to God in national constitutions. I do not get into the various clauses concerning religion (e.g. religious freedom, secularism, fiscal measures, etc.). I do not analyze the specific dynamics of Islamic constitutions, which exceed my expertise (for those constitutions, see Issa 2011 and Georges 2012). My overview is synchronic rather than diachronic, paying little attention to the historical evolution of individual constitutions.

Invocations and nominationes

In many constitutions, God is mentioned very briefly and generically, in expressions such as “the name of God” (e.g. Costa Rica, 1949; Dominican Republic, 2015, Ecuador, 2008), “faith in God” (Albania, 1998), “trust in God” (El Salvador, 1983) or “pledging to God” (Paraguay, 1992). Some accentuate a specific attribute, such as “the One and Only God” (Indonesia, 1945) or “the guiding hand of God” (Papua New Guinea, 1975; Solomon Islands, 1978). Some display characteristic features pointing to a specific religion: “In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful” (Kuwait, 1962); “In the name of the Holy and Consubstantial and Indivisible Trinity” (Greece, 1975; also see Samoa, 1962).

The literature about references to God in constitutions occasionally differentiates *invocationes Dei* (invocations of God) and *nominationes Dei* (mentions of God) (Schröder 2004, 345). *Invocationes*

place the constitution under the patronage of God or call for God’s help. Here are a few examples:

The Democratic Constituent Congress invoking Almighty God ... has resolved to enact the following Constitution ... (Peru, 1993)

By the grace of God Almighty ... (Indonesia, 1945)

In the Name of God the Merciful and the Compassionate ... (Algeria, 1976)

Nominationes mention God as a source, principle, guardian or in any other respect. For example:

We, the people of Albania, proud and aware of our history, with responsibility for the future, and with faith in God and/or other universal values ... (Albania, 1998)

We, the representatives of the Brazilian People ... promulgate, under the protection of God, this constitution ... (Brazil, 1988)

Whereas Canada is founded upon principles that recognize the supremacy of God and the rule of law ... (Canada, 1982²)

An approximate tool, this distinction between *invocationes* and *nominationes* fails to account for the many ways God is referred to in constitutions. Thus, Johannes van der Ven (Ven 2003, 201) stresses the importance of recognizing the “various linguistic nuances”; many *invocationes*, for example, are actually “rhetorical petition prayers”, such as the invocation “God bless South Africa” found at the end of the Preamble of today’s South African Constitution (1996). Likewise, *nominationes* aim at several different purposes, which call for further analyses.

To go beyond the distinction between *invocationes* and *nominationes*, I suggest the following mode of analysis. When constitutions refer to God, God is represented in a certain way; furthermore, the god-head is understood to play a certain role; finally, implicit or explicit expectations are present. I will focus on this interplay of images, functions and benefits. From this perspective, I suggest that four categories can be discerned in constitutions: God as liberator, as ruler, as giver and as judge. I will briefly address and assess each of these categories.

¹ Wikisource 2018. From here on, I will refer to the Constitutions in the following way: “Peru, 1993” is the Constitution of Peru initially adopted in 1993. The various constitutional texts can be found on the Constitution Project website (<https://www.constituteproject.org/>).

² As is the case for United Kingdom, Canada’s Constitution is a compendium of various documents deemed to have constitutional value, such as the one quoted here, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which was voted as part of the 1982 Constitution Act.



God as Liberator

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, God is experienced and portrayed first and foremost as a liberator, the *gō'el* (redeemer) who frees God's people from slavery. This understanding of God is most explicit in the Pentateuch, but it is foundational to all biblical literature, from the dissipation of chaos in Genesis up to the fulfilment of all things in Revelation. It links God to history and underlies the idea of a covenant between God and specific peoples.

The above-cited 1961 South African Constitution is a most telling example of this view. But there are other traces of it. Nicaragua's Constitution (1987) mentions "those Christians who inspired by their belief in God have joined and committed themselves to the struggle for the liberation of the oppressed." The Dominican Republic's national motto associates "God, Country, and Liberty" (2015). Other constitutions express their gratitude for the country's existence (Liberia, 1986; Seychelles, 1993), evoke the protection of God (especially South American Constitutions: e.g. Argentina, 1853; Colombia, 1991; Venezuela, 1999), ask for God's guidance (Tuvalu, 1986; Liberia, 1986, Paulu; 1981) or God's blessing (e.g. Australia, 1901; Kenya, 2010; Hungary, 2011). God is understood as instrumental in those countries' history and destiny.

In those constitutions, the references to God are dynamic, in the sense that they suggest concrete benefits for the country. But they clearly open the door to the "God with us" syndrome, as the former South African Constitution exemplifies.

God as Ruler

The Kenyan Constitution (2010) acknowledges "the supremacy of the Almighty God of all creation" (Kenya, 2010). Many constitutions presume God's rule over the world. The United States of America's Constitution (USA, 1789) does not mention God, but two USA State constitutions (Colorado, Washington) refer to God as "the Supreme Ruler of the Universe."

This vision of God as a ruler is the most common in the constitutions. Its roots run deep in political history: The Magna Carta, a foundational element of the United Kingdom's Constitution (1297), is written "unto the honour of Almighty God." God's rule is expressed in various ways. Many constitutions mention the sovereignty of God (Samoa, 1962),

God's supremacy (e.g. Canada, 1982; Zambia, 1991; Zimbabwe, 2013), God's Fatherhood (Kiribati, 1979; Grenada, 1973), or God's Highness (Lebanon, 1926). Their provisions are established "under God" (Ireland, 1937; Nigeria, 1999) or "under the guiding hand of God" (Papua New Guinea, 1975; Tuvalu, 1986; Solomon Islands, 1978). In monarchic systems, the king or queen rules "by the Grace of God" (Liechtenstein, 1921; Sweden, 1974) or takes the oath "in the presence of Almighty God" (Lesotho, 1993).

The most frequent attribute we find in the constitutions is "Almighty God," and its variants ("God All-Powerful," "Almighty Allah," "the omnipotence of Allah"). They appear in at least 37 constitutions. *Power* is the central notion here: God is seen as the overarching authority from which the power of the State proceeds or to which it is somehow related. Sometimes, this relationship is clearly defined, thus in Samoa (1962): "sovereignty over the Universe belongs to the Omnipresent God alone, and the authority to be exercised by the people of Samoa within the limits prescribed by God's commandments is a sacred heritage." Many times, constitutions try to articulate the sovereignty of God and the sovereignty of the people: "All powers of government, legislative, executive and judicial, derive, under God, from the people" (Ireland, 1937). But most of the time, the reference to God's power is simply stated, such as in the Constitution of Switzerland (1999), which opens with a brief but blunt "In the name of Almighty God!"

Commentators remark that bracing a ruler's power against the authority of a divinity is an age-old stratagem (Winiger 2010, 17). Others interpret this enduring reference to God's rule as a "claim that human rights and human authority are not without limitations and conditions but find their source, their limitation, and their goal in the authority of God. The human being cannot be the measure of all things" (Schmid 2004, 29). Thus, the reference to God's rule appears to sway between the justification of power and its ultimate limitation.

God as Giver

Konrad Schmid sees a close connection in the constitutions between references to God Almighty and the foundation of a moral order. He traces this connection back to the deistic views of the early modern period: "For the Enlightenment, God cannot be proven, but he must be postulated as an infallible

agency of supervision in order to guarantee a functioning moral community. In this context, it is particularly advisable to refer back to God as the 'Almighty': God is the almighty guarantor of a moral order for state and society" (Schmid 2004, 21). Bénédict Winiger concurs with this idea, discerning a Kantian perspective under the references to "God as moral Lord of the world" (Winiger 2010, 21; my translation). Indeed, some constitutions ascribe moral considerations to the "Almighty God" figure: "the people of Nauru acknowledge God as the almighty and everlasting Lord and the giver of all good things" (Nauru, 1968).

However, as the Nauruan example indicates, another specific pattern appears in the context of these moral considerations. It entails a *donation* and is often expressed with the image of a "source." God is seen as "the Giver of our life, liberty, identity and our inherent rights" (Marshall Islands, 1979). God is the "source of all reason and justice" (Argentina, 1853). "Human dignity is given by God to every human being, and this is the basis for all human rights" (Somalia, 2012). This gift is related to God's creational activity: "Since it appears to be the will of God that man should be free as He has made all men of one blood therefore shall the people of Tonga and all who sojourn or may sojourn in this Kingdom be free forever" (Tonga, 1875). Much like Nauru, the Polynesian State of Tuvalu (1986) sees God both as a ruler and as a provider: "the people of Tuvalu, acknowledging God as the Almighty and Everlasting Lord and giver of all good things, humbly place themselves under His good providence and seek His blessing upon themselves and their lives." And again: "The right of the people of Tuvalu, both present and future, to a full, free and happy life, and to moral, spiritual, personal and material welfare, is affirmed as one given to them by God." In many constitutions, reference to God goes hand in hand with the idea of gratitude for what God has given, through terms such as "gift," "gratefulness," or "benediction" (Liberia, 1986; Seychelles, 1993; South Sudan, 2011).

The Polish Constitution (1997) offers a recent and well-crafted version of this reference to God as giver:

We, the Polish Nation—all citizens of the Republic,

Both those who believe in God as the source of truth, justice, good and beauty,

As well as those not sharing such faith but respecting those universal values as arising from other sources ...

Beholden to our ancestors for their labours, their struggle for independence achieved at great sacrifice, for our culture rooted in the Christian heritage of the Nation and in universal human values ...

Recognizing our responsibility before God or our own consciences,

Hereby establish this Constitution of the Republic of Poland ...

In this case, the imagery of the "source" is used to anchor the moral order. The Polish people are also "beholden" to their ancestors for what the latter have achieved and transmitted. This Preamble retains a strong reference to God while refraining from invoking the powerfulness of God as ruler. Through its openness to a variety of "sources," it seeks to invoke different roots for the moral order. However, even this thoughtful expedient cannot silence two enduring questions: What can this reference mean for people who are estranged from the very idea of a god? And for the believers themselves: To what extent can God be rightly viewed as a Moral Absolute?

God as Judge

A last representation of God is quite discernible in constitutions, that of God as judge. It emerges behind the multiple calls to *responsibility*. Many countries declare themselves responsible "for the future" (Albania, 1998), before "God and history" (Equatorial Guinea, 1991), "God and the nation" (Georgia, 1995), "God and man" (Germany, 1949), "God and our own consciences" (Poland, 1997), "God, our own conscience, past, present and future generations" (Ukraine, 1996), "God, the Nation, Africa and the World" (DR Congo, 2005). We could understand this responsibility as being answerable to God as ruler, but there is a juridical twist to it, which can be perceived in a minor article of the Argentinian Constitution (1853): "The private actions of men that in no way offend public order or morality, nor injure a third party, are reserved only to God, and are exempt from the authority of the magistrates."

Another testimony given to the understanding of God as judge is the massive appeal to God in *oath-taking* (40 constitutions), even in constitutions that do not entail any other reference to God (e.g. Fiji, 2013; Jamaica, 1962; Lithuania, 1992). The oath supposes consequences if it is ever broken. "The essence of a divine oath is an invocation of divine



agency to be a guarantor of the oath taker's own honesty and integrity in the matter under question. By implication, this invokes divine displeasure if the oath taker fails in their sworn duties." There is a juridical overtone in such practices: a divine oath "implies greater care than usual in the act of the performance of one's duty, such as in testimony to the facts of the matter *in a court of law*" (Wikipedia 2019; emphasis mine).

The essential provisions for oath-taking in constitutions, their link with appealing to God, and the larger call for responsibility provoke thought. Exploring these issues would take us far beyond the scope of the present article. May I just point out two potential avenues for further inquiry. The first one is the fundamental importance of *promises* in political life, as hinted to by the political thinker Hannah Arendt (Arendt 2013, 243–247). The second is the age-old relationship between religion, oath-taking and the practice of libation. The very concept of responsibility points towards this three-fold relationship: the famed linguist Émile Benveniste has shown how the etymology of the concept of responsibility points towards the Greek and Latin root *spend-*, which in turn bears the memory of the religious rite of libation (Benveniste 1969, 209–221).

In any case, the call for responsibility before God (and nation, history, conscience) indicates that constitutions are looking for ways to ensure that the promises they make are binding and will ultimately be accounted for. They express a wish that there be a transcendent depth beyond the legal nature of constitutional provisions. We may wonder, however, if the appeal to a divine judge can have a real effect in the concrete application of constitutions and if, in sum, they do not represent a sophisticated version of the famous "pie in the sky."

The Theologico-Political Problem

The above-delineated four categories are distinguished in order to see the many ways God is referred to in national constitutions. They mingle in some preambles, such as that of the Irish Constitution (1937):

In the Name of the Most Holy Trinity, from Whom is all authority [*God as ruler*] and to Whom, as our final end, all actions both of men and States must be referred [*God as judge*],

We, the people of Éire,

Humbly acknowledging all our obligations to our Divine Lord, Jesus Christ [*God as giver*],
Who sustained our fathers through centuries of trial
[*God as liberator*] ...

Do hereby adopt, enact, and give to ourselves this
Constitution.

The four categories represent, in a way, four cardinal ways of locating God, either on a temporal axis (the past liberator, the future judge) or on a spatial axis (the ruler above, the giver below). In any case, they attempt to strengthen constitutional foundations by bracing them with a divine reference. In doing so, they testify to an age-old problem: how can the political sphere, which is contingent by nature, be firmly established? Can an absolute divine foundation be invoked? Can the contingent and the absolute connect in any way? Should they? In political philosophy, those questions point towards what has come to be known as "the theologico-political problem" (Strauss 1997; Meier 2006).

Early Modernity had broken with religious foundations and undertaken to re-establish them on the sole principles of reason and the will of the people. But tragedies of the 20th century, especially world wars and genocides, shook the confidence in such foundations and laid bare the powerlessness of laws when faced with widespread violence and injustice. Different solutions were explored. After World War II, there was a renewal of interest for the idea of a "natural law" beyond rationality.

[Their proponents] believed in a natural law which was derived from the order created by God, in which man's nature was the source of, and his reason nothing but a means to, revelation. Natural law was not just some product of human reason, but a system of norms which through reason could be found in the order erected by God, in which God was both *principium* and *finis*. They believed in a law ... which Plato had referred to as the law in itself ... Cicero had said of it that it was the same in Rome and Athens, unchangeable and eternal at all times and for all peoples, the voice of God himself, which could not be abolished; nor could its validity be contested by the resolution of a senate or a plebiscite (Dietze 1956, 75–76).

Natural law underlies many recent discourses on human rights. As Dietze writes: "Under the Western

3 Obligation relates to the idea of gift through the themes of gratitude and indebtedness (Online Etymology Dictionary, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/obligation>).

constitutions, basic rights appear as an objective value. The *pouvoir constituant* does not grant them, but merely guarantees them. Having their roots in a natural law that is not so much the creation of human reason but of God, these rights are immune from a subjectivist interpretation and can neither be amended nor abolished” (Dietze 1956, 81).

More secular schools of thought attempted to ground human rights on other principles, such as human dignity or reason. Most constitutions refer to human rights and do so in a very solemn way, even if they do not relate them to a divine foundation. However, as Schmid (2004, 28) remarks:

It seems that the commitment to universal human rights has attained quasi religious status in these preambles, that at first sight appear to be secular. No longer is accountability to the almighty God final criteria, but accountability to the dignity of the human being. This demonstrates, as with the particular western examples, that constitutions—as the supreme texts of law—cannot do without religious reminiscences, at least as structural elements: whereas they do not invoke God, they do celebrate a firm “faith” in universal human rights, in which they find their foundation *extra se*.

The theologico-political problem cannot be easily solved. “Religious reminiscences” remain, even when constitutions try to do without a religious foundation.⁴

Critical Reflections

Our assessment of the references to God in national constitutions leads us to a mixed appraisal. On the one hand, many analysts find those references useful to warrant the solemnity of constitutional measures.

To invoke God is, beyond the act of faith ... to give an additional guarantee to the liberty and the rights of the citizens, in the sense that a divine presence means that human law is not the supreme and final norm of human society, because everyone knows that positive law does not exhaust the sphere of law. Likewise, this invocation emphasizes that politics is not the unsurpassable horizon of social life (D’Onorio 2008, 9; my translation).

On the other hand, other analysts deem such invocations to be either inappropriate, ineffective, or

⁴ Even an openly atheistic constitution such as that of North Korea (1972), as it exalts the leadership of Comrades Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il, underlines that their maxim is “The people are my God.”

harmful. From a modern perspective, constitutional references to God seem out of place. Their location in preambles and their very general phrasing tends to make them useless in legal disputes.⁵ They testify to ancient alliances between religious authorities and political powers, which, too often, served to warrant those powers and to justify unfathomable crimes (Winiger 2010).

Other critical remarks are necessary from a theological point of view. The massive legacy of Christendom prompts many Christians to consider the inclusion of God in national constitutions as a fit homage to God or the Christian heritage and to see its promotion as a faithful duty. We could witness this sort of argumentation in the debate around the European Constitution project (Berten 2004; Kiljunen 2004, 51–52; Wynne 2007). But to what extent isn’t the God of national constitutions a mere projection of our collective desires and needs? Do constitutional references to God truly honour God? Their insistence on “Almighty God” and on God as “Supreme Ruler” of the universe leaves aside important aspects of the biblical tradition about God. God calls Abram to leave his country and to move towards “the land I will show you” (Gen 12:1). The prophets constantly question the rulers’ appeal to God to justify their deeds and policies. Jesus’ kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36), and, therefore, in Paul’s words, “our citizenship is in heaven” (Phi 3:20). In a word: from a Christian point of view, constitutional references to God tend to suffer from an eschatological deficit. But this leads us to a well-known theological dilemma: Is the Christian view of politics essentially a critical one, or can Christianity (still) make positive contributions to the foundation and development of countries?

A proposal

Konrad Schmid made a thought-provoking remark in his study of constitutional preambles: “It could very well be the case that a preamble that avoids

⁵ In Canada, “the British Columbia Court of Appeal has gone so far as to describe the words of the preamble as ‘a dead letter’ into which that court has ‘no authority to breathe life’—an act of resurrection, it says, which only the Supreme Court of Canada could hope to bring about” (Farrow 2004, 162). For a counterargument regarding the normative value of preambles in constitutions, see Pieprzycza 2017.



mentioning God is shaped by theological thought to a greater degree than a preamble in which such mentioning is explicit” (Schmid 2004, 29). The issue might not be so much to name God but rather to discourse in such a way that a space opens for transcendence, be it a “nameless Transcendence.”⁶

The conditions under which such discourse can be achieved would have to be explored for themselves. Let me just suggest that they could be traced in the South African case, as the country abandoned the racist constitution of 1961 to move towards the post-apartheid constitution of 1996. This contemporary constitution abandons the epic godly narrative to propose instead a brief preamble remembering past sufferings, injustice and hardships, and expressing its fundamental belief in inclusivity:

We, the people of South Africa,
Recognise the injustices of our past;
Honour those who suffered for justice and freedom in our land;
Respect those who have worked to build and develop our country; and
Believe that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity.

We may notice that the three central categories of Johann Baptist Metz’s new political theology are imbedded in this first sentence, namely: memory, narrative, and solidarity. The memory is, as in Metz’s view, the memory of suffering (Metz 1980). The preamble goes on with the goals and principles held dear by the country:

We therefore, through our freely elected representatives, adopt this Constitution as the supreme law of the Republic so as to
— Heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights;
— Lay the foundations for a democratic and open society in which government is based on the will of the people and every citizen is equally protected by law;
— Improve the quality of life of all citizens and free the potential of each person; and

— Build a united and democratic South Africa able to take its rightful place as a sovereign state in the family of nations.

The preamble concludes with a dual *invocatio Dei*: “May God protect our people,” and “God bless South Africa.” Such invocations recognize that, ultimately, the people are vulnerable and in need of “blessing.” Our beliefs, intentions and projects are full of hopes and desires that we cannot entirely fulfill. God is invoked not as a warrant that closes the deal, but as the trustworthy witness of a liberating journey which remains our own.

References

- Arendt, Hannah. 2013. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- B. C. 2013. “In God Some Trust: Faith in Constitutions.” *The Economist*, Erasmus Section, May 13. <https://www.economist.com/erasmus/2013/05/13/in-god-some-trust>.
- Baum, Gregory. 2015. *Fernand Dumont: A Sociologist Turns to Theology*. Montreal: McGill-Queen’s Press.
- Benveniste, Émile. 1969. *Le Vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes*. 2nd vol.: *Pouvoir, droit, religion*. Paris: Éditions de Minuit.
- Berten, Ignace. 2004. “La Constitution européenne et les religions.” *Revue théologique de Louvain* 35 (4): 474–494.
- Cone, James H. 1974. “Biblical Revelation and Social Existence.” *Interpretation: a Journal of Bible and Theology* 28 (4): 422–440. doi: 10.1177/002096437402800403.
- Dietze, Gottfried. 1956. “Natural Law in the Modern European Constitutions.” *Natural Law Forum*, Paper 7. http://scholarship.law.nd.edu/nd_naturallaw_forum/7.
- Domingo, Rafael. 2016. “God as a Metalegal Concept.” In *God and the Secular Legal System*, 23–72. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- D’Onorio, Joël-Benoist. 2008. “Dieu dans les Constitutions européennes.” *Liberté politique*, September 24. <http://www.libertepolitique.com/La-revue/La-revue-Liberte-Politique/Extraits/Dieu-dans-les-Constitutions-europeennes>.
- Dumont, Fernand. 1995. *Raisons communes*. Montreal: Boreal.
- Farrow, Douglas. 2004. “Of Secularity and Civil Religion.” In *Recognizing Religion in a Secular Society*, edited by Douglas Farrow, 140–182. Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press.
- Georges, Nael. 2012. *L’islam dans l’ordre juridique des États arabes du Moyen Orient*. Bruxelles: Institut MEDEA.
- Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV). 2011. Colorado Springs: The International Bible Society. <http://biblegateway.com>.
- Ibán, Iván C. 2016. “God in Constitutions and Godless Constitutions.” In *Law, Religion, Constitution*, edited by W. Cole Durham *et al.*, 37–56. New York: Routledge.
- 6 The French-Canadian sociologist Fernand Dumont wrote extensively about the key role of such transcendence in human life, both on individual and societal levels (Baum 2015; Dumont 1995, 215–234).

- Issa, Ali. 2011. "Constitution et religion dans les États arabes: la place de la religion dans le système constitutionnel moderne du monde arabe." <http://www.droitconstitutionnel.org/congresNancy/comN3/issaT.pdf>.
- Kiljunen, Kimmo. 2004. *The European Constitution in the Making*. Brussels: Centre for European Policy Studies.
- Meier, Heinrich. 2006. *Leo Strauss and the Theologico-Political Problem*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Metz, Johann Baptist. 1980. *Faith in History and Society*. New York: Seabury Press.
- Pieprzyca, Piotr. 2017. "Le préambule de la constitution comme un exemple d'un texte de droit." *Comparative Legilinguistics* 30: 51–66.
- Rowland, Christopher, and Mark Corner. 1990. *Liberating Exegesis*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press.
- Schmid, Konrad. 2004. "In the Name of God? The Problem of Religious or Non-Religious Preambles to State Constitutions in Post-Atheistic Contexts." *Religion in Eastern Europe* 24 (1): 19–32.
- Schröder, Wolfgang M. 2004. "Gott im europäischen Projekt rechtsstaatlicher Demokratie." In *Ideen für Europa*, edited by Walter Fürst, Joachim Drumm, and Wolfgang M. Schröder, 343–372. Berlin: LIT Verlag.
- Strauss, Leo. 1997. "Preface to *Hobbes Politische Wissenschaft*." In *Jewish Philosophy and the Crisis of Modernity*, edited by Kenneth Hart Green, 453–456. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Ven, Johannes A. van der. 2003. "Religious Freedom and the Public Church." In *Developing a Public Faith*, edited by Richard R. Osmer and Friedrich L. Schweitzer, 189–202. St. Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press.
- Wikipedia. 2019. "Oath." <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oath>.
- Wikisource. 2018. "Republic of South Africa Constitution Act 1961." https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Page:Republic_of_South_Africa_Constitution_Act_1961_statute_book_scan.djvu/1.
- Winiger, Bénédicte. 2010. "Introduction: Dieu et l'universalisme du droit." In *Recht und Globalisierung*, edited by Bénédicte Winiger *et al.*, 17–23. Stuttgart: F. Steiner.
- Wynne, Emma. 2007. "Finding Faith in the EU Constitution." <https://www.dw.com/en/finding-faith-in-the-eu-constitution/a-2381546>.

Rethinking hospitality, resistance and the calling: Explorations of decolonial research strategies

Kaia Schultz Rønsdal

What is hospitality, what is its content? Through explorations of decolonial research strategies this article has its starting point in a narrative from Northern Norway. I discuss conceptualisations of hospitality from theological and phenomenological perspectives, and as something that may entail resistance from and for those involved. I present the Arctic North as a very specific geographical, historical and cultural space. Certain events took place in these borderlands during the so-called refugee crisis that set in motion encounters and narratives that were worth investigating. In the explorations of hospitality, I include the perspective of lived space and the phenomenological concept of prereflexivity, which are prerequisites for a discussion of the calling and hospitality.

Introduction

This article explores decolonial research strategies, connecting to the ways in which voices, bodies and practices make up critical counter-power, and where this counter-power is rooted. Hospitality, as well as the response to the call of another human being, in this context are interpreted within a theological framework as practices of resistance and counter-conduct.

Through a narrative from Northern Norway, I explore the concepts of hospitality and calling from theological and phenomenological perspectives as something that may entail resistance from and for those involved. The Arctic North is the starting point as certain events took place there in 2015 that set in motion encounters and narratives that were worth investigating.

The research relates to decolonial thinking both indirectly, as the issue of migration, border-crossing, and the reason for these are to a large extent linked to varying remnants of colonialism and systemic racism and marginality based in colonial logics. Implicitly, the research as well as the text itself, relate to research strategies that are tied to decolonial think-

Dr. Kaia S. Rønsdal is a researcher affiliated with The Faculty of Theology, University of Oslo. Her discipline is the field of professional ethics and Christian social practice. Her research interests are in the lived practices in civil society, addressing issues such as marginality, migration, borders and peripheries, from perspectives including spatial theory, urbanity, phenomenology and theological ethics. Her research also includes methodological explorations within these perspectives and fields. She is involved with several projects allowing for further explorations on the concept of hospitality in the context of migration.

ing. Postcolonial critique, in the tradition of Edward Said (Said 1979) points to the complete objectifying of the oriental, non-white other, where this other has been observed, administrated and controlled without the freedom or power to participate, negotiate, or decide. Traditional research methods are often critiqued due to the objectification of the research subjects or matters, reflecting this postcolonial thinking. Starting with Spivak's warning of hegemonizing the other, decolonial methodology focuses on how we learn "from below, from the subaltern,

rather than only study him(her)” (Spivak 2005, 482). In their endeavors, researchers often collaborate with individuals who are not researchers, and the goal is to avoid reducing their life, experiences and practices to data. A research approach characterized by collaboration focused on subject-to-subject relationships between the researcher subject and research field may be understood as a decolonial research strategy (cf. Wyller and Lid, Forthcoming 2021). Furthermore, new knowledge developed from new spaces with other perspectives may lead to new grounds for resistance and counter-conduct (Wyller and Lid, Forthcoming 2021). Also when we research with people who are not necessarily subaltern in Spivak’s understanding, it is a question of letting the people and practices speak, and, in an attentive and embodied sense, participate and share.

To let the counter-conductive spaces, practices and bodies speak, the presentation of the geographical and historical context and the narrative of contacting and speaking with the research subjects becomes important, and may not follow the traditional composition of academic writing. I will attempt to comprehensibly weave the elements together.

In the explorations of hospitality, I include the perspective of lived space and the phenomenological concept of prereflexivity, which are prerequisites for a discussion of calling and hospitality. These perspectives also relate to encountering and affectedness, and not reducing the research subject “to the empirical alone” (Spivak 2005, 480), but to sharing experiences and knowledge production, as situated bodies. In other words, the research does not present a “general body”, as in trying to say something about general tendencies regarding hospitality; but rather, it regards concrete present bodies, sharing, also within the framework of research.

After presenting the context of the research, and some of the presently relevant history, I will recount the narrative of the encounters with the two research subjects. All these elements, related to context, history and shared encounter are part of the information that forms the discussion. Thus, the narrative will, in line with the methodology, include a present researcher subject. As it is not only the words spoken in the interviews that inform the discussion, the balance between information given in the interviews and ‘other’ information may be awry compared to traditional ethnographic and empirically developed writing.

Refugees in the North¹

In 2015, almost one and a half million people crossed the borders into Europe. They were refugees and migrants searching for any possible route into a European country.

Norway has a 196-kilometre border with Russia. Only one road crosses the border, with one border station, called Storskog. It is illegal to make the crossing on foot, but a bicycle is considered a vehicle. At the beginning of the 21st century, an average of five asylum-seekers crossed this border annually.² In 2015, 5,465 asylum-seekers found this way into Norway, most having been granted once-through visas in Russia. As early as March 2015, a few asylum-seekers crossed this border; in August 100 people crossed. By October, 50 to 60 people were crossing daily. According to Norwegian law, asylum applications can be processed either at the border or inside the territory. Because it was impossible to differentiate between asylum-seekers and others, as well as handling the large number of people, the border authorities simply decided to let every third country national enter.

The local police, politicians, and population mobilized. The transit reception center, the refugee reception centers, and all the hotels in the area filled up. The local politicians and news station reported on the situation but were unable to catch the attention of the national authorities. International media, however, was attentive, and once they started broadcasting from Storskog, the Norwegian media and government realized that this had become an international event.

Furthermore, it became both a national and an international political issue. The refugees heading to Norway were crowding the two Russian cities closest to Storskog: Nikel and Zapoljarnyj. Russian border authorities and Norwegian police agreed to a daily maximum of 200 border crossings.

Once the Norwegian government had realized the severity of the situation, they mobilized to find means of stopping the increasing flow of migrants into Norway. The law had to be changed, and a legislative amendment was enacted within ten days. The locals were alarmed, as it was now late November and the climate was aggravating the situation.

1 Some of the narrative is also published in Rønsdal 2019.

2 The following account builds on local, national, and international reports from 2015 and 2016.



The government remained unaffected and increased the offensive. The lack of clear agreements with Russia led to migrants being sent back and forth within the border zone several times. In the end, Russia drew a line so that none of those deported from Norway were permitted to re-enter Russia. The amendment allowed the apprehending of people who were likely to be denied asylum, which led to several asylum-seekers exploring the options of church asylum.

The Artic borderlands

The frontier between Norway and Russia was first staked out in 1863. Since then, the borders between Russia and Finland have been re-drawn and fought over many times. People have inhabited the area for more than 10,000 years, regardless and irrespective of these frontiers, and people on all sides are connected to each other through family bonds and friendships. Until around 200 years ago, the population was predominantly Sami. The region played an important role in the Nordics' history as colonizers. As the Sami population was threatening to outgrow the whites in the early 1800s, the government changed policies to repopulate the region with white and "loyal" Norwegians. In the county of Sør-Varanger, industry, as well as national and international politics have thus been the decisive forces of change, influencing who settled and made up the population. Refugees have crossed these borders many times before, mainly due to wars, unrest and persecution in Russia and Finland.

Throughout the Second World War around 160,000 German soldiers were based in this county, with a population of around 7000. Many stayed in people's homes, sometimes while the families were still living there. Additionally, 65,000 Soviet war prisoners were held in the many camps in the area. Locals fled or were evacuated by force, and the area was destroyed.³ Children were sent to Sweden when the war ended, for nourishment and healing, after years of food deprivation and sickness. During the 90s, there was a direct route from Sarajevo⁴ to Sør-Varanger, as the county is a so-called reception

county, which means that the county has an established center with a specific capacity in personell and beds for reception.

Shared borderland encounters

If you can reach Murmansk, you can get to Zapoljarnyj, a city with a population of 15,000, 53.3 kilometers from Storskog and the Norwegian border. Between Zapoljarnyj and Storskog, there is only wilderness. It is very dark, and there is little passing traffic. This area is as far East as Istanbul, and once you cross into Norway, you jump two time zones.

13 kilometers from Storskog, across the border, in the county of Sør-Varanger is Kirkenes, a town with 3,500 inhabitants. The locals travel 'next door' to do their shopping. Many go to Russia once a week to fill up their cars' gas tanks, as the price on gas and diesel is considerably lower than in Norway. Locals have "grenseboerbevis" (a local border traffic permit) and may cross the border without visas.

Some say that there is something called Northern Norwegian hospitality. If it exists, does it relate to the geographical, historical and social context of being a borderland? The context of the borderlands was a starting point for exploring hospitality, and one of the dimensions of hospitality became the concept of calling and, eventually, that led to finding practices and voices of resistance and counter-conduct.

I read about two people, Lars and Maria in countless news articles. Two ordinary people who took action when 'the refugees came' to Norway. Through a friend and colleague in Kirkenes, I managed to get the phone numbers to these two people.

I booked flights to Kirkenes, booked a hotel, and planned to contact Lars and Maria to arrange interviews. I had a reminder in my calendar every day for two months, "call Kirkenes", but I kept hesitating. It felt insignificant to be a researcher and to talk to people three years afterwards, to interpret and think about what *they* did.

I travelled there, just to be there, as a situated body. It is a place that calls to be experienced, lived and felt. The people, culture and history needs to be experienced *there*. Three days after my arrival, I still had not called, really struggling with the question of why it was important to talk to them. On the fourth day, I could not procrastinate anymore, and I called Lars, fully prepared for him to say that he had no time to talk to me. "Hello, it's Lars!" came the response.

3 Kirkenes endured 328 bombardments, and in October 1944, it was burned to the ground, leaving only 39 houses.

4 There are different reports of origin city; Skopje, Pristina, Sarajevo, and Kosovo.

I introduced myself, and explained why I had called, and told him that my friend had recommended I talked to him about “the refugees” and that he had given me his number. He replied that it was nice to hear that the other man thought he was someone interesting to talk to. I told him that I knew it was short notice, but I hoped he had the chance to talk to me about his experiences. “Yes, sure, I’d like that. How about tomorrow? Where can we meet?”

I met Lars in the hotel lobby. We talked for 2.5 hours. He talked about those months in 2015/16, about everything that happened, and all the things that had happened in his life because of those experiences. I asked about Maria, who I had learned was moving from Kirkenes. He told me she was still around, and that I should call her. At the end of our conversation, I asked him for a hug.

Lars, who is a man in his late forties, told me how he is one of the many locals who goes to Russia for cheap gas. During the fall of 2015, he met families wandering the desolate road between Zapoljarnyj and Storskog. More and more people and many small children, walking or bicycling. People who were not dressed for the harsh climate here. He, a man who used to be an adamant adversary of immigration, an “unknowing sceptic” as he calls himself, was moved to action.

When I got to my room, I called Maria. “Hello, it’s Maria?” I went through the introduction again. “I can meet you tomorrow, no problem!” She told me her story of those months when the refugees came. We talked about Kirkenes as a historic place of hospitality. She told me of doors that are always open in Kirkenes. People will enter each other’s homes and get a cup of coffee, even when there is no one home. She thinks this has to do with the war (WWII). As the Germans occupied people’s homes for their own use, families would move into other families’ homes. Maria’s grandparents had told her how they lived several families together in one home, and that this was part of people’s narratives, thus shaping them as perhaps more welcoming and open.

Maria, a nurse with two grown children, told me how she was watching the news, seeing the families who were walking or bicycling in the nothingness between Zapoljarnyj and Storskog. She saw small children and their exhausted parents. Almost invisible bodies in the Arctic darkness. She saw people in danger and was moved to action.

Both told me about how they were arrested for helping transport refugees from the reception cen-

ter to church asylum. Maria paid her fine. Lars refused and spent three years getting exonerated from the sentence. Both said that *their lives would never be the same again*. When we talked about hospitality, they both claimed the refugees as most hospitable. *That they had never received so much hospitality as when the refugees came*.

Hospitality and calling

The question of hospitality is in some instances one of life or death. It can therefore not be a question of courtesy or civility, and in this discussion, it is not a political question. On the human level, what is ultimately at stake is tied to ethics. Hospitality is conceptually linked to theology, and ultimately appears as an ethical demand in one form or another, as an “ethics-as-hospitality” (Dikeç, Clark and Barnett 2009, 9). “When it is the ethical challenge of the other that is central, and this is confronted in action, then a theologically relevant practice takes place” (Wyller 2008). The Danish philosopher and theologian Knud Løgstrup’s most famous work is *The Ethical Demand* (Løgstrup 2000 [1956]). In this work on relational ethics, he stated that you can never engage with another human without holding pieces of her life in your hand. This demand is also part of Løgstrup’s work on vocation. Vocation is when humans see themselves called by God to certain actions, ways of life or professions. Over the last half of the 1900s, theological thinkers like Løgstrup developed a theology and philosophy that included specific ideas of vocation. Central here is that in the *calling*, the term I will use, we are called by the other, by our neighbor. This is not a religious concept, but instead a universal concept that every human being is called to heed this other life and take care of and protect it. This should mean that when refugees come to our door, they are the life placed in our hand to care for, to show hospitality.

Lars and Maria both stated that hospitality was something that came with the refugees. If that is the case, it turns the concept on its head. If hospitality comes with the other, the concept of calling from traditional thinkers such as Løgstrup is contested and challenged. In an attempt to explore what this may mean, it is fitting to reflect on the Nordic emphasis on traditional ideas of calling, as they can be used to say something about hospitality.



Embodied spatial calling

The theoretical premise is spatial thinking, primarily in the tradition of the French sociologist Henri Lefebvre, and his production of space (Lefebvre 2003 [1970]; 2007 [1974]; 2008 [1961]). The very short introductory version of Lefebvre's theory on the production of space, in this context is that space is to be understood in an active sense as an intricate web of relationships that is continuously produced and reproduced. Spaces are formative. Space is to be understood less as something that is, but as something we do, or in the interpretation of Kirsten Simonsen, space is a verb rather than a noun (Simonsen 2010, 45).

I will draw on prior explorations on the concept of calling, which emphasizes the fact *that individuals are placed in the sometimes disruptive calling relationship as equals* – the actions taken in the encounter determine the meaning for those involved (Rønsdal 2018). The theological premise for this particular understanding of calling is the tradition sometimes referred to as Scandinavian creation theology, where Løgstrup was a central figure.

One starting point of this position is that life is created and given to us. We did not create it ourselves. This life is continuously created, in the *here and now* (Wingren 1995, 35–36; 39–40). Our relationships and encounters with other people thus shape our world (Løgstrup 2000, 39). There are, according to Løgstrup, phenomena and aspects of human life that are not subject to our power, that belong to life itself (Løgstrup 2000, 30; 35, 38–39). Løgstrup rejected making the question of compassion and care a religious one. Rather, he made them a universal challenge, in a reciprocal interdependence regardless of faith or creed (Løgstrup 2000, 34). As we are created (by God), life is expressed as care for and reception of the other. Løgstrup's view of creation is that it is universal, and that it is characterized by motion, change, and life. That the world and other humans are not *our* creations is decisive in how we think about and act toward them.

The Other has always been an important figure and phenomenon for theology; part of “the task of perceiving the other” (Heimbrock and Meyer 2010, 1999). This emphasis links to phenomenology, where the fact that we share a [created] life, reality, and world makes us part of the same *lifeworld* [with divine presence]: “A human is inherently related to others, to nature, culture and society” (Wyller 2010, 190). Furthermore, we “share the same planet, there-

fore unavoidably live at the expense of other life-forms, and repeatedly do so at the expense of others” (Gregersen, Uggla and Wyller 2017, 21).

This is a theology that is “particularly interested in thinking of reality as a radically open concept, which leaves space to think otherness and changeability for the world. Such extensions into discourse are open for discussion, not holy laws to be either condoned or condemned” (Heimbrock and Meyer 2010, 1999). It is a normative, philosophical, life-interpreting approach towards God, life, humans, and the world. The so-called Scandinavian creation theology “stands and falls with the claim that there are shared aspects of human life that offer room for open-minded discussions of how to live the human condition alongside people of other faiths, and with people of no professed faith at all. [It] leaves ample room for common sense and common commitments, even where worldviews differ or even drift apart. Everyday life constitutes a third realm between a purely political realm, and a purely religious domain” (Uggla, Wyller and Gregersen 2017, 8).

These two lines of thought regarding human life are distinctive to this theological interpretation. The first is the understanding of creation, meaning interpreting the world as “already God's creation, a reality which should be cared for and enjoyed for its own sake, by believers and non-believers alike” (Uggla, Wyller and Gregersen 2017, 11). Humans partake in continuous creation, a condition shared by all.

The other distinction is the profession of a divine presence also outside religious or sacred spaces – in the everyday. This is also true in the everyday lives, practices and spaces of people who do not necessarily think of themselves as being religious. This gives a sacredness to everyday life and to everyday spaces that are open to theological interpretations of practices and locations of life traditionally not thought of as sacred. The other human being, the one who is fundamentally other to myself, is also a part of this shared condition of living in a world that is continuously created.

Bodies and prereflexivity

The Norwegian professor of the science of nursing, Kari Martinsen, claims that in the confrontation with another body, there is an embodied reaction to this body, even before one begins to think about who this person is (Martinsen 2014 [2000], 19–23).

She refers to this embodied reaction as *prereflexivity*, meaning something that occurs before conscious consideration. Bodies are aware of and respond to other bodies.

Prereflexivity is significant in my interpretation of the calling. I argue that the significant moment is when encountering bodies respond to each other momentarily, before all conscious considerations and assessments of the situation can occur. These moments are significant because in the prereflexive, the encountering bodies are equal; they are just equal bodies without predefined positions. In the calling and in the encounter, in the prereflexive, it is not as obvious who these vulnerable bodies are (Rønsdal 2018).

There are several phenomenologists contributing to the concept of prereflexivity (cf. Løgstrup 2000; Martinsen 2014 [2000]; Merleau-Ponty 1962), among them Bernard Waldenfels, placing prereflexivity in the body. “The domain of our body includes all that really has to do with me without being done by me” (Waldenfels 2007, 75). Waldenfels also emphasizes the encounter. He uses the concept of *pathos*, noting that they are “those events which are not at our disposal, as if merely waiting for a prompt or command, but rather happen to us, overcome, stir, surprise, attack us,” (Waldenfels 2011, 26). They are events that happen to us and do not belong to a “first-person perspective as an act I perform, nor to the third-person perspective as an objective process registered or effected from the outside” (Waldenfels 2007, 74). He states, “In sum, everything that appears to us has to be described not simply as something which receives a sense, but as something which provokes sense without being meaningful itself yet still as something *by which* we are touched, affected, stimulated, surprised and to some extent violated. I call this happening pathos, *Widerfahrnis* or af-fect, marked by a hyphen in order to suggest that something is done *to us*” (Waldenfels 2007, 74).

This prereflexivity as pathos is a central feature in how I interpret calling. It places the prereflexive in an ethical discourse, as being in the world is in itself ethically and morally significant. It is human to encounter others with empathy and pathos, but it is not necessarily something we decide ourselves. In his contemplations on vocation, the Swedish theologian Gustaf Wingren claimed that solidarity, which is linked to empathy and hospitality, is something we have to “endeavour to shake off” (Wingren 1995 [1974], 39), in encounters with suffering. To shake

off or ignore empathy or solidarity demands consciousness, not pathos.

In the moment of encounter, in the disruption, there is a prereflexive moment of equality, where the calling and the pathos may be pointed out. This changes the space of encounter momentarily – and thus changes the production of space. Space and prereflexivity are thus closely connected.

The body and being bodies in a common life-world – sensing and physically feeling with the entire body – is something common to us all regardless of our religious position. Being aware of our sensing the other in our encounters is related to being affected by the other, which also relates to ethics.

Even a small event, explicitly tied to embodied affectedness, prereflexive response, and equal bodies in lived space, has implications for how we interpret and understand calling. Because the bodies share the same circumstances – in the moment of encounter, in the shared lived space – these individuals are the same, equal bodies *as bodies*. The body does not stop to consider whether this is someone that it *wants* to aid: It simply responds.

Spaces and calling

I have established certain aspects with respect to calling: it applies to us all, equal individuals encounter each other in the calling, and we are all situated, sensing bodies in the world. There is an explicitly embodied calling, happening inside a space produced by the people there. It is an ethically normative notion – one may become affected. To return to phenomenology, the affectedness and pathos belong with those who experience it.

Calling has to do with *embodied and spatial* practices and socialities (Rønsdal 2018). This take on calling also has implications for how we may understand the concept of hospitality. By emphasizing lived space, we may learn more about calling. The calling is not only a disruption or an encounter or sensuousness; it also takes place in lived spaces. The calling is also in the nonspaces, those not included in churches or ecclesial notions on calling. Borderlands or borderspaces may be such nonspaces. Such nonspaces may be counterspaces, in that they, through their very differences, direct criticism toward society, threatening general discourse and challenging ethical discourse (Foucault 1984). Michel Foucault called these heterotopic spaces, and they are rich and socially complex. Who calls and



who responds in these spaces is not something decided beforehand. Nor are the spaces themselves.

Lars and Maria's experience of having met great hospitality when encountering the refugees may indicate something similar in terms of the undecided. The premise is *not* that if you do not believe in a god you are not in a reciprocal commitment toward fellow human beings (Rønsdal 2018). Our bodies are called, and they meet and respond in pathos when undisturbed by thought. The action, in accordance with Wingren, is latent, lying in wait, rooted in human existence, something that can be executed to exemplary perfection by anyone, regardless of knowledge or education (Wingren 1995 [1974], 101–102).

Fluid hospitality

The reason for taking the perspective of calling, and thus hospitality, is that it may also become a means for exploring resistance.

Lars, Maria and I talked about a lot of things, but I am not going to analyze their actions, thoughts, ideas, and conceptualizations about what happened in 2015. Rather, the narrative with them, their context, our experiences, and the one little sentence about hospitality gives means to discuss certain theological and phenomenological concepts that lets me explore aspects of hospitality. The one statement on hospitality as something *they* experienced may point out something.

The events took place so close to the border where someone who was not supposed to come came. They had nothing, and that is the reason they had nothing to give, and no one on either side had the time to make up an opinion. Certain circumstances fell together in a way that made certain encounters possible. This is the point where bodies can express needs and where other bodies can respond in pathos.

In the often hostile border situations in borderlands, there are also openings. There may be creative potential, human encounter and connectedness, in-betweenness and rupture, all opening up for change, counter-action and thus resistance. We live in a world where there is little time or sympathy for detours and delays – hospitality and calling are in themselves counter to this. However, it is the detours and delays that disturb, break, and open for the potential, the creative, and the resistance. In the perspective of Henri Lefebvre space is constantly in motion, always different, always being moved for-

ward, being produced – the world is moved forward by contrasts, contradictions, and tensions (Lefebvre 2007 [1974], 42).

There is an inherent, embodied reciprocity in the calling. The calling is not something someone comes to another with; rather, those involved meet each other as equals *with* and *in* the calling with pathos. The prerequisite is that we produce and share lived space, which is why it is *spatial*. The other prerequisite is the *body*: The body is attuned to the other body, sensing it and acting on it, *prereflexively*.

Even someone who seemingly has nothing to give, nothing to offer a guest, may offer hospitality unlike anything experienced before. Subjectivity is created when the offer is acknowledged, accepted and shared. Becoming the subject is resistance. It is an absolutely radical transformation of the calling, and an extension of hospitality.

Concluding remarks

A fluid hospitality takes the concept of calling and makes it universal, becoming an interesting and fruitful extension of both concepts in decolonial development. Traditional notions of both hospitality and the concept of calling may become passive, while fluid hospitality may be pinpointed as a *prereflexive, or even subreflexive, action*. “The foreigner, indeed, does not pose the question – he/she/it is the question – a question that begs my response and my responsibility” (Dufourmantelle 2013, 21).

In this embodied calling – in the pathos – we are all equally vulnerable and exposed, and it is unclear who calls and who responds – there is a potential for a rupture or breach that transgresses prior power status and knowledge. In the embodied spatial calling, *every* body is an otherbody; *no* body is in command, and *no* body is defined beforehand.

The same could be claimed for hospitality. Hospitality does not belong to *any one*, completely and always, it is continuously changing. The one who comes has our lives in their hands. What is given, shown and shared in human relationships, for shorter or longer time periods, is just that – shared. It concerns much more than the question of who is guest and who is host, who deserves what and who is to receive: thus challenging traditional binaries used to maintain destructive power structures.

In the power play that Lars and Maria have entered into by taking action, by their specific *disruptive* encounters, there is another production of space

going on at the same time. Maybe the fluid hospitality they experience in this lived space opens up new subjectivities, thus pointing to counter-spaces of resistance.

Presuming fluid hospitality, like calling, entails equal bodies encountering each other in pathos, there is a glimpse of universal better life, of equality, reciprocity, and human interconnectedness. It is immaterial, a transcendent, sensing, and embodied hospitality. In the fluid hospitality the encountering bodies surrender, or even entrust themselves to each other, holding pieces of each other's lives in their hands, transcending the usual conceptions of (the boundaries of) hospitality.

This spatial, embodied exploration and subsequent reflection on prereflexivity was actualized by the methodology founded in decolonial thinking. In the venture of the decolonizing of academic milieus, this may also reflect on fundamental methodological issues. Research related to various forms of marginality, such as migration, often involve delegating "the voice and agency of migrants to legitimised actors or native activists, mostly in the name of their status" (English, Grazioli and Martignoni 2019, 204), once again leaving other voices and narratives out. Multisensory, embodied methodology, experiencing with those we research with may enable emerging into fields where many voices can speak, in multiple ways. Donna Haraway claims that "[T]here is a premium on establishing the capacity to see from the peripheries and the depth" (Haraway 1988, 583). She goes on to warn of the dangers of romanticizing the visions of those marginalized through the claim of seeing from their perspective. The methodology I am arguing for here, however, does not have as its claim that it sees from the positions of the others. It does, rather, attempt to discover new perspectives when research is based on the *shared experience* we have with the people we research with.

References

- Dikeç, Mustafa, Nigel Clark, and Clive Barnett. 2009. "Extending Hospitality: Giving Space, Taking Time." *Paragraph* 32 (1): 1–14.
- Dufourmantelle, Anne. 2013. "Hospitality – Under Compassion and Violence." In *The Conditions of Hospitality. Ethics, Politics, and Aesthetics on the Threshold of the Possible*, edited by Thomas Claviez, 13–24. New York, NY: Fordham University Press.
- English, Claire, Margherita Grazioli, and Martina Martignoni. 2019. "Migration Solidarity in Postcolonial Europe. Challenging Borders, Creating Mobile Commons." In *Routledge Handbook of Radical Politics*, edited by Ruth Kinna and Uri Gordon, 194–210. Oxford: Routledge.
- Foucault, Michel. 1984. "Of Other Spaces (1967), Heterotopias." In *Architecture/Mouvement/Continuité*, Oct. 1984, 1–9. <https://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/foucault1.pdf>.
- Gregersen, Niels Henrik, Trygve Wyller, and Bengt Kristensson Uggla (eds). 2017. *Reformation Theology for a Post-Secular Age: Løgstrup, Preter, Wingren, and the Future of Scandinavian Creation Theology*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Haraway, Donna J. 1988. "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective." *Feminist Studies*, Autumn, 14 (3): 575–599.
- Heimbrock, Hans-Günter and Peter Meyer. 2010. "Theology as Model for Perceiving the Other." In *Perceiving the Other. Case Studies and Theories of Respectful Action*, edited by Trygve Wyller and Hans-Günter Heimbrock, 192–201. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Isin, Engin. 2012. *Citizens without Frontiers*. NY/London: Bloomsbury.
- Lefebvre, Henri. 2003 [1970]. *The Urban Revolution*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Lefebvre, Henri. 2007 [1974]. *The Production of Space*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Lefebvre, Henri. 2008 [1961]. *Critique of Everyday Life Vol. II. Foundations for a Sociology of the Everyday*. Malden, MA: Verso Books.
- Lid, Inger Marie and Trygve Wyller (eds.). 2017. *Rom og etikk: Fortellinger om ambivalens*. Oslo: Cappelen Damm Akademisk.
- Lid, Inger Marie and Trygve Wyller (eds.). Forthcoming 2020. *Motstand og Motmakt*. Oslo: Cappelen Damm Akademisk.
- Løgstrup, Knud E. 1997. *The Ethical Demand*. Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Løgstrup, Knud E. 2000 [1956]. *Den etiske fordring*. Oslo: Cappelen.
- Machado, Daisy L., Bryan S. Turner, and Trygve E. Wyller. 2018. "Traces of a Theo-Borderland." In *Borderland Religion: Ambiguous Practices of Difference, Hope and Beyond*, edited by Daisy .L Machado, Bryan S. Turner, and Trygve E. Wyller, 4–14. Oxford: Routledge.
- Martinsen, Kari. 2014 [2000]. *Øyet og kallet*. Bergen: Fagbokforlaget.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. 1962. *Phenomenology of Perception*. London: Routledge.
- Rønsdal, Kaia S. 2018. *Calling Bodies in Lived Space: Spatial Explorations on the Concept of Calling in a Public Urban Space*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Rønsdal, Kaia.S. 2019. "Hospitality in the Hands of Who?" In *Contested Hospitalities in a Time of Migration: Religious and Secular Counterspaces in the Nordic Region*, edited by Synnøve K. N. Bendixsen and Trygve Wyller, 175–187. Oxford: Routledge.
- Said, Edward. 1979. *Orientalism*. New York, NY: Vintage.



- Schmid, Christian. 2008. "Henri Lefebvre's Theory of the Production of Space: Towards a Three-Dimensional Dialectics." In *Space, Difference, Everyday Life: Reading Henri Lefebvre*, edited by Kanishka Goonewardena, Stefan Kipfer, Richard Milgrom, and Christian Schmid, 27–45. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Simonsen, Kirsten. 2010. "Rumlig praksis: Konstitution af rum mellem materialitet og repræsentation." *Vendingen mot rummet*, Slagmark, 57: 35–58.
- Soja, Edward W. 1996. *Thirdspace – Journeys to Los Angeles and Other-Real-and-Imagined Places*. Malden MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Spivak, Gayatri C. 2005. "Scattered Speculations on the subaltern and the popular." *Postcolonial Studies* 8 (4): 475–408.
- Waldenfels, Bernhard. 2007. *The Question of the Other*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Waldenfels, Bernhard. 2011. *Phenomenology of the Alien. Basic Concepts*. Translated by Tanja Stähler and Alexander Kozin. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Wingren, Gustaf. 1995 [1974]. *Credo. Den kristna tros- och livsåskådningen*. Skellefteå: Artos.
- Wyller, Trygve. 2008. "Compassion as an Interruption of the Power of Inscription. A Contribution to Diaconal Studies." In *Lived Religion: Conceptual, Empirical and Practical-Theological Approaches; Essays in Honor of Hans-Günter Heimbrock*, edited by Heinz Streib, Astrid Dinter, Kerstin Söderblom, and Hans-Günter Heimbrock, 171–182. Leiden: Brill.
- Wyller, Trygve. 2010. "Religion and Professional Ethics in a Post-Secular Society." In *Perceiving the Other. Case Studies and Theories of Respectful Action*, edited by Trygve Wyller and Hans-Günter Heimbrock, 188–191. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Wyller, Trygve and Hans-Günter Heimbrock (eds.). 2010. *Perceiving the Other. Case Studies and Theories of Respectful Action*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

The income gap between rich and poor: stealth colonialism

Raymond J. Webb

Settled and shaped by the 1 %

While there is some global improvement in poverty reduction, better healthcare, and other measures, the income gap between rich and poor is increasing, with its negative relationship to educational opportunities, healthcare, longevity, happiness, and social cohesiveness. Besides socio-economic harm, personal and collective agency are diminished, and the norms of distributive justice are violated. Practical theologians should understand and highlight the scope of the problem and its consequences. This paper discusses the justice, agency, biblical wisdom, cultural context, and empathy which are an important foundation for the construction by others of economic and political efforts to narrow the income gap. Where the “1 %” invade, occupy, and control the political, economic, and cultural space of all, a kind of colonialism (“stealth colonialism”) is present.

Introduction

It should be noted that wealth, capital, and income are different. Wealth is overall economic worth, including one’s house, for example. Capital is more like at-hand, usable economic resources, for example, money in a bank account. Income is the money that comes into a household. Disposable income is the money that comes into a household minus taxes. Income can come from an investment of wealth.

After a brief look at the world economic situation, we focus on the income gap between rich and poor, its economic, social, and particular consequences, and relevant practical theological principles. While there has been some material improvement in the situations of many people in the lower quadrant of economic prosperity, poverty remains, the income gap grows, and its negative effects remain. The quiet invasion, occupation, and control of more and more of the political, economic, and cultural space thrives. This gross assault on distributive justice is indeed “stealth colonialism.”

Raymond J. Webb is Professor of Pastoral Theology at the University of Saint Mary of the Lake, Mundelein, Illinois, U.S.A. His research interests include practical theology, educational psychology, Muslim-Catholic dialogue, human rights, inequality, immigration, and “peripheries.”

I. There is physical improvement in life situations of many people on the planet: the case for optimism

Steven Pinker argues “more or less” that things are better than ever with regard to happiness, which he says is related to absolute income, not comparative income (Pinker 2018, 270). Income is increasing in 45 out of 52 countries studied. Happiness is also related to social support, generosity, and less perception of corruption (Pinker 2018, 271). Pinker argues that recent years have brought measurable improvement in longevity, health, abundance, safety, peace, equal rights, freedom, literacy, knowledge, and opportunity for leisure-time enjoyment (Pinker 2018, 51). Hans Rosling (Rosling 2018, 52–53) notes that





the percentage of the world's population living in extreme poverty (less than \$2 per day adjusted for inflation and prices) has dropped from 85 % in 1800 to 50 % in 1966 to 9 % in 2017. Latin America went from 14 % living in extreme poverty in 1997 to 4 % in 2017. Rosling (Rosling 2018, 248) argues that educational programs should present this generally optimistic view of the state of the world, things getting better for the majority of people in the world.

II. Serious problems are associated with income inequality: the rich-poor gap

What do the income gap between rich and poor and its financial consequences look like? In the U.S. three people have more wealth than the lower half of the population. In the world at large, 63 people have more wealth than the 4 billion in the lower half. Anand Giridharadas (Giridharadas 2018, 4) notes that the average pre-tax income of the top 10th of Americans has doubled since 1980, that of the top 1 % has more than tripled, and that of the top 0.001 % has risen more than sevenfold even as the average pre-tax income of the bottom half of Americans has stayed almost precisely the same. Much wealth is income producing. Thomas Piketty (Piketty 2015, 20) notes that wage inequality began increasing in the U.S. and U.K. in the 1970s and stopped decreasing everywhere else in the 1980s. Piketty (Piketty 2015, 15) offers a picture of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) country ratios of income inequality by comparing the top decile with the bottom decile. Comparisons include Sweden 2.7; Germany 3.0; U.K. 3.8; U.S. 5.9. Anthony Atkinson (Atkinson 2015, 79) is convinced that a general fall in inequality in Latin America can be attributed to a reduction in skilled worker wage premiums and progressive government transfers to the poor, since other factors go in various directions depending on the country.

The "sufficiency" substitute

Samuel Moyn (Moyn 2018, 3) is concerned that in this age of a focus on human rights, the goal has become greater sufficiency rather than greater equality. Sufficiency does not equal equality. The "distributive commitment" of the welfare state has been uncoupled. The material rights of all, by virtue of being human, generally set aside. "Sufficiency con-

cerns how far an individual is from having nothing and how well she is doing in relation to some minimum of provision of the good things in life. Equality concerns how far individuals are from one another and the portion of those good things they get" (Moyn 2018, 3). At least some equality in the distribution of goods in life is necessary; otherwise it might turn out that two societies emerge — different ways of life, the wealthy covering over their economic inferiors with the moral that as long as basic needs are met, it does not matter how much the rich are above the rest. Moyn supports Barbara Ward's still unrealized call for a global distributive equality (Moyn 2018, 155).

The opportunity versus outcome issue

Atkinson (Atkinson 2015, 3) called the 1980s the "Turn to Inequality." He supports the position of Wilkinson and Pickett (Wilkinson and Pickett 2010) that we should be concerned about inequality of outcome, rather than equality of opportunity. Atkinson himself is focused on achieved economic resources, making the distribution of market incomes less unequal (Atkinson 2015, 13–14, 21). What is claimed is that where opportunities do not lead to improved outcomes, they are not usually in fact opportunities.

III. Specific consequences of the income gap

We briefly look at studies concerned with the negative relationship of income inequality to family, education, healthcare, longevity, happiness, and social cohesion.

Family

Miles Corak (Corak 2013) found that income inequality is strongly related to family background, more than to "hard work." Income inequality is negatively related to quality of education, access to high level employment, and "upward mobility." Remediation of the results of the gap must include focus on inequality of outcomes. Bourguignon, Ferreira, and Menendez (Bourguignon, Ferreira, and Menendez 2003) also found that observed outcome income inequality strongly related to family background. However, after the family background is controlled for, they note that inequality remains high in Brazil.



Education

Sabrina Tavernise (Tavernise 2012) points out that children from affluent families do better in school. In rate of college completion – the best predictor of workforce success -- the imbalance between rich and poor children has grown by 50 % since the 1980s. She notes that Kornrich and Furstenberg found that in 1972, rich families spent five times more on their children than low- income families but by 2007 the ratio was 9:1, even though low-income family spending had increased by 20 %. Tavernise highlights Meredith Philips' finding that by the start of school high-income family children have spent 400 more literacy hours and 1200 more out-of-the-home cultural activity hours than children from low-income families.

Fifty people were recently arrested in a bribery scheme to gain admission to prestigious U.S. universities by claiming fictitious talent in minor sports. But Ron Lieber (Lieber 2019) has pointed out another admissions edge at many prestigious private colleges and universities, which are accessible to families in the upper middle class. One has a better chance of admission if one does not need financial aid and can pay the full amount (as much as \$300,000) for four years of tuition, room and board.

Sean Reardon (Reardon 2013) has found a relationship between income and academic treatment, "the income achievement gap," which has grown significantly in the last three decades and is attributable to social trends affecting both income and educational preparation of children entering school. Already large when children enter school, it does not grow significantly afterwards.

Steven Durlauf (Durlauf 1992) developed a model that predicted children's income from parents' neighborhood choice, which is affected by income and leads to economically homogeneous neighborhoods, similar levels of educational opportunity, and fewer successful role models in poorer neighborhoods.

Alan Krueger developed the concept of the Great Gatsby Curve: high economic inequality corresponds with low economic mobility on a generation-to-generation basis. When the "rich- everyone else disparity" is wide, people's ability to improve their financial health depends even more heavily on their parents' economic status. B. Mazumder (Mazumder 2015) claims that the immobility described by the Great Gatsby Curve may be related to in-

equality in skills. In another area, but typical of the income gap, Krueger also found that most of the gain in pop music income went to a few top recording artists.

Health and longevity

In studies of the U.S., U.K., and Brazil, Lynch, Smith, Kaplan, and House (Lynch et al, 2000) noted that income inequality is generally associated with differences in health. They found the best explanation of this is to say that the political and economic processes that generate income inequality influence both individual and public resources such as schooling, healthcare, welfare, and working conditions.

In a review of research, Brian Keeley (Keeley 2015, 77) of the OECD saw a consensus that there is a correlation between income inequality and health and social problems. While there is not complete agreement, there is evidence that income inequality causes health and social problems independently of other factors. Karachi, Kennedy, Lochner, and Prothrow-Stith (Karachi et al, 1997) found that income inequality led to increased mortality, due to less access to social capital (for example, trust in others and opportunities for civic engagement). In a study in Brazil, Pabayo, Chiavegatto, Filho, Lebrão, and Kawachi (Pabayo et al, 2013) noted that persons living in districts with higher income inequality were at significantly increased risk of mortality compared with those in low- inequality districts.

Happiness

Sherman and Stone (Sherman and Stone 2010) present the general picture that the income gap between the very rich and everyone else more than tripled between 1980 and 2010. Rousseau (Rousseau 2009) found that since 1995, U.S. income gains have accrued to the richest 20 % of households and income inequality has significantly increased. The happiness gap has also widened substantially, happiness having stagnated for the rich and fallen for the poor. Happiness is "a commodity of the rich," he says (Rousseau 2009, 14).

Okulicz-Kozaryn and Mazelis (Okulicz-Kozaryn and Mazelis 2016) in their research found that the income gap and the happiness gap have been increasing over the past several decades in the U.S. The happiness gap has widened by about 40 % since the 1970s for the poor and by about 50 % between the middle class and the rich.



Schneider (Schneider 2016) contends that studies of the relationship between income inequality and subjective well-being (life satisfaction and happiness) remain inconclusive. But A. E. Clark, S. Flèche, and C. Senik (Clark, Flèche and Senik 2016) offer a conclusion from six studies that countries with income growth saw reduced numbers in both the “very unhappy” and “perfectly happy” categories of self-rating, leading to falling happiness inequality in countries experiencing income growth but not in those which did not experience such income growth. Similar to 70 years ago, two-thirds of U. S. inhabitants cannot say that they are very happy (Pinker 2018, 325). Overall, there appears to be evidence that the income gap is related to unhappiness.

Social cohesion

Joseph Stiglitz (Stiglitz 2013) fears that the social consequences of the gap lead to a divided society. He argues that the real solution to the inequality crisis lies in focusing on community rather than self-interest, otherwise we will have an even greater divide in society. Stiglitz (Stiglitz 2013, 39–40) sees much of the problem of income inequality in what is called “rent seeking,” which is acquiring income not as a reward for creating wealth but by grabbing a larger share of the wealth which is produced. It occurs in many ways: making markets less transparent and competitive; taking advantage of asymmetries of information; taking advantage of the poor and uninformed; predatory lending; abusive credit card policies; laws allowing corporations to take advantage of others; gaining access to favorable terms in regard to another country’s natural resources; non-competitive procurement; politics influencing governments to make policies that work for one’s self-interest rather than for the good of society; and eroding the power of labor unions. All of this is taking money from the rest of society and re-distributing it to the top.

IV. Practical theological perspectives

Practical theology does not offer specific economic or political programs for ameliorating the income gap, nor does this paper. However, it does provide ethically, theologically, biblically, and social scientifically derived principles, perspectives, and values which may undergird pragmatic solutions to the injustice of the income gap. Here we focus on distrib-

utive justice, agency, biblical guidance, empathy, and cultural context.

Distributive justice

Justice is the foundation of a democratic society. Commutative justice regulates exchanges between persons and between institutions and requires the restitution of stolen goods to the owner or other restitution for injustice committed (CCC 1997, 2411). Distributive justice regulates what the community owes to its citizens in proportion to their contributions and needs (CCC 1997, 2412). Distributive justice expects that since all are created in the image and likeness of God all should share in an adequate amount of the world’s goods. After one has an adequate (varied) amount for one’s own life the rest of one’s goods may need to be used for the welfare of others. As Pope Leo XIII advocated in *Rerum Novarum* (Leo XIII, 1891, 36), “Once the demands of necessity and propriety have been met, the rest that one owns belongs to the poor.”

John Rawls’ (Rawls 1999, 53) highly influential theory of distributive justice – justice as fairness – rests on two principles. The first is that “each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive scheme of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar scheme of liberties for others.” The second and perhaps more important for distributive justice is that “social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both (a) reasonably expected to be to everyone’s advantage, and (b) attached to positions and offices open to all.” Underserved inequalities, e.g. birth, endowment, social position, call for social redress – his “difference principle” (Rawls 1999, 86). This Kantian perspective is geared toward equality of opportunity, rather than equality of outcome.

Joseph Ratzinger (Benedict XVI 2009, 35) highlights the relational dimension of distributive justice, which is important for the market economy “not only because it belongs within a broader social and political context, but also because of the wider network of relations within which it operates. Markets need social cohesion, mutual trust, and internal forms of solidarity to function well, not merely equivalence in value in exchanges. The poor should not be seen as a burden but rather as a resource, not simply an economic balance and opportunity for development (Benedict XVI 2009, 35). They are disadvantaged when economic action is detached from political action. Locating resources, financing, production, con-

sumption and all the other phases in the economic cycle inevitably have moral implications and consequences (Benedict XVI 2009, 37, 39). When economic action is detached from political action, imbalance is the result. Globalization requires political logic and action as well as a social order that conforms to the moral order (Benedict XVI 2009, 67). In an interconnected world, distributive justice and some forms of redistribution must play their roles.

Agency

Agency is the manifestation or exercise of the capacity to act (Cf. Schlosser 2015). Such action is of interest to us insofar as it is intentional, caused by our mental states and events. Precluding the questions of free will and determinism, as well as of habit, automaticity, deliberateness and consciousness, we can look at agency as the capacity to act. Certainly, the scope of our agency will depend on the means we have to affect our situation or environment. It is not unreasonable to say that our conscious intentions are causal. Besides individual events, we frequently join with others toward common purposes or goals or need satisfactions. Agency also refers to the capacity of groups to have resources to achieve results and then actually achieving them. Cartels, “legal” monopolies, oligarchies, and enormous accumulations of wealth by a few people all squeeze or eliminate the agency of the many.

Contributing to the understanding of agency is social theorist Margaret Archer (Archer 2000, 2–10), a proponent of a critical realist theory of the relationship between society and people — structure and agency — which does not conflate the two. The notion of agency as distinct from structure is critical if we are to “make things happen” and avoid passivity (simply having things happen to us). The circumstances of our birth are not of our own choosing; we are assigned to positions on society’s distribution of resources, which means that we become members of collectivities which share the same life chances, “involuntarily either privileged or not privileged (Archer 2000, 11).” But we need to be primary agents, at times linked with others, to transform our circumstances and reconfigure society’s distribution of resources. We need the capacity to “write our own scripts” – agency. If all encompassing determinism or internal psychic forces are presumed to control us, agency is a thing of the past.

There is a connection between distributive justice and agency, in that some of the world’s goods

would be used to facilitate agency. If the goods of the world need to be shared, then the capacity for agency similarly should be shared among the people of the world. The gap in agency becomes severe and a violation of distributive justice when a few have disproportionate agency with regard to the rest.

David Hollenbach (Hollenbach 2002, 198) notes the connection between distributive justice and agency: “...if the institutional arrangements prevailing in society prevent some persons from sharing the social goods to the level required by their dignity as members of the human community, requirements of distributive justice are violated.” Living in a society requires interacting with others economically, culturally, and politically. One uses one’s freedom and agency to build the common good. Without social solidarity, one cannot make one’s own contribution. Being treated passively dehumanizes and results in marginalization. Hollenbach notes the many forms of the resulting marginalization: denial of the vote, limits of free speech, repression by tyrannical governments, unemployment, poor educational opportunities for all, *de facto* closing the gates to social mobility, school resources based on geography, the circumstances causing generational urban poverty and ghettoization (Hollenbach 2002, 199 ff.).

Biblical wisdom

Narratives from the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures (the Old and New Testaments) develop an ambience pointing toward equality within the people, a culture of thriving through equality and weakness through division. A literal reading of the Hebrew Scripture presents a strong theme of justice, a constant emphasis on peoplehood, and a negative view of extravagance. The biblical creation story is analyzed to propose the notion of all human beings made in and sharing the likeness and image of God (*imago Dei*). Exodus describes the Hebrews’ enslavement plight in Egypt as unjust, immoral, and calling for liberation. Of course, the Israelites are liberated from slavery and each one is fed manna and quail in the desert. The whole people do enter the Promised Land.

Walter Brueggemann (Brueggemann 2012) draws from the wisdom of the Hebrew Scriptures to develop his contrast of the dominant imagination and the prophetic imagination. Beginning from the later greedy, idolatrous, enslaving Solomon, Brueggemann (Brueggemann 2012, 42) describes the



dominant “royal” imagination and consciousness as a mindset of complacency, self-sufficiency, anxiety, restlessness and autonomy. It is involved with contractual and utilitarian arrangements, caution, manipulation, self-interest, fearfulness, a lack of truth, a “zero sum game,” and a commitment to keeping the status quo (Brueggemann 2012, 32). Prophetic imagination is centered on the surprising, uncontainable YHWH (God). It rejects self-invention, competitive productivity and self-sufficiency (Brueggemann 2012, 12).

Prophetic imagination is a new way of seeing, a new consciousness, faithful to the tradition, modeled on the prophets, calling for widespread conversion. Such a prophetic imaginative consciousness is consistent with concern to reduce the income gap between rich and poor, the few and the many, the fragmentation of the community.

The New Testament contains the promise of salvation open to all. The five thousand are fed. Jesus’ parables of Lazarus and Dives, the widow’s mite, and the Pharisee and the publican can be seen as appreciations of equality. The man who would build more barns to store his surplus grain dies too soon to enjoy it. The early Christian community shared its resources in common, giving to each according to their need (Acts 3:31–4:10, 1989, NRSV). The rich sold goods for the benefit of the community. Two who sold but did not donate the promised receipts were struck dead.

Deacons were appointed to assure that both Hebrew-speaking and Greek-speaking widows were cared for. Our biblical examples all touch on distributive justice, agency, culture, and empathy. An argument for income equality can be made.

Empathy

D. Goleman (Goleman 2011) has described three types of empathy. Cognitive empathy is being able to “stand in the shoes of another” and know what they think and feel. Emotional empathy is feeling what the other person feels. Compassionate empathy (empathic concern) is knowing and feeling what the other person knows and feels but also being moved to assist them as needed. An example is Jesus being moved with compassion and then healing a person in need. Some part of this may be “wired” into us, but the willingness to act for the good of the other is virtue, vital for human flourishing. In the current pandemic crisis, without a vaccine, the disease is controlled only by population cooperation by

using suitable distancing, masks, handwashing, heroic health professionals, and contact tracing. These are the recommendations of scientists. Without this community effort and enlightened leadership, the death rate rises – possibly into the millions. Of course, persons with fewer resources and lower income have more crowded living spaces, greater vulnerability from higher rates of diabetes and high blood pressure, economic pressure to work in more dangerous environments (e.g. meat packing plants), and a greater vulnerability to contracting COVID-19. The income gap fosters this in that most deaths are among patients in minimum standard nursing homes, African Americans and Latinx persons, as well as health care personnel. If persons apparently less likely to contract the virus do not assist in anti-spread behavior, then in fact those at the top of the gap will be safer and those at the bottom will be in even greater danger. Empathy is a critical motivation. “I want my freedom to do as I please” does not live well alongside empathy.

Cultural context

This paper is not about devising political and economic strategies for narrowing the income equality gap. But those who do construct them must not ignore the “cultural context.” The presence or absence of distributive justice (social justice), the right of groups and individuals to their own agency, religious insight, and the development of empathy (often through exposure) are significant threads in the fabric of the cultural context. The recently oft used maxim, “Culture eats strategy for breakfast,” should be kept in view. Perspectives like neo-liberal economics and thought, “rugged individualism,” “mind your own business,” “you are poor because you are lazy,” and “religion belongs in church” have strong, but certainly not universal, cultural influence.

Practical theology connects specific situations with aspects of the theological tradition. Distributive justice and agency relate to theological ethics. The Bible is the Judeo-Christian community’s book and guide in theory and practice. The cultural context is an integral dimension of practical theology’s connection making. Compassionate empathy combines with a sense of justice to guide the practice of ethical life. All of these provide dimensions of a foundation for the political and economic strategies others will develop to shape a lessening of the income gap. Individuals flourish and society flourishes when the gap narrows. This does not preclude



some people being rich, not does it eradicate all poverty. It puts many more of us together, with all of the benefits of social cohesion, health care, longevity, educational access, and perhaps a better modicum of happiness.

V. Conclusions

This paper is not about promoting a utopia but rather the survival of cohesive society. There have, indeed, been improvements in the standard of living for some people, but the ethical stance which is distributive justice seems minimally operative. The income gap widens. When it comes to the things that matter, “agency” is quite limited for most of those with whom we share this planet. When people do not have effective control of their own lives, they are, in essence, driven out of their own “land.” When a few invade and settle in the space of others, this is colonialism. If I occupy your land, even to try to improve your life (or your chance for salvation through my religion), then I have power and claim prescience and am in fact a colonizer.. If you are effectively removed from the economic influence, political power, and the shaping of culture, you have been removed from the territory you have the right to inhabit. The same fortunes that philanthropically help to promote improvement in certain basics exercise a quiet but wide-ranging control. In the whole “stealth colonialism” case, those at the top end of the income and resources spectrum control the life circumstances and agency of many more than just the bottom half. They have pushed out or dominated the rest economically, politically, and culturally, even if they could claim to have the best of intentions. All this has the quality of “stealth” because the disconnections to distributive justice, agency, and human flourishing are barely visible and are often hidden behind simple poverty-based analyses.

References

- Atkinson, A. 2015. *Inequality: What can be Done?* Cambridge, MA: Harvard.
- Archer, M. 2000. *Being Human: the Problem of Agency*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Bourguignon, François, Francisco H. G. Ferreira, and Marta Menendez. November 2003. “Inequality of Outcomes and Inequality of Opportunities in Brazil.” *William Davidson Institute Working Paper* No. 630; *World Bank Working Paper* No. 3174. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=497242>.
- Brueggemann, W. 2012. *The Practice of Prophetic Imagination*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC). 1997. 2nd ed. Libreria Editrice Vaticana.
- Clark, A.E., S. Flèche, and C. Senik. 2016. “Economic Growth Evens Out Happiness: Evidence from six surveys.” *Review of Income and Wealth* 62 (3): 405–419. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5015123/>.
- Corak, Miles. 2013. “Income Inequality, Equality of Opportunity, and Intergenerational Mobility.” *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 27 (3): 79–102. DOI: 10.1257/jep.27.3.79
- Durlauf, S.N. 1992. “A Theory of Persistent Income Inequality.” *Journal of Economic Growth* 1 (1): 75–93. <https://www.nber.org/papers/w4056.pdf>.
- Fosu, A.K. 2017. “Growth, Inequality, and Poverty Reduction in Developing Countries: Recent Global Evidence.” *Research in Economics* 71 (2): 306–336. <https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/54015/1/644542136.pdf>.
- Giridharadas, A. 2018. *Winners Take All: The Elite Charade of Changing the World*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Goleman, D. 2011. “Emotional mastery.” *Leadership Excellence* 28 (6): 12–13.
- Hollenbach, D. 2002. *The Common Good and Christian Ethics*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Karachi, I., B.P. Kennedy, K. Lochner, and D. Prothrow-Stith. 1997. “Social Capital, Income Inequality, and Mortality.” *Am J Public Health* 87: 1491–1498. <https://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/pdfplus/10.2105/AJPH.87.9.1491>.
- Keeley, B. 2015. *Income Inequality: The Gap between Rich and Poor*. Paris: OECD Insights, OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264246010-en>.
- Leo XIII. 1891. *Rerum Novarum* (On Capital and Labor). <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/leo13/113rerum.htm>
- Lieber, R. 2019. “One More College Edge.” *New York Times*. March 16, 2019. B1.
- Lynch, J.W., G.D. Smith, G. A Kaplan, and J.S. House. 2000. “Income Inequality and Mortality: Importance to Health of Individual Income, Psychosocial Environment, Or Material Conditions.” *BMJ* 320 (7243): 1200–1204. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1127589/>.
- Mazumder, B. 2015. “Inequality in skills and the Great Gatsby Curve.” *Chicago Fed Letter* (330). <https://www.questia.com/library/journal/1P3-3558260601/inequality-in-skills-and-the-great-gatsby-curve>.
- Moyn.S. 2018. *Not Enough: Human Rights in an Unequal World*. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Okulicz-Kozaryn, A. and J.M. Mazelis. 2016. “More Unequal in Income, More Unequal in Wellbeing.” *Social Indicators Research* 132 (3): 953–975. doi: 10.7282/T3ST7RXC.
- Pabayo, R., A.D. Chiavegatto Filho, M.L. Lebrão, and I. Kawachi. 2013. “Income Inequality and Mortality: Re-



- sults from a Longitudinal Study of Older Residents of São Paulo, Brazil.” *American Journal of Public Health* 103 (9): e43-e49. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3780697/>.
- Piketty, T. 2014. *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*. Translated by Arthur Goldhammer. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Piketty, T. 2015. *The Economics of Inequality*. Translated by Arthur Goldhammer. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Pinker, S. 2018. *Enlightenment Now*. New York: Penguin.
- Rawls, J. 1999. *A Theory of Justice*. Rev. ed. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Ratzinger, Joseph (Benedict XVI). 2009. *Caritas in veritate*. Libreria Editrice Vaticana. http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html.
- Reardon, S. F. 2013. “The Widening Income Achievement Gap.” *Educational Leadership* 70 (8): 10–16.
- Rosling, H. 2018. *Factfulness*. New York: Flatiron.
- Rousseau, J. B. G. 2009. “Happiness and Income Inequality.” *CIRANO Public Policy Group Working Paper* <http://www-personal.umich.edu/~jbgrou/jobmarket/Happiness%20and%20Income%20Inequality.pdf>.
- Stiglitz, J. E. 2013. *The Price of Inequality: How Today’s Divided Society Endangers Our Future*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Schlosser, M. 2015. “Agency.” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Stanford University, Center for the Study of Language and Information (CSLI). <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/agency/>.
- Schneider, S. M. 2016. “Income Inequality and Subjective Wellbeing: Trends, Challenges, and Research Directions.” *Journal of Happiness Studies* 17 (4): 1719–1739. doi: 10.1007/s10902-015-9655-3.
- Sherman, A. and C. Stone. 2010. “Income Gaps between the Very Rich and Everyone Else More Than Tripled in Last Three Decades, New Decades Show.” *Center on Budget and Policy Priorities*, 25. http://www.scottgoold.org/docs/cbbp_income_gains.pdf.
- Tavernise, S. 2012. “Education Gap Grows between Rich and Poor, Studies Say.” *The New York Times*. February 12, 2012.
- Wilkinson, R. and K. Pickett. 2010. *The Spirit Level: Why Greater Equality Makes Societies Stronger*. Forward R. Reich. New York: Bloomsbury Press.

Douglas Davies' Transcultural Model of Grief

Auli Vähäkangas

Grief research on continuing emotional bonds between the deceased and the bereaved has mainly used concepts and theories developed in the Western world with a few exceptions from the Majority world as well. The concept of dividuality or multiple personhood of a bereaved person is used in various Asian societies. The aim of this chapter is to analyse what Davies means with his model and to evaluate the transcultural nature of it. The results of this chapter show that Davies stresses embodied rituals because the starting point of dividual personhood is the inner complexity of a person. Davies challenges a Western word-centred individual to reconstruct identity and find new meaning in life after bereavement. Dividual grief is a good beginning when searching for transcultural models of grief. It is, however, not based on first-hand empirical research on a specific culture, which makes the transcultural aspects in it very descriptive. I am waiting for practical theological colleagues from the Majority world to start formulating models of grief based on their own cultural backgrounds. Models that are strongly grounded in a specific culture are really needed in order to understand such a central theological topic.

Introduction

Grief research has focused on continuing emotional bonds between the deceased and the bereaved for the past twenty years (Klass, Silverman and Nickman 1996; Valentine 2008; Klass 2006). This research has mainly used concepts and theories developed in the Western world with a few exceptions from the Majority world as well (Steffen and Klass 2018; Evans et al, 2017). Another example of searching for transcultural aspects of grief is the new dividual grief model of Douglas Davies. The concept of dividuality or multiple personhood of a bereaved person is used in various Asian societies (Marriott 1976; Strathern 1988). The aim of this chapter is to analyse what Davies means with his model and to evaluate the transcultural nature of it. I use the concept transcultural and not the more widely used transnational, since the focus is on cultural elements connected with grief and not on physical border crossings as such (Purnell 2012). I will not link this paper into the discussion on decoloniality, which to-

Auli Vahakangas is professor in pastoral theology at the Faculty of Theology at the University of Helsinki, Finland. She co-led the South-African-Nordic research project *Youth at the Margins. A comparative study of the contribution of faith-based organisations to social cohesion in South Africa and Nordic Europe (YOMA)* (2013–2017). At the moment she is leading a Finnish multidisciplinary project *Meaningful relations: Patient and family carers encountering death at home* (2017–2021).

gether with the discussion of transculturality, would be too extensive to cover in a single chapter.

Professor of religious studies Douglas Davies from Durham University in the UK has studied various aspects of death and dying (see for example Davies 2004; 2008; 2015b) but only a few have studied his writings. Barry Fry only touches on grief in his study on Davies' "words against death" theory (Fry 2015). Terence Turner studies Davies' analyses on grief but this is before his formulation of the dividual model (Turner 2005). Davies received a commem-





orative volume for his long career; two of the articles in it deal with rituals of death. Anders Bäckström compares the Swedish and British funeral rituals and Valerie DeMarinis describes rituals connected with abortion (Bäckström 2017; DeMarinis 2017); neither of them examines grief. I found that there is a significant gap in knowledge and thus wanted to focus on those publications of Davies' that deal with grief and especially, dividual grief.

Data and Method

Two books and one article of Douglas Davies' that deal with grief form the data of this chapter. The first and most important source is the 3rd edition of *Death, Ritual and Belief* in which the dividual model is explicitly introduced in chapter three (Davies 2017, 75–78.) The previous editions from 1997 and 2002 dealt correspondingly with grief but in them Davies had not yet introduced the model. The other book that is central for the topic is *Emotion, Identity and Religion* in which Davies discusses grief in detail in chapter four (Davies 2011, 95–120). The third source is an article entitled “Emotions, Grief, and Reality-Unreality in Human Mortality,” which seems to work as a background for dividuality (Davies 2015a). In these two earlier sources, Davies does not yet use the notion of dividual but already connects grief to communities, reciprocity, and to the discussion on continuing bonds. In order to understand Davies' model fully, the other parts of these written sources are important, not just those parts in which he explicitly deals with grief. In addition to the written material, I have discussed the model with Douglas Davies.¹ These discussions were not documented research interviews; therefore, I will not have direct reference to them.

I analysed the data using systematic concept analysis and focused on the main concepts and how Davies uses them (Nuopponen 2011). I gave special attention to the cultural background of the notion of dividuality which is also the starting point of this chapter. Subsequently, I discuss rituals of memory and meaning making after bereavement. The chapter is wrapped up by an evaluation of the transcultural elements of the model.

Dividual identity and relationships with the bereaved

The starting point of dividuality is an approach to personhood that is radically social. Davies found the notion of dividuality through reading the work of McKim Marriott in India where he found that a person was not defined as an individual but as a dividual person (Marriott 1976; Davies 2017, 75). In addition to Marriott, Davies refers to Marilyn Strathern and her studies in Melanesia. Probably the most quoted definition of a Melanesian person can be found in Strathern's work: “Far from being regarded as unique entities, Melanesian persons are as dividually as they are individually conceived. They contain a generalized sociality within. Indeed, persons are frequently constructed as the plural and composite site of the relationships that produce them” (Strathern 1988, 12). Strathern's definition notes that a dividual person is at the same time also an individual, which is not much discussed by Davies. Strathern additionally stresses that multiple personhood symbolizes collective life as a unity (Strathern 1988, 13). This collective approach is essential in order to understand dividuality.

In addition to relationships, Davies defines dividuality from an intrapersonal perspective in which the complexity of the inner identities of a person are central (Davies 2017, 75–76). This aspect of complex inner identities of a dividual person Davies explains further with the following quotation in which he refers to both Marriott and Christine Valentine: “Marriott argued that ... understanding many aspects of social life in India would be enhanced by approaching the notion of a person not as individual but as ‘dividual’. In this context, echoing Valentine above, ‘individual’ described a person as self-contained and, despite networks with other individuals, remaining firmly bounded and almost insular” (Davies 2017, 75; see also Valentine 2008, 4–5, 83, 104). Davies further clarifies the complex inner identities of a person with a reference to Durkheim's notion of *Homo duplex*. Davies writes, “... society is so represented with an individual as to lead to a more expansive sense of embodiment” (Davies 2017, 76; see also Durkheim 1915). Relations are thus important to the dividual person but dividuality is more than just what a person's relations are since the inner processes of a person are an important part of the model.

1 I was a COFUND fellow at the Durham Centre for Life and Death Studies for Easter term 2018.

Davies continues to discuss the difference between an individual and a dividual person: "... the dividual person is a more dynamic and interactive entity than the individual. ... our interplay with the worlds around us matters a great deal in making us who we are and making it what it is" (Davies 2017, 76). In addition to the interplay with a person and their surroundings, dividuality seem to point to the continuing bond between the bereaved and the deceased person (Davies 2017, 75–76).

In other parts of *Death, Ritual and Belief*, Davies gives the impression that there is also a communal dimension of grief in the definition of dividuality (Davies 2017, 22, 51). In other words, he not only focuses on the emotional bond between the bereaved and the deceased persons but also on the role of other members of the grieving community. Davies does not, however, explicitly refer to communal aspects of grief while defining dividuality. This communal aspect of grief is important in individualized Western contexts.

According to Davies, grief involves emotions connected with death in which there is both a personal and social dimension. When stressing the social and religious identity of a dividual person, Davies refers frequently to Emile Durkheim (Davies 2017, 64; Durkheim 1915). Additional central theoretical backgrounds are the psychological theories of attachment of Sigmund Freud and John Bowlby (Freud 1984; Bowlby 1969; 1973; 1980). Davies makes a clear division from Freud and his use of grief work and seems to put more stress on communal support of grief than on individually focused grief work. Davies links communal support with funeral and memorial rituals (Davies 2017, 56–57). Davies is much more positive towards Bowlby's attachment theories and seems to build dividuality partly on that.

Davies criticizes the Western postmodern emphasis on individualism, and, from that point of view, his choice to search for terminology from non-Western communal cultures makes more sense. According to Davies, grief has become increasingly individualised especially in Western societies (Davies 2017, 75). Davies is the first to utilize the dividual concept in grief research, but, as discussed previously, he did not invent the notion, as it has been utilized in other research previously.

Post Mortem Bonds in Rituals of Memory

Rituals are valuable as part of grief support, Davies proposes (Davies 2017, 75). He further explains that the rituals of memory influence a person holistically and acknowledge the body (Davies 2017, 198–199; Davies 2011, 1, 52, 247–249). This makes rituals especially important in bereavement. Narrative memory is hence an important part of Douglas Davies' dividual model. He explains this aspect further when referring to studies on biography in bereavement (Walter 1996; Walter 1999). Davies perceives autobiography as an important tool for memory through which the bereaved can reconstruct a bereavement narrative of the lost loved one. In many non-Western societies, memory and oral narratives are a natural form of grief therapy, which is revealed by recent research as well (Nwoye and Chinwe 2012; Nwoye 2005).

Davies argues that embodiment is central in grief in which the bereaved reconstructs holistically their own life history and relationship to the deceased (Davies 2017, 74; Davies 2011, 103). Davies explains this reconstruction of identity with a reference to Christine Valentine's *Bereavement Narratives*. Davies writes, "She describes how some interviews seemed to create 'space for the deceased person', so much so that she gained 'a feeling of his or her presence between us'" (Davies 2017, 74 refers to Valentine 2008, 172). At the beginning of her book Valentine further explains her approach to grief: "Instead it recognises how people's relationships with their loved ones may survive the life-death boundary, the focus being placed on how bereaved people make sense of, and manage, the changed nature of their relationship with deceased loved ones. Bereavement is thus conceptualised as an ongoing process of negotiation and meaning-making" (Valentine 2008, 3–4). With these examples, Davies connects dividual grief to the traditions of continuing bonds and rituals of memory.

Davies proposes that funeral and other memorial rituals help to work through emotions; in his words, "Funeral ritual and events following death help channel these emotional changes of relationship to the otherness of others and reveal the value of reciprocity for understanding emotion and memory" (Davies 2011, 103). According to Davies, among those religious traditions that motivate beliefs on afterlife, hope of eternal life is also included among these emotions (Davies 2011, 103; Bäckström 2017). In the previous references to the two sources of this



chapter, Davies explicitly discusses religious identity, life after death, and the connection between rituals and the transcendent. In other parts of these books, he connects them more implicitly with dividual grief.

Davies discusses the rituals of memory on a theoretical level and does not refer to empirical studies on rituals of grief even though such studies are available. Here I would mention two studies on personalization of funeral rituals that fit well into dividuality (Ramshaw 2010; Schäfer 2007). These studies deal with the questions of memory through ritual and investigate in what way personalization can increase the relational process of bereavement. Additionally, they suggest that personalized rituals, which include aspects of memory and biography, make it even more meaningful to the participants. These are all things that the dividual model also stresses.

Davies discusses reconstruction of identity through rituals of memory, but he does not consider whether transformation of the bond is part of the dividual grief model (Davies 2017, 74). Recent grief research has purported that the question is not solely one of reconstruction but rather of transformation of the bond through various rituals. For example, Brenda Mathijssen found in her study among bereaved people in the Netherlands that not all bereaved people wanted to continue the bond with the deceased. According to Mathijssen, continuing the bond is not the goal for all bereaved, but instead, many see a need to transform the relationship with the deceased and to find new relationships in their lives as well. This transformation of a relationship was possible through everyday rituals of clearing the home of some of the objects of the deceased and changing the place of photos (Mathijssen 2018, 2–4, 5–8).

According to the dividual model of grief, the bereaved receives support through rituals of memory. Davies seems to see the bond between the deceased and the bereaved as continuous and accordingly does not indicate a need to transform this bond. In order to gain a full picture of the model, the following section studies Davies' understanding of meaning making after bereavement.

Meaning making after bereavement

Meaning making after bereavement is central to Davies' dividuality even though he does not deal with

it in the short chapter in which he defines the model. In his other book, *Emotion, Identity and Religion*, he ultimately links grief and meaning making together (Davies 2011, 84, 96, 99). Additionally, the subheadings of both books include existential questions with words of faith and hope. According to Davies, the attachment bond to the bereaved had been so meaningful that there is a need to relate this loss to meaning in life (Davies 2017, 57). These questions are also central for practical theology (Louw 2014; Lester 1995).

Davies refers to Durkheim's notion of *anomie*, which, according to him, explains the emotions of the bereaved. In the words of Davies, "... grief involves a kind of anomie, as a person experiences a decrease in vitality and a corresponding depletion in identity" (Davies 2011, 98). According to Davies, it is important that the bereaved does not remain in a feeling of powerlessness but through the rituals of memory and through the support of a community can find new meaning in life. Davies purports that grief is not a sickness but is a normal part of life (Davies 2017, 65–67). This approach seems to imply that the positive emotions are strongly represented in the dividual model in comparison, for example, to the attachment theory of John Bowlby which otherwise seems to be central to Davies. Bowlby's second volume is titled *Separation, Anxiety and Anger* (Bowlby 1973) and the third volume is *Sadness and Depression* (Bowlby 1980). Davies deals correspondingly with negative emotions in his writings; for example, while he discussed hope, he also considers hopelessness (Davies 2017, 89; Davies 2011, 200–203). Guilt is another emotion that can be grouped under negative emotions (Davies 2017, 55, 215). Davies' model of grief deals with grief that is a normal part of everyday life, not with traumatized grief which needs treatment.

Regarding more positive emotions, Davies suggests that the bereaved has to hold on to a sense of reality even during grief and mourning (Davies 2015a, 14). In order to explain what the sense of reality means, Davies quotes Clive Seale's argument that "takes grief to be but an extreme version of an everyday experience of 'grief' which is routinely worked upon in order to turn the psyche away from awareness of Mortality and continuation in life" (Seale 1998, 211 *apud* Davies 2015a, 14). This discussion comes very close to the "words against death" theory which Davies described in the second edition of *Death, Ritual and Belief*. The basic idea there is that rituals work as words against death, meaning

that through rituals a person does not focus excessively on the reality of death but also notes that life goes on even though bereavement has happened. Davies shares the notion of the importance of keeping a sense of reality and continuing with life routines in both of the source books of this paper (Davies 2011, 105–107; Davies 2017, 50–51). In Davies' model the dividual person thus reconstructs his/her identity after the bereavement, and this helps not to remain in the sorrow of grief for too long but instead to focus on the future as well. A similar trend is seen in parts of Africa, where the focus is on the spiritual nature of healing in grieving and in the resources the community offers to bereaved persons (Nwoye 2005).

Missing transcultural elements

Davies gives quite an optimistic picture of a dividual person. Other researchers of dividuality have been more critical in their analysis and have pointed out how partly contradicting identities of dividual and individual personhood influence the decisions and behaviour of a person (Hess 2006; Smith 2016). Furthermore, Davies seems to romanticize dividuality and does not consider the negative aspects of relational personhood. Relational personhood is also quite vulnerable to exploitation and abuse (Brown 2006, 178). Dividual and partible personhood are closely related notions of the fractal person (Smith 2016, 671). Overall, dividuality in these studies which were based on empirical data from those contexts where the notion of dividuality is widely used, also involves negative emotions and fear, contradictory to Davies' use of the notion. Similar critical findings on relationality in the African context can be found from practical theologian Ester Acolatse. Acolatse formulates a new African relationality, which is partly based on traditional communality but acknowledges needs of our contemporary situation. She is especially critical towards gender inequality in traditional African societies (Acolatse 2009; 2010). There are also those African scholars, who are in line with Davies and promote the harmony of traditional societies without criticism (Chisale 2018). In my observation, Acolatse's critical view, especially towards gender inequality, could also be applied to the notion of dividuality.

An important transcultural aspect of the continuing bond: a discussion on ancestors, is missing from Davies' model. When defining dividual grief,

Davies does not refer to ancestors even though in other parts of the *Death, Ritual and Belief* book he discusses ancestral beliefs in various cultures (Davies 2017, 33, 103, 109–136, 143). Other researchers stress that the role of ancestors is strong in dividuality and the bereaved have a responsibility to conduct burial rituals; otherwise, the deceased will not end up among the living dead but stay in between to bother those on earth. The examples concerning burial rituals of dividual persons also involve fear and negative feelings, not just the positive side of communal support (Hess 2006, 289–290, 293–294). Anglican bishop of Malaita, Terry Brown stresses that relationships with ancestors, not just relationships with those still living on earth are very important (Brown 2006, 174–175). Further, Brown connects the discussion of dividual personhood into theological discussions on Greek word *koinonia*, many times translated as fellowship or community. According to him, dividual personhood including ancestral beliefs, both positively and negatively affects how one understands and lives *koinonia* (Brown 2006, 178–179). Brown, thus, also raises a critical voice towards traditional notions of communality.

Davies' use of the dividual notion disjointedly from its cultural context brings some difficulties to the model as was discussed above. This is one of the challenges when using elements from another culture without studying the context accurately.

The contribution of dividuality to grief research

Davies constructs his model on the identity feature of attachment theories and additionally on some elements in the continuing bonds and narrative theories of grief, as has been previously discussed. Combining these various perspectives is essential in grief research even though Davies does not yet give a clear picture of how dividuality unites these perspectives in practice and what it means to the life situation of a grieving individual. Moreover, Davies is not the first to unite these perspectives when studying grief. For example, Cyril Schäfer came to the conclusion, in his study on New Zealand funeral directors' understanding of grief, that continuing bonds and narratives of memory are essential parts of personalized funerals (Schäfer 2007, 17). This was ten years before he wrote about dividual grief, which shows that it is not all that unique as a conceptuali-



sation. What is supplementary in Davies' model is the strong link to attachment and discussions of how this affects the reconstruction of the inner complexity of dividual personhood. Similar insights on multiple personhood and its effects to pastoral counselling is seen in Pamela Cooper-White's relational theology (Cooper-White 2004; 2011).

It is essential that Davies includes meaning reconstruction in his model. It is an important opening towards studying meaning making in bereavement even though he does not yet operationalize specific study designs nor does he reflect on the implications for clinical practice. James Gillies and Robert Neimeyer (Gillies and Neimeyer 2006, 44–49, 53–56) designed an integrated model of meaning reconstruction pathways based on large sample of previous studies and identified three activities of meaning reconstruction in the grieving process: sense making, benefit finding, and identity change. Davies' dividual model contributes to at least two of these, specifically, to sense making through rituals of memory and identity change, which in dividuality is essential.

The existential discussion connected to dividuality could have been more transparent. In particular, when the primary concept of dividuality is transcultural, the existential discussion could also include transcultural issues of grief as Valentine, for example, does in her study (Valentine 2008, 4). Another topic connected with the existential discussion that simultaneously raises interest and some misgiving, is the practice of speaking against death. Tara Bailey and Tony Walter have gone even further in their analyses of funerals as rituals against death and they write: "Whereas Davies analyses the power of professionally delivered ritual words against death, our data reveals how admired is the courage exercised by non-professionals in speaking against death...We thus argue that funerals symbolically conquer death not only through words delivered by ritual specialists, but also through those who knew the deceased congregating and speaking (Bailey and Walter 2016, 149). They thus follow the same line as Davies that it is important to speak against death, but they focus on those who knew the deceased well. Terence Turner does not, however, agree with Davies on the "words against death" theory. Turner criticizes Davies for being primarily informed by Christian religious concerns (Turner 2005, 252–253). I agree with Turner that Davies seem to identify with Christian religious concerns which he should more openly express and justify in his writings.

Davies' holistic approach to complex issues has been admired in previous research. Valerie DeMarinis writes, "He manages to create a perspective for understanding complex phenomena whereby the interactions among individual components as well as between these components and the larger structure can be understood" (DeMarinis 2017, 107). DeMarinis continues, "Davies has incorporated a sophisticated understanding of both the complexity of and the necessity for understanding the dynamic and life-long interactions among experience, emotion and embodiment in terms of how meaning is made, especially existential meaning (DeMarinis 2017, 108). Davies had not created his model of dividual grief when DeMarinis wrote her text but I approve of her point that Davies' perspective for understanding complex phenomena is also valuable when studying the complexity of grief as long as models are properly defined.

When I evaluate the dividual model, its weakest point is in its definition. Both books that are sources for this paper are widely used as course books. For this usage they fit well; they offer a wide perspective on the study of death and the role of emotions. But they do not go very deep into any specific topic; in this case the dividual model is merely mentioned, not deeply formulated. In spite of this lack of proper definition, I see the dividual grief model as a good first attempt to search for transcultural approaches to grief.

Concluding remarks

Douglas Davies' model on dividual grief would be challenging to understand only through *Death, Ritual and Belief*, even though it is the only source in which he explicitly defines and discusses the model. Emotions and identity are essential in order to understand the discussion on dividuality and it was thus also necessary to focus on the other sources. Davies is presently only in the process of formulating the model and this makes it even more essential to look at his previous writings on grief that influence his understanding of the importance of rituals of memory in the reconstruction of dividual personhood after bereavement.

The results of this chapter show that Davies stresses embodied rituals because the starting point of dividual personhood is in the inner complexity of a person. Mourning gives a person an opportunity to reconstruct an identity through narrated rituals.

A bereaved person needs the support of the community in this reconstruction. Davies challenges a Western word-centred individual to reconstruct identity and find new meaning in life after bereavement. The themes Davies raises: bereavement, grief, beliefs on afterlife, meaning of life and rituals of memory are all central theological themes. As a religious studies scholar Davies does not use theological analyses or Biblical argumentation to justify his model. However, Davies' model is very useful for practical theology as well.

Dividual grief is a useful beginning when searching for transcultural models of grief. It is, however, not based on first-hand empirical research on a specific culture, which makes the transcultural aspects in it very descriptive. I am waiting for practical theological colleagues from the Majority world to start formulating models of grief based on their own cultural backgrounds. Models that are strongly grounded in a specific culture are really needed in order to understand such a central theological topic.

References

- Acolatse, Esther. 2010. "Unraveling the Relational Myth in the Turn Toward Autonomy." In *Women Out of Order: Risking Change and Creating Care in a Multicultural World*, edited by J. Stevenson-Moessner and T. Snorton, 218–229. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Acolatse, Esther. 2009. "Embracing and Resisting Death: A Theology of Justice and Hope for Care at the End of Life." In *Living Well and Dying Faithfully, Christian practices for End-of-Life Care*, edited by J. Swinton and R. Payne, 246–271. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans.
- Bäckström, Anders. 2017. "Religion and ritual markers between public and the private: funerary rites in Sweden." In *Death, Life and Laughter: Essays on Religion in Honour of Douglas Davies*, edited by Guest, Mathew and Martha Middlemiss Lé Mon, 87–104. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Bailey, Tara and Tony Walter. 2016. "Funerals against death." *Mortality* 21 (2): 149–166. doi: 10.1080/13576275.2015.1071344.
- Bowlby, John. 1969. *Attachment*. Attachment and Loss, no. 1. New York: Basic Books.
- Bowlby, John. 1973. *Separation, Anxiety and Anger*. Attachment and Loss, no. 2. New York: Basic Books.
- Bowlby, John. 1980. *Sadness and Depression*. Attachment and Loss, no. 3. New York: Basic Books.
- Brown, Terry. 2006. "Personhood as a Tool to Reflect upon Koinonia." *Anglican Theological Review* 88 (2): 163–179.
- Chisale, Sinenhlanhla S. 2018. "Ubuntu as care: Deconstructing the gendered Ubuntu." *Verbum et Ecclesia* 39 (1): 1–8. doi: 10.4102/ve.v39i1.1790.
- Cooper-White, Pamela. 2004. *Shared Wisdom; Use of the Self in Pastoral Care and Counselling*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress press.
- Cooper-White, Pamela. 2011. *Braided Selves: Collected Essays on Multiplicity, God, and Persons*. Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Press.
- Davies, Douglas J. 2004. *A Brief History of Death*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Davies, Douglas J. 2008. *The Theology of Death*. London: T&T Clark.
- Davies, Douglas J. 2011. *Emotion, Identity and Religion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Davies, Douglas J. 2015a. "Emotions, Grief, and Reality-Unreality in Human Mortality." In *Death and Mortality: From Individual to Communal Perspectives*, edited by Outi Hakola, Sara Heinämaa, and Sami Pihlström, 10–31. Collegium Studies across disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, no. 19. Helsinki: Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies.
- Davies, Douglas J. 2015b. *Mors Britannica, Lifestyle and Death-Style in Britain Today*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Davies, Douglas J. 2017. *Death, Ritual and Belief. The Rhetoric of Funerary Rites*. 3rd edition. London: Bloomsbury.
- DeMarinis, Valerie. 2017. "Facing existential meaning challenges through post-secular clinical model: Swedish case illustrations following abortion." In *Death, Life and Laughter: Essays on Religion in Honour of Douglas Davies*, edited by Guest, Mathew & Martha Middlemiss Lé Mon, 105–118. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Durkheim, Emile. 1915. *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. London: George Allen & Unwin.
- Evans, Ruth, Jane Ribbens McCarthy, Fatou Kébé, Sophie Bowlby and Joséphine Wouango. 2017. "Interpreting 'grief' in Senegal: language, emotions and cross-cultural translation in a francophone African context." *Mortality* 22 (2): 118–135. doi: 10.1080/13576275.2017.1291602.
- Freud, Sigmund. 1984. "Mourning and melancholia." In *On Metapsychology*, no. 11, 245–269. London: Reud Pelican Library: Penguin Books Ltd.
- Fry, Barry. 2015. "An examination of the concept of a theology of laughter, and the use of laughter and humour as 'Words against Death' as defined by Douglas Davies in death, ritual and belief (1997)." PhD dissertation, University of Winchester.
- Gillies, J. and R. Neymeyer. 2006. "Loss, Grief, and the Search for Significance: Toward a Model of Meaning Reconstruction in Bereavement." *Journal of Constructivist Psychology* 19 (1): 31–65.
- Guest, Mathew and Martha Middlemiss Lé Mon (ed.). 2017. *Death, Life and Laughter: Essays on Religion in Honour of Douglas Davies*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Hallam, Elizabeth, Jenny Hockey, and Glennys Howarth. 1999. *Beyond the Body: Death and Social Identity*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Hess, Sabine. 2006. "'Strathern's Melanesian 'Dividual' and the Christian 'Individual'. A perspective from Vanua Lava, Vanuatu." *Oceania* 76 (3): 285–296.



- Hockey, Jenny, Leonie Kellaher and David Prendergast. 2007. "Of Grief and Well-being: Competing Conceptions of Restorative Ritualization." *Anthropology & Medicine* 14 (1): 1–14.
- Kellaher, Leonie, David Prendergast, and Jenny Hockey. 2005. "In the shadow of the traditional grave." *Mortality* 10 (4): 237–250.
- Klaassen, Derrick, Richard Young, and Susan James. 2015. "Relational and Spiritual Dimensions of Parental Grieving." *Canadian Journal of Counselling and Psychotherapy* 49 (1): 79–95.
- Klass, Dennis, Phyllis Silverman, and Steven Nickman (ed.). 1996. *Continuing Bonds: New Understandings of Grief*. London: Taylor and Francis.
- Klass, Dennis. 1993. "Solace and immortality: bereaved parents continuing bond with their children." *Death Studies* 17 (4): 343–368.
- Klass, Dennis. 2006. "Continuing conversations about continuing bonds." *Death Studies* 30 (9): 843–858.
- Lester, Andrew D. 1995. *Hope in pastoral care and counseling*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.
- Louw, Daniel J. 2014. "Cura animarum as hope care: Towards a theology of the resurrection within the human quest for meaning and hope." *HTS Theological Studies* 70 (1): 1–10.
- Marriott, McKim. 1976. "Hindu transactions: diversity without Dualism." In *Transaction and Meaning. Directions in the Anthropology of Exchange and Symbolic Behaviour*, edited by Bruce Kapferer, 109–142. Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues.
- Mathijssen, Brenda. 2018. "Transforming bonds: ritualizing post-mortem relationships in the Netherlands." *Mortality* 23 (3): 215–230.
- Nuopponen, Anita. 2011. "Methods of concept analysis—tools for systematic concept analysis." *LSP Journal* 2 (1): 4–15.
- Nwoye, Augustine and Miriam Chinwe Nwoye. 2012. "Memory and Narrative Healing Processes in Grief Work in Africa: Reflections on Promotion of Re-Anchoring." *Journal of Family Psychotherapy* 23: 138–158.
- Nwoye, Augustine. 2005. "Memory Healing Processes and Community Intervention in Grief Work in Africa." *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy* 26 (3): 147–154.
- Purnell, Larry D. 2012. *Transcultural Health Care: A Culturally Competent Approach*. Philadelphia: F. A. Davies Company.
- Ramshaw, Elaine. 2010. "The personalization of postmodern post-mortem rituals." *Pastoral Psychology* 59 (2): 171–178.
- Schäfer, Cyril. 2007. "Post-mortem personalization: pastoral power and the New Zealand funeral director." *Mortality* 12 (1): 4–21.
- Smith, Benjamin R. 2016. "Sorcery and dividual in Australia." *Journal of Royal Anthropological Institute* 22 (3): 670–687.
- Steffen, Edith Maria, and Dennis Klass. 2018. "Culture, contexts and connections: a conversation with Dennis Klass about his life and work as a bereavement scholar." *Mortality* 23 (3): 203–214. doi: 10.1080/13576275.2018.1469481.
- Strathern, Marilyn. 1988. *The Gender of the Gift*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Turner, Terence. 2005. "Death, Passion and Politics: The Power of Grief and the Charisma of Loss. Reviews." *Anthropology* 34 (3): 245–256.
- Valentine, Christine. 2008. *Bereavement Narratives. Continuing Bonds in the Twenty-First Century*. London: Routledge.
- Walter, Tony. 1996. "A new model of grief: bereavement and biography." *Mortality* 1 (1): 7–26.
- Walter, Tony. 1999. *On Bereavement: The Culture of Grief*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Unlearning Religion: The “GDR Children from Namibia” between Postcolonialism and Decoloniality

Alexander Schulze

When South West Africa was placed on the UN General Assembly’s agenda as being the first region to gain independence from colonial rule, no one could foresee that Namibia would be one of the last territories to gain independence. While the political decolonization of most of the former colonies was essentially completed in the mid-1970s, on May 4th, 1978 the South West African People’s Organization (SWAPO) suffered its biggest military setback. As a result of the attack on the Cassinga refugee camp, in Angola close to the Namibian border, between 1979 and 1989 a total of 423 children were brought to the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Experiencing their childhood and youth in the safe socialist state, they were educated according to the ideals of the SWAPO and the curricula of the GDR in order to go on to become the elite of the new Namibia upon their return. Religion was not taught and was largely suppressed. After their sudden repatriation to independent Namibia in 1990, the so-called “GDR children” felt like strangers in their own country. Despite their good education, they were denied the opportunity to make a significant contribution to the development of the young country. Left alone and disappointed by the promises of the SWAPO, the churches began to play an unexpected role in their lives. It seemed that the suppression of religion during their childhood education had brought about a gap that was calling to be filled. This article analyzes the religious practices of the “GDR children from Namibia”. Based on the data available so far (Groop, Hopf, Kenna, Krause, Reuter and Scheunpflug, Schmitt and Witte, Timm), the role of the churches can be described as ambivalent. By filling the vacuum, the churches made it possible for the “GDR children” to reintegrate into the existing system. In the medium term, however, the churches indirectly contributed to leveling out their unique competencies. The potential of the “GDR children” for the decolonization process of independent Namibia was thus left unrecognized.

Introduction

Almost unnoticed by the public, on December 8th, 1978, a group of 37 girls, 43 boys and 15 women landed at the Berlin-Schönefeld airport in East Germany. The children were between 3 and 7 years old and came from Namibian refugee camps in Angola and Zambia. Many of them had lost their parents in the fight for Namibia’s independence, others had been sent as children of leading or disgraced South West African People’s Organization (SWAPO) officials. Their stay in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) initially pursued two mo-

Alexander Schulze Ph.D., teaches practical theology in Friedensau, Germany. He first came into contact with the “GDR children from Namibia” when he was on his vicariate in Namibia. Soon he discovered that these children had grown up only a few kilometers from him, as pre-schoolers in the GDR: Schulze in one of the few church-run kindergartens, and the Namibian children under strict observation from the SWAPO. It seemed that both parties had a great deal to learn from each other about their shared experience in the GDR, which, when they finally met in Namibia, no longer existed in the way they remembered it.





tives: the safe accommodation and care of the children as well as the education of the women, who were to work as kindergarten teachers after their return to Namibia. The previous negotiations between the SWAPO leadership and the GDR government were based on the mutual misconception that Namibia was about to attain independence in the late 1970s and that the children and the women would return very soon. In fact, the Namibian fight for independence would last for more than 10 years: the children stayed, the caregivers changed, more children joined. And, a third motive was formulated that was to become essential for their stay in the GDR: the education of the children in order to become the elite of the new Namibia. Therefore, each Namibian caregiver was guided by two German educators. Together, they formed a trio that was responsible for a group of 12 boys and girls each. They were housed in Bellin Castle, a former manor house 180 km north of Berlin. Until the 4th grade they attended the primary school in the neighboring village of Zehna. From the 5th grade, the first children moved to the boarding school of the “School of Friendship” in Staßfurt. There they attended the Polytechnic High School in neighboring Löderburg. In August 1990, amid the efforts for German reunification, a total of meanwhile 430 children were repatriated to Namibia, which had become independent only a few months earlier on March 21st (Schmitt and Witte 2019). So far there is no coherent study that has analyzed the religious practices of the “GDR children from Namibia”, nor their contribution to the decolonization process of independent Namibia. However, there are studies examining other topics related to the “GDR children” that contain direct or indirect information about their religious practices and their role after their repatriation to independent Namibia. Based on the data available so far, this article reconstructs religious practices of the “GDR children from Namibia” and their contribution to Namibia’s decolonization process.

A unique combination of competencies

“Learning to unlearn” is defined by Tlostanova and Mignolo as “basically pedagogical” (Tlostanova and Mignolo 2012, 25). The GDR children were neither the first nor the only ones sent abroad by the SWAPO. But they were the youngest and the largest connected group. In contrast to postcolonialism,

decoloniality refers to processes that constructively counteract colonial thinking patterns and maxims that have survived the end of formal colonialism. According to Castro Varela and Dhawan, “Postcolonialism cannot simply be thought of as something that ‘came in’ after colonialism, but must be viewed as a form of resistance to colonial rule and its consequences. So instead of looking at history as a linear progression, postcolonial theory turns to the complexities and contradictions of historical processes” (Castro Varela and Dhawan 2015, 16). The education of the GDR children according to the ideals of the SWAPO and the curricula of the GDR, in some cases for more than 10 years, resulted in a unique combination of competencies that can perhaps be broadly characterized into the following three themes: being highly educated, atheistic, and color-blind; areas which could help overcome colonial thinking patterns.

Multilingual

The good education of the GDR children refers not only to their language skills, but to their general education, including the natural sciences. Regarding language skills Ndlovu-Gatsheni states: “The forcible imposition of colonial languages... as languages of teaching and learning created an impression that their mastery was a sign of being intelligent. Consequently, many educated African people distanced themselves from their indigenous African languages.” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018, 41). This decision was taken from the “GDR children”. They grew up trilingual. German emerged as their main language followed by English and Oshivambo (Timm 2007, 174). While they could speak German better than the German-speaking white minority in Namibia, they had to catch up with their deficits in English and Oshivambo.

Cauna Jones is one of the children who came to the GDR in 1979. She reflects about the time after her repatriation: “I had big problems finding my identity. What I’ve noticed about myself since I am married to Paul and more and more involved with other blacks is the mentality differences. I am not the same person I was when I came back from Germany. I adapt more and more to the African culture. 10 years ago I probably would have said that I feel more German, but now I would rather call myself an Ovambo girl, who speaks German” (Möller, Hens and Radelhof 2003, 23:31–26:04).

Atheistic

Although this was neither addressed by the SWAPO nor explicitly requested, the GDR children were raised and educated atheistically. Religion was not taught and was largely suppressed in children's lives throughout their whole stay in the GDR. This already began with the selection of the staff employed to look after the children: “When I applied, it was said: Yes, immediately. It was four days before Christmas when I should start. It was very fast. And I thought, now I would have to get a message that it starts, because I should be there for Christmas.... Shortly after Christmas I suddenly got back all my papers without comment. I never got told the reason. My lady boss at that time said: I cannot say it, but I'll tell you anyway. You are ideologically not acceptable because you are religiously bound. People like you cannot be given responsibility for the children” (Rüchel 2001, 30).

This also applied to the Namibian caregivers sent by the SWAPO. Regardless of their own religious beliefs, they were not allowed to talk to the children about the Christian faith nor to guide them in religious practices. Monica Shikwambi had survived the attack on the refugee camp Kassinga. After recovering and training in the GDR, she was one of the Namibian caretakers for the children in Bellin. She remembers the death of one of the children entrusted to her: “The doctor told us there was no hope that he would recover. It was really sad to see my dearest Indongo in the hospital bed helpless and waiting to die... His groupmates asked, ‘When will Indongo come back?’ It was hard for me as an educator to tell them that Indongo would not come back and that he would die” (Shikwambi 1999, 84). Dimo Indongo died at the age of 11 years. His peers were not satisfied with the answer given to them. Monica Shikwambi describes her inner conflict as an educator to give an answer that she does not believe herself and that contradicts her own worldview: “They asked me where Indongo would go after his death. The answer to this question was also hard for me, because I was not allowed to tell them that he would go to heaven because they had learned nothing about Christianity. I simply told them that they would not see him again” (Shikwambi 1999, 84).

With the beginning of the 5th grade, the first 60 “GDR children” were transferred to the “School of Friendship” boarding school in Staßfurt, 300 kilometers away from Bellin. Here they attended the Polytechnic High School in neighboring Löderburg.

At that time, the “School of Friendship” was mainly home to older exchange students from Mozambique. Regardless of their origin, all students were taught according to slightly adapted curricula of the GDR. Religion was not taught here either. Religious questions were widely ignored (Krause 2009). Reuter and Scheunpflug remark that Luther, Münzer and Calvin were mentioned in the revolutionary movement of citizens and farmers, but their importance for Protestantism were not appreciated (Reuter and Scheunpflug 2006, 145).

While in 1978, the Council of Churches in Namibia (CCN) represented more than 80 % of the Namibian population, most Namibian Christians belonged to the Evangelical Lutheran Churches (Kjeseth 1989, 11). On May 30, 1990, just a few weeks before the repatriation of the “GDR children”, which had not yet been scheduled at that time, one of the young people stated in a conversation with government officials that they were denied the possibility of religious education. Notwithstanding this, a relaxation of the religious regulations at the “School of Friendship” can be assumed with the opening of the wall on November 9, 1989. An indication of this may be the hitherto inconceivable baptism of one of the students in the first half of 1990 (BArch DL 3/137/1). Timm concludes: “Basic knowledge of the Namibian children about religion and their own religious affiliation can therefore be accepted without having found their way into the documented analyzes and concepts, or even as a (...) distinctive feature. Because of the SWAPO's more liberal policy in religious matters, it can be assumed that the great blank ‘religion’ (...) sprang from the anti-Christian ambitions of the SED (Socialist party in the GDR)” (Timm 2007, 176–177).

Nevertheless, religious practices cannot be presupposed for all “GDR children”. Likewise, it must be assumed that possibly familiar religious practices have been lost or at least lost their significance under the influence of the GDR education for many years. The autobiographic alienated short story by Nambata Shapaka “The First Day in the Homeland” (Shapaka 1999) illustrates the unease of the protagonist “Rosalia” immediately after her pickup from the airport: “She is silent on the way to Tsumeb and does not know what to say. Her parents notice the joy of having their daughter back with them after eleven years. Again and again, the mother is praying aloud to God, which makes Rosalia, who grew up in socialism, a little bit scared” (Shapaka 1999, 109).



Ambivalent

Ndlovu-Gatsheni describes colonial thinking as patterns that “arose from a context where missionary and colonial education taught Africans a lot of wrong education ... that white people were superior and black people were inferior” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018, 41). A first collective confusion of their pre-formatting the children already experienced in connection with their selection for transport to the GDR. They knew white people to be occupiers, oppressors and enemies. Then it was a white woman who put their names on the passengers list to Germany (Nagel and Reinhold 2007, 00:08:44). In the GDR, the children witnessed an uncomplicated and mutually respectful behavior between black and white people. The children regularly performed in front of an audience: “The applause often did not end, and tears ran out of the people’s eyes when we began to sing and dance” (Schmitt and Witte 2018, 1360).

Ambivalent therefore does not mean that they have not been able to differentiate between black and white people, but that they have been able to confront whites in a self-aware and unprejudiced way. “Starting from the theoretical considerations of subject positioning in postcolonial orders and the interpretative-theorizing analysis of the empirical material, one can formulate the assumption that the construction of the biography, because of the temporality attributed to it as inherent, first provides the principle of the becoming of the subject and thus can be used as a reference for other difference markers. Without the perspective of the whiteness of the inner being, the external black would not appear in the symbol of the ‘coconut’ (Polat 2017, 209).

The ambivalent social behavior of the “GDR children from Namibia” was expressed not only in their reception of black and white people, but also in how they encountered each other. While the majority of the children were Ovambo, they included members of other ethnic groups too (Timm 2010, 19). Although they perceived the differences, they were able to accept them.

Lucia Engombe

The fact that a certain religious education can be assumed, at least among the older children, is shown by the memory of one of the “GDR children”. Lucia Engombe came to the GDR at the age of seven. She remembers joint worship services with her mother

in the refugee camp. About Sunday school she writes: “Most of all I met a friend there, who was there for me at all times – Kalunga, God. When sad or scared, I knew that Kalunga would help me in distress: I talked to God as to a friend, and he took the sorrows away from me. And I got to know new songs that were about God” (Engombe and Hilliges 2004, 25).

A report of the same GDR child about a nocturnal maneuver in Bellin shows the imprint of her early childhood experience of the Christian faith. Exercises as nocturnal maneuvers served the pre-military training of boys and girls and met the educational goals of the SWAPO. Equipped only with flashlights and wooden toy rifles, the children, who had been rudely awakened only a few minutes earlier, were to crawl down a steep slope: “No one made a sound, my heart was thumping, my panic grew. I can never do that, I thought. But then I remembered Kalunga. ‘Dear God, protect me when I run down the dark road that nothing happens to me.’ So that God really heard me, I spoke half aloud ... ‘Lucia has prayed to God!’ The light cones of all flashlights were turned on me, sneering laughter rang in. The next moment teacher Jonas stood in front of me and gave me a resounding slap in the face. ‘God does not exist, remember that! I do not want to hear that nonsense anymore!’” (Engombe and Hilliges 2004, 25).

In a state of greatest fear Lucia Engombe remembers the God of her early childhood and begins to pray. This forbidden religious practice is denounced, mocked and punished. Immediately after the punishment, she is made absolutely clear that God does not exist and that she should never forget that. Further it is expressly forbidden to repeat ‘that nonsense’. While the punishment primarily applies to the conspicuous child, the unequivocal instruction is addressed to all bystanders. The undifferentiated phrase ‘that nonsense’ implies a vehement exasperation of the teacher, which includes both the Christian faith as well as the religious practice. “Tears came to my eyes, sobs shook my whole body. Such a vulgarity, I thought, God is my friend, my best, my only one. Finally, I also prayed for the soldiers to win for us. And it helped. After all, the SWAPO spanked the South Africans properly the butt. So praying could not be wrong” (Engombe and Hilliges 2004, 25).

The public exposure, reprimands and condemnation were experienced as confusing to Lucia Engombe’s worldview. She experienced God as her ‘best’ and ‘only one’ friend who answers her prayers.

In this belief, she also prayed for the victory of the SWAPO soldiers, which became more and more likely. How could it be wrong to pray to God? “You are the elite of the new Namibia! You do not need God, your guide is Sam Nujoma!” exclaimed teacher Jonas. He shone into my scared face. ‘As a soldier you do not cry. Go down there!’ He pointed into the dark valley. Teacher Jonas could say what he wanted! As I stumbled down the dark path, I prayed softly that nothing bad should happen to me. With God’s help SWAPO pioneer Lucia Engombe arrived, plodding to the campfire” (Engombe and Hilliges 2004, 106–107).

Turning to the bystanders, the teacher repeats the ubiquitous leitmotiv of the children’s education in the GDR. By reminding the children to be the ‘elite of the new Namibia’, he separates Lucia Engombe from the group. The instruction, now directly addressed to her, to obey the command given in advance, opens the way for the child to show loyalty and to belong to the group again.

Back to Namibia, it is Lucia Engombes brother Martin who challenges her to reflect on her repressed religious practice. Their memories of the repression, experienced years ago, are still present: “Are you going to church?” Martin asked. ‘Don’t know,’ I answered. I had too many bad experiences with my belief in God. I was mocked, laughed at and punished for that. Again, I hid Kalunga in my heart. ‘You have to go to church, Lucia,’ my brother said. ‘God gives you support and confidence. He is always there for you’” (Engombe and Hilliges 2004, 317–318). In the music of her brother Lucia Engombe finds a renewed access to her hidden religiosity. While her faith is abstract and internal, her brother encourages her to practice religion: “My big ‘little’ brother did not just play reggae music. He taught me that reggae is a very religious music. But I had hidden God somewhere deep in my heart. ‘Where is God?’ I challenged my brother. ‘God is the air in you,’ Martin replied. ‘The bad air I breathe?’ ‘God is the spirit in you,’ he explained seriously. ‘Prove it to me!’ I demanded defiantly. I believed in God, but in one whom I could entrust my sorrows. Martin spoke of the church I was to visit” (Engombe and Hilliges 2004, 325–326).

Lucia Encombe experiences further access to religious practice through her mother’s regular attendance of church services: “I felt the void in my heart that I wanted to fill and did not know how. I needed a meaning in my life. Something it was worth having been born for. For ten years, it had been the be-

lief in SWAPO, in the great power that relieved my worries. I had suffered many things, beatings and humiliation, but I had a goal. ‘Be ready! Always ready!’ I had lost that in the last few months. I was not really aware of that. I only felt this emptiness, which was filled by nothing” (Engombe and Hilliges 2004, 326). Her mother’s statement that SWAPO President Sam Nujoma also believes in God irritates her conviction that religious beliefs and SWAPO are mutually exclusive: “Even Mother went there often, though I had assumed that faith and SWAPO were mutually exclusive. ‘Even the president believes in God,’ Mother said. Too bad, I thought that teacher Jonas had not known that at the time when he dominated me with: ‘God does not exist!’ Since then, God was something that was there at the same time and not” (Engombe and Hilliges 2004, 326). Many years later, the experience of denunciation, mockery and punishment is still present. This public exposure, reprimand and condemnation have become deeply engraved.

In the right place at the wrong time

With their sudden repatriation to Namibia in August 1990, the “GDR children” were confronted with a reality that did not correspond to the ideal of their childhood. That is how many of them felt. Most of them were no longer children at that time. Not every child could be handed over to their parents. Many of them had already been brought to the GDR as half or full orphans. Children who were not picked up by their parents or relatives or who could not be assigned to a caregiver were eventually released for adoption. Thus, the majority of the remaining children came into close contact with white families of the German-speaking minority (BArch DL 3/137/2). These families gave them a home and enabled them to attend a German school. Kenna states that “through the contact with the German-speaking community, many GDR children have been Christian baptized and confirmed” (Kenna 1999, 56). The Church will play a role for the next generation (Groop 2012, 79) if a culturally- and historically-sensitive Practical Theology succeeds in pointing out perspectives for relevant work of the churches in the here and now, which reveal injustice and constructively encourage the process of decoloniality.



Conclusions

1. In contrast to postcolonialism, decoloniality refers to processes that constructively counteract colonial thinking patterns and maxims that have survived the end of formal colonialism. The raise and education of the “GDR children” according to the ideals of the SWAPO and the curricula of the GDR, in some cases for more than 10 years, resulted in a unique combination of competencies that can be characterized as highly-educated, atheistic and colorblind; valuable qualities for the decolonization process.

2. The GDR children were no longer children at the time of their sudden repatriation, but were still too young to take on responsibility. The SWAPO was incapable, neither of recognizing the medium and long-term opportunities that opened up with the return of the children nor of providing for the completion of their education towards becoming “the elite of the new Namibia”.

3. In contrast to the SWAPO administrators, the church representatives proved to be reliable and constant partners for the welfare of the repatriated children. By caring for the basic needs of the GDR children, the church representatives succeeded in building on their early childhood experiences and their henceforth suppressed religious imprints, which became helpful interpretive templates for the present-day.

4. While the churches made it possible to reintegrate the GDR children into the existing system they perhaps indirectly contributed to leveling out the unique experiences of the repatriated. The potential of the “GDR children” for the process of decoloniality in independent Namibia was thus not recognized. Time will tell if the next generation can build on the potential of the parent generation.

5. Because religion is hard to unlearn, it requires a culture- and historically-sensitive practical theology, whose responsibility it is to develop – in their classical disciplines as well as through interdisciplinary dialogue – perspectives for relevant work for the churches in the here and now which reveal injustice, and constructively build on the process of decoloniality, towards liberating hope for the future.

References

- BArch DL 3/137/1, Bündel 46 (06.06.1990). Bericht über den Besuch des Kinderheims Bellin und der “Schule der Freundschaft” in Staßfurt. Ministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit.
- BArch DL 3/137/2, Bündel 46 (24.08.1990). Information über „Rückführung namibischer Kinder“. Ministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit.
- BArch DL 3/137/3, Bündel 46 (12.09.1990). Bericht über die Repatriierung namibischer Kinder/Jugendliche/Erzieher von der SdF Staßfurt und dem Kinderheim Bellin“. Ministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit.
- Castro Varela, M., and N. Dhawan. 2015. *Postkoloniale Theorie. Eine kritische Einführung*. 2nd ed. Bielefeld: Transcript-Verlag.
- Engombe, L.; and P. Hilliges. 2004. *Kind Nr. 95: Meine deutsch-afrikanische Odysee*. Berlin: Ullstein.
- Groop, K. 2012. “The church, the state, and the issue of national reconciliation in Namibia.” *Journal of Namibian Studies* 11: 63–82.
- Hopf, H. 1999. “Die DDR-Kinder sind besser als ihr Ruf.” In *Die “DDR-Kinder” von Namibia. Heimkehrer in ein fremdes Land*, edited by Constanze Kenna, 151–159. Göttingen: Hess.
- Jonas, C. 1999. “Heimat.” In *Die “DDR-Kinder” von Namibia. Heimkehrer in ein fremdes Land*, edited by Constanze Kenna, 182. Göttingen, Hess.
- Kenna, C. 1999. *Die “DDR-Kinder” von Namibia. Heimkehrer in ein fremdes Lan*. Göttingen, Hess.
- Kjeseth, P. 1989. “Apartheid under Seige: Challenges from the Churches. Sanctions and the White Right.” *Africa Today* 36 (1): 7–22.
- Krause, J. 2009. Das DDR-Namibia-Solidaritätsprojekt “Schule der Freundschaft”: Möglichkeiten und Grenzen interkultureller Erziehung. Oldenburg: BIS.
- Möller, B., Hens, N., and Radelhof, S. 2003. “Omulaule heisst schwarz.” Dokumentarfilm, Bauhaus Universität Weimar, Deutschland.
- Nagel, M., and M. Reinhold. 2007. “Wenn uns zwei Berge trennen.” Dokumentarfilm, NBC German Service, Windhoek, Namibia.
- Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S.J. 2018. “The Dynamics of Epistemological Decolonization in the 21st Century: Towards Epistemic Freedom.” *Strategic Review of Southern Africa* 40 (1): 16–45.
- Polat, S. 2017. “Ich bin Kokusnuss sozusagen. Biographisches Sprechen und Subjektpositionierung in postkolonialen Ordnungen.” In *Methodisches Vorgehen und Methodologische Verbindungen von Biografie- und Diskursforschung*, edited by Elisabeth Tuidar and Tina Spies, 195–212. Wiesbaden: Springer.
- Reuter, L., and A. Scheunpflug. 2006. *Die Schule der Freundschaft. Eine Fallstudie zur Bildungszusammenarbeit zwischen der DDR und Mosambik*. Münster, Waxmann.
- Rüchel, U. 2001. *Wir hatten noch nie einen Schwarzen gesehen*. Schwerin: Israel.



- Schmitt, C., and M. Witte. 2018. ““You are special”: othering in biographies of “GDR children from Namibia.”” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 41 (7): 1352–1369. doi: 10.1080/01419870.2017.1287417.
- Schmitt, C., and M. Witte. 2019. “Refugees across the generations. Generational relations between the ‘GDR children of Namibia’ and their children.” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 45: 1–17. doi: 10.1080/1369183X.2019.1580566.
- Shapaka, N. 1999. “Der erste Tag in der Heimat.” In *Die “DDR-Kinder” von Namibia. Heimkehrer in ein fremdes Land*, edited by Constanze Kenna, 109. Göttingen, Hess.
- Shikwambi, M. 1999. “Eines meiner Kinder.” In *Die “DDR-Kinder” von Namibia. Heimkehrer in ein fremdes Land*, edited by Constanze Kenna, 84–85. Göttingen, Hess.
- Timm, S. 2007. *Parteiliche Bildungszusammenarbeit. Das Kinderheim Bellin für namibische Flüchtlingskinder in der DDR*. Münster, Waxmann.
- Timm, S. 2010. “Das Kinderheim Bellin für namibische Flüchtlingskinder 1979–1990. Ein interkulturelles Ausnahmeprojekt in der DDR.” *Zeitschrift für internationale Bildungsforschung und Entwicklungszusammenarbeit* 33 (1): 18–24.
- Tlostanova, M. V., and W. D. Mignolo. 2012. *Learning to Unlearn: Decolonial Reflections from Eurasia and the Americas*. Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press.

"Liberation Theology opted for the Poor, and the Poor opted for [Neo-]Pentecostalism": Illustrating the Influence of the "Prosperity Gospel" in Brazil¹

Mark J. Cartledge

One of the most significant movements in the history of Christianity is Pentecostalism, and Brazil probably has the largest number of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christians in the world. Pentecostalism is a global phenomenon and exhibits diversity of expression, depending on a combination of factors that include culture, ecclesial traditions, and localized beliefs and practices. Amid this religious diversity certain key ideas appear to be pervasive if not altogether universal. One of these key ideas is the so-called "prosperity gospel", which refers to the belief that as part of the blessings of the kingdom of God, believers have the right to expect both health and material benefit. One of the contradictions with this kind of religious expression is the fact that the people who appear to hold to this view most ardently are in fact the poor of Pentecostalism. Why is it the case that the poorest of the poor hold on to a view that is often transmitted from the United States of America and appears to reflect the material aspirations associated with the "American dream" rather than the empirical realities of Latin American contexts? This paper seeks to illustrate how [Neo-]Pentecostals hold on to their belief in the "prosperity gospel", identifying the key biblical text that is used in this hermeneutic, as well as the cultural practices that support its maintenance. From this analysis, questions are raised about what aspects might inform the so-called historic churches when seeking to negotiate their relationship with [Neo-]Pentecostals.

Introduction

The quotation at the beginning of the title of this study is a famous one and it is usually attributed to an Argentine liberation theologian (Miller 2006), who is making an important point about the role of a movement within the Roman Catholic church, namely an historic "option for the poor" in contexts where the number of the "poor" is considerable. The

Mark J. Cartledge is Principal of the London School of Theology and Professor of Practical Theology. His current research focuses on the relationship between church and society. His most recent co-authored book is entitled *Megachurches and Social Engagement: Public Theology in Practice* (Leiden: Brill, 2019).

¹ Research support for the International Academy of Practical Theology conference paper upon which this article is based was provided by The Foundation for Pentecostal Scholarship (<https://sites.google.com/tffps.org/tffps/>, last accessed February 12, 2019).

poor themselves have ignored this preference towards them and have instead opted for an alternative one, namely Pentecostalism (Martins and de Pádua 2002; Martin 2005, 150; von Sinner 2012b, 102–112). Of course, the suggestion that liberation theology is a failed theological movement is contested, and rightly so (Chesnut 1997; 2003). Neverthe-

less, the idea that elitist and educated theologians can have a preferential option for the poor and yet be ignored by the poorest of the poor in favour of what appears to be a regressive, patriarchal and seemingly right-wing fundamentalist form of religion, is deeply uncomfortable. Nevertheless, this appears to be what is happening in different countries around the world and including Brazil. *Therefore, this study seeks to illuminate aspects of the relationship between the prosperity gospel and [Neo-]Pentecostalism by looking at the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God in order to give insight into the way this Brazilian denomination has assimilated specific American features that date back to the Pentecostalism of the 1970s.* First, Brazilian Pentecostalism is introduced before sociological and religious reasons for growth are considered. Second, the prosperity gospel is illustrated with respect to the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God before suggestions are made for the historic denominations in Brazil to consider.

Brazilian Pentecostalism

Brazil is not a poor country (von Sinner, 2012b, 35, notes that it stands tenth in the world's largest economies as measured by GDP); but it has a lot of poor people, whose life chances are limited because of a massive inequality in the distribution of resources. In terms of religion, it is not hugely diverse, with around 87 % still claiming to be Christian. Of that 87 % around 64 % would claim to be Roman Catholic and just over 22 % designate themselves Protestant, which would include Pentecostals as the largest group in that bracket (Moreira 2018, 1). Thus, Pentecostals would still appear to be a minority but they are growing at such an amazing rate that they are attracting media and scholarly attention. As Martins and de Pádua explain:

The social exclusion suffered by the poor population in Brazilian modernisation creates a type of magic pretence that has the capacity to explain, through mystic and supernatural powers, the causes of social injustice and the misfortune lived by the individual. This magic reasoning represents a way of relating with the world, taking away human responsibility in the social and historic construction of one's own destiny, that is submitted totally or partially to the intervention of mystical powers, and that transcends the capacity of the individual and demands a ritual control of its interference (Martins and de Pádua 2002, 152).

This is a particular sociological analysis that captures something of the mix of the various factors involved: social exclusion, poverty, social change, spirituality, human responsibility and the creation of an alternative reality that stands in contrast to the experiences of life that the “world” has to offer.

Pentecostal Strategies

Most commentators tend to agree that the strategies the Pentecostal movement uses include a radical conversion away from the domain of the world, with its street life of crime, violence, alcohol, drugs and sexual licentiousness (Chesnut 1997, 17). Pentecostal groups, at least historically, have been sectarian, creating alternative enclaves, whereby people can be saved from the world and can be safe with God. It was often women who first became interested: miserable at home, perhaps with abusive and violent partners, poor and scraping by on whatever money was left over from the drinking, gambling and street life (Chesnut 1997, 62–64). By hook or by crook, they managed to drag their men along to a Pentecostal meeting where they experienced the “power of God”, were converted and subsequently found a new set of social relationships in the church that supplanted those on the streets, leaving behind machismo culture and investing what they had into the domestic realm and the life of the church (Medcraft 1987, 83–85). With the better use of resources, the family could eat well, buy nicer clothes, even acquire electrical goods, and send their children to different schools. Thus, we see the beginning of social mobility and an ethic of “self-betterment” (Martin 2013, 38). In the middle of these aspirations is the role of “faith”. It is the women who believe first and who exercise power, but in order to maintain this ethic of self-betterment, they subsequently endorse the patriarchal culture of the church. It is what Bernice Martin calls the Pentecostal gender paradox (Martin 2001; Brusco 2010). They are empowered within a patriarchal casing that is fragile. Should they choose to topple it, they would be the ultimate losers and they know exactly what that would mean for them and their families. And it is largely through the network of family relationships that Pentecostalism has grown, with women at its heart. Men are no longer seen as “masters” or “oppressors” but as “victims” of evil, capable of being liberated (von Sinner 2012a).



The Rise of Pentecostalism in Brazil

Brazil, as a former Portuguese colony, has been largely associated with the Roman Catholic church from around 1500. Protestants, for example the Huguenots, tried to obtain a foothold in the country in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries respectively, only to be expelled (Hollenweger 1972, 94–95). While Protestantism arrived after independence in 1822, the separation of church and state and the establishment of freedom of religion occurred in 1890, although with a partial re-establishment through the influence of Cardinal Sebastiao Leme in the 1920s and 1930s. This led to a *de facto* Roman Catholic monopoly until the 1950s (Chesnut 2003, 30–35). Pentecostalism landed at the beginning of the twentieth century via two separate missionary groups around the same time with Europeans who had experienced the impact of Pentecostalism via William Durham in Chicago. The Assemblies of God (*Assembleias de Deus*) denomination was started by two Swedish missionaries in 1911, Daniel Berg and Sumner Vingren, while the Christian Congregation of Brazil (*Congregação Cristã do Brasil* [hereafter: CCB]) was started by the Italian Luigi Franceson in 1910 (von Sinner 2012b, 131, 240–274). Both groups arrived in Brazil in 1910 having no knowledge of the other. Often historians call this the first wave of Pentecostalism, and both of these early Pentecostals predate the formation of classical Pentecostalism in the USA (Hollenweger 1972, 75). The second wave is associated with the arrival of the established Pentecostal denominations from the USA, like the Foursquare denomination, from the 1950s and the use of mass rallies in sport stadia. “And by the 1950s, Pentecostalism had won enough converts to be able to bring a permanent end to the four-and-a-half-centuries of a monopolistic religious economy” (Chesnut 2003, 35). But it is also associated with the establishment of newer Brazilian Pentecostal denominations such as Brazil for Christ (*Igreja Pentecostal o Brasil para Cristo*) founded by Manoel de Mello in 1955, and the church God is Love (*Igreja Pentecostal Deus é Amor*) founded by Daví de Miranda in 1962. The third wave is traced to the mid 1970s and linked to newer kinds of Pentecostals (often referred to as “Neo-Pentecostals”) such as the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God ([hereafter: UCKG], *Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus*, also often referred to as IURD), which is less puritanical than older forms of Pentecostalism and emphasizes prosperity, healing and mass exorcisms in its ser-

vices (Chesnut 1997, 39–40). It is these more recent churches that have attracted a lot of attention because of their intolerance of African Brazilian groups like the Umbanda. It is suggested that more recently these third wave type groups have moved into a fourth wave associated with neoliberal economics, commercial branding, media savvy, consumer orientation, syncretic tastes, and more explicit political engagement (Lingenthal 2012; Freston 1999).

Sociological Explanations

Sociological explanations for the rise of Pentecostalism in Latin America include the idea that the movement is one aligned with social change. With the rise of industrialization and urban migration, it is argued, the spirituality of Pentecostalism followed the same trajectory and clustered in cities, providing support for the displaced and disorientated. Alongside this explanation is the social protest account that sees Pentecostalism as fundamentally a protest movement against the establishment of capitalism (Medcraft 1987, 74–76). Another view suggests that while the elite held religious power via Roman Catholicism, Pentecostalism subverted this power by aligning itself with the lower social classes in order to legitimate social differentiation and give itself a social niche (Freston 1999, 148). This alignment with lower social classes also meant that it became a popular form of religion and was indigenized through the use of music, ritual expression and the social proximity of its leadership to the people, since they are led by their own. It has been suggested that its growth only really began substantially once this indigenization had taken place. Perhaps one of the most compelling reasons for the growth of Pentecostalism is that it provides an answer for the pathogens of poverty, the chief of which is a lack of health care (Chesnut 1997). Pentecostalism almost universally emphasizes healing because of its soteriology, whereby Christ is understood as the healer from sin-sickness. In a society with a lack of universal healthcare, the church becomes a hospital for the sick. In particular, it has become the main “detox centre” for men suffering from substance abuse (Chesnut 1997, 71). More recently, it has been suggested that Pentecostals have bought into a neoliberal cosmology and now see themselves as part of a global religious market (St. Clair 2017, 619). The typical consumer of Pentecostalism is a poor, mar-



ried, woman of colour, living on the urban periphery and a former nominal Roman Catholic (Chesnut 2003, 158). As the middle classes have expanded, and as Pentecostalism has become more diverse, so it is now driven by a logic framed by this free market ideology. This may indeed be the case for some Pentecostals, especially Neo-Pentecostals, but it is not a universal narrative (Martin 2011, 120).

Religious Explanations

Some have suggested that there are specific religious reasons for its appeal and growth. These include the initial persecution by the Roman Catholic church and state officials. There is evidence that the religious hegemony of the Roman Catholic church has historically been threatened by this expression of Christianity, leading to persecution and sometimes violent attacks, especially in the 1930s (Chesnut 1997, 33). This led to a sense of religious marginalization by Pentecostals, which was embraced as a religious virtue. They stood not only against the world, but also against other forms of religion, including other expressions of Christianity (St. Clair, 2017, 617). On this account, difference was accentuated. But underlying this difference is another reason, one which has resonance across not only Christianity but other religious traditions as well, namely mysticism based in religious experience (Hollenweger 1972, 102). It is noted by commentators who suggest that Pentecostals have much in common with other mystical types of religion and this is where there are comparisons to be made at a phenomenological level. Pentecostals frame their spiritual experiences in a unique way by emphasizing the primacy of Pentecost as the defining narrative, especially the doctrine of Baptism in the Spirit as a post-conversion dramatic experience evidenced by particular signs, such as speaking in tongues (Medcraft 1987, 80). And with this empowerment of the Holy Spirit comes a certain kind of spiritual egalitarianism since the Holy Spirit has been poured out on all flesh, including men and women, young and old, slave and free. And it is this Spirit empowerment which provides liberation from the constraints of the world in terms of economic reality, social status and educational opportunity (von Sinner 2012a, 109). When someone is empowered by the Spirit to serve and to lead, then they are qualified irrespective of who they are in the eyes of the world. There is a kind of social healing that takes place as a new dig-

nity is given and received in an alternative community, which is different and set apart from the world. The flip side to this experiential empowerment is the construction of a narrative that seeks to justify itself in terms of identity and this is where we also see the tension with forms of fundamentalism, which are intolerant, aggressive and, on occasions, violent, thus illustrating how some of the religious reasons have themselves come full circle (da Silva 2007; but cf. Freston 2013).

The Prosperity Gospel

One of the main reasons it appears that people are attracted to the prosperity gospel is because of the hope it gives people: there is a way out of poverty and lives can change for the better. If only they have sufficient faith to believe in the promises of God, things will change. The appeal is that they do not have to rely on anyone else but God and themselves, and the connection between the two is their faith (Martins and de Pádua 2002). In a society that has failed them, there is an alternative and it is provided by the community of the church. To outsiders, they might seem gullible, but if people have failed you all your life and you have to trust something or someone, then why not trust God? The cultural conventions of making vows are translated into making vows before God (Medcraft 1987, 78). The prosperity gospel church leaders use this mechanism to obtain finances for the church by employing what is the called “the sowing of a seed” (Roberts 1970, 12). One begins by giving an amount of money as a “seed amount”, in the hope that by faith one will receive one’s financial needs as a return because of the goodness of God and his faithfulness to his promises (undergirding the process of vows). It is based on a reading of Luke 6.38: “Give and it shall be given unto you, good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal shall it be measured to you again” (version cited by Roberts 1970, 12) (Perriman 2003, 53–55).

An example of one of the Neo-Pentecostal prosperity gospel churches is the controversial Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (Universal Church of the Kingdom of God USA 2019; von Sinner 2012b, 135–137). This is a church that was founded by Edir Macedo, whose wealth was estimated at around \$950 million in 2013 and whose assets include TV networks, radio stations, a newspaper, music labels,



and a private jet (Smith and Campos 2015, 180). A full hour of a two-hour service can be used to admonish, solicit and collect tithes and offerings from the congregants by authoritarian and dominant pastors (Shaull and Waldo Cesar 2000, 26). For example, Bailey's account of a worship service is illuminating:

Speaking from a stage encircled by 12 large wooden crosses, Gabriel Camargo held up wads of fake Brazilian money, showing his flock what could be theirs.

"God will bless you if you give a lot more to the church", said Camargo, a Pentecostal pastor with the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God.

Then he extended an arm and pointed a black pouch toward his parishioners in the working-class neighbourhood of Osasco.

"Pick up your wallets and purses", he said, instructing his flock to look for Brazilian reais. About a dozen people hurried forward and dumped bills and coins into the bag.

Those without cash didn't have to worry: An usher held out a credit card machine. "You'll have so much money after giving generously to the church", the pastor boomed, "that smoke is going to come out of the machine".

In a country struggling with the worst economic crisis in its history, with long lines at unemployment offices and public health clinics, perhaps it's not surprising that Brazilians are increasingly drawn to the promises of personal wealth (Bailey 2017).

This is a church that connects with all sectors of society but especially the poor and uses this "seed faith" approach to obtain money from its adherents in order to resource its ever increasing operations. Even just a cursory glance at its website reveals an emphasis on tithing and offerings, responsibility and entrepreneurialism, consumerism and testimonies from members who have sown their financial seed and been rewarded. The English language version connects to American churches (they have planted churches in the US starting in LA) and the testimonial page includes four testimonies (Universal Church of the Kingdom of God USA 2019):

My financial life was terrible, I had 60 days to move out of my renting home. After sowing my seed, I now own my own house!
– Ms. Kim

I had to pay \$10,000 for a court case. After sowing my seed, God served me justice.
I went to court, and I didn't have to pay anything

anymore. I am debt free!
– Janneth Richards

Before sowing my seed, I had just lost my job. After I sowed my seed, I received a double blessing. I received my dream job, two houses, and two cars.
– Ms. Carla

I only had \$30 in my name in prison, and I sowed my seed.
As a result, my case dismissed and I now have a job.
– Arthur

Bowler describes this approach in a discussion of the history of the prosperity gospel in the USA. She suggests that the movement uses popular catch-phrases to focus on the essence of its message and that these include "seed faith". The content of the "seed" can be a "prayer, tithe, word, emotion, or action, a 'seed' whose spiritual consequences – good or bad – had not come into season" (Bowler 2013, 67). In the Brazilian UCKG it appears that the "seed" has been narrowed to refer to money exclusively. Here we see the influence of neoliberal cosmology as noted above, whereby the spiritual realm is deeply embedded in the material and especially the financial such that neoliberal economics become part of the dominant ideological framework (Walsh 2011). Health and wealth are linked to a market economy and it has become just as branded as any American expression of Pentecostalism (Freston 2013, 117). However, as in all consumer societies, it is also the case that people are beginning to ask for their money back if they do not obtain the results that they hoped to achieve. Von Sinner observes the example of a member of the UCKG being manipulated into selling his car in order to give its value of 2,600 reais to the church precisely on the basis of a "positive return". When this "seed" did not produce the desired "harvest", the person wanted his money back. The matter went to court, which ruled in the favour of the "religious consumer" (von Sinner 2012a, 105). It remains to be seen just how successful such future "seed returns" will be.

And, as Chesnut observes, this approach is targeted towards a specific group of people:

Like their Pentecostal brethren in the United States, Latin American *crentes* are the most skilled marketers in the region's new religious economy. They have used diverse media to deliver the simple but potent message to prospective converts that affiliation with Pentecostalism will imbue them with sufficient supernatural strength to vanquish the demons of poverty. It is the dynamic and controversial [UCKG] that has captured the essence of



Pentecostal advertising in its evangelistic slogan, ‘stop suffering’. The pithy phrase ‘pare de sofrer’, typically printed in bright red letters, calls out to the afflicted poor of Brazil from the church walls, pamphlets, and newspapers of this innovative denomination. A combination of low- and high-tech media invite religious consumers, mainly nominal Catholics, to relieve their suffering by embracing Jesus and the Holy Spirit specifically within the walls of the particular church that is advertising its product (Chesnut 2003, 51).

Of course, we need to be careful in our portrayal of Pentecostalism. It is not homogeneous and while there are common themes, there are also huge differences across time and place. One such difference is the stark comparison of the UCKG with one of the earliest Pentecostal churches in Brazil, the CCB. In an insightful article, St. Claire argues that there is a reaction to the prosperity gospel message by some Pentecostals, who see God as not providing certain things like new and better paid jobs because of his will for their lives in their own circumstances. This anti-prosperity discourse provides a counter narrative and suggests that we need to take care in our generalizations when commenting on Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity (St. Clair, 2017).

Conclusion: Possible Insights for the Historic Churches

What insights might these observations raise for the so-called historic churches? Three may be suggested.

First, there is a common spirituality that permeates Pentecostalism and Catholicism, broadly understood, and the Roman Catholic Charismatic Renewal movement has tapped into this stream as part of an attempt to respond to Pentecostalism. The materiality of incarnational theology in Catholicism and the materiality of pneumatological mediation in Pentecostalism provide a set of common assumptions about how grace intersects with nature, which means that very often Roman Catholics and Pentecostals are closer to each other than Pentecostals are to other Protestants. If this observation is puzzling, just consider how Roman Catholics and Pentecostals use oil to mediate healing, or how Pentecostals use handkerchiefs to mediate the anointing of the Spirit. Granted, it is not quite the same thing as “old bones” (aka relics), but the religious logic and spiritual intuition is pretty much the same. Pope Francis is an advocate of Spirit Baptism and has just set up a

new structure within the Roman Catholic Church called CHARIS as a vehicle for renewal and as a way of reaching out to Pentecostals and Independent Charismatics (CHARIS 2019). Perhaps this new structure will prove useful in Latin America, indicating where there is commonality and as a way of overcoming hostility based on a common experience of the Holy Spirit. This is what Andrew Chesnut has called a “preferential option for the Spirit” with its imitation of Pentecostalism’s adoption of the mass media including the production of TV soap operas for popular consumption (Chesnut 2003, 64, 94). Certainly, Roman Catholic Charismatic Renewal has proved popular in Brazil and has even produced celebrities such as Fr. Jonas Abib with his training centre in São Paulo attracting 550,000 people annually, or Fr. Marcelo Rossi, whose CDs, DVDs and exercise videos have sold millions of copies. However, once again, it seems that this kind of material spirituality, however packaged, is incapable of escaping a neoliberal cosmology whether in its Pentecostal or Catholic expression.

Second, Pentecostalism provides hope for the people. Pentecostalism is less about “pie in the sky when you die”, by which it is often caricatured. It is more about “on earth as it is in heaven”. It is concerned with realized eschatology rather than the far off and distant consummation of all things. The immediacy of God in the whole of life is a challenge when society appears to undermine that reality, which is why Pentecostals have traditionally provided alternative communities. People suffered the indignity of society with greater fortitude because there was an alternative reality, an alternative community, in which they were honoured, given dignity and respect, so they could cope with the world’s lack of care and love. They navigated the dissonance by means of a strong dualism. More recently, their posture has changed, instead of opting out, they are opting in. But instead of serving the poor, they desire to rule over them and manipulate them, like other religious traditions have done before them. They see themselves in less prophetic ways (standing apart) and instead entertain theocratic aspirations by means of political processes and a neoliberal cosmology. Arguably they (the fourth wavers) have placed themselves within the socio-religious marketplace and now play the “game” like everyone else and this, sadly, means that their politicians are also embroiled in corruption scandals (including the disproportionate number of UCKG politicians implicated in the so-called “bloodsuckers scandal” of



2006) (Freston 2013, 101; von Sinner 2012a, 107). Historic churches can only speak to these types of Pentecostals once they have examined themselves and asked whether they have led the way or not. Has the priestly service to the state given way to a more prophetic stance, or has it once again given way to the seduction of power (even if it is veiled)?

Third and finally, there is a role that the historic churches can play in relation to education. I invited a Pentecostal pastor and FaceBook friend from São Paulo to come to the IAPT conference but he said that he could not make it because he has a full time job. Many Pentecostal pastors and leaders have to work outside the church in order to make a living. They do not have the luxury of time and money to attend conferences and talk to theologians, even prestigious ones from around the world! Additionally, many of them are anti-intellectual and believe that “theologians” have lost both the plot and the Spirit, if they ever even “had” the Spirit in the first place. What would it take for the historic churches to set up opportunities for dialogue and build open and honest relationships? How can historic churches move beyond hostility to a place of mutual exchange? Hospitality is the key to conversation, so I thank our hosts for their hospitality to the Academy and I look forward to possible conversations between Pentecostals and the historic denominations in Brazil.

References

- Anderson, Allan Heaton. 2014. *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bailey, Sarah Pulliam. 2017. “How the Prosperity Gospel is Sparking a Major Change in Predominantly Catholic Brazil.” *The Washington Post*, October 31, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/social-issues/forget-the-germans-this-is-where-the-protestant-reformation-debates-are-happening-now/2017/10>.
- Bowler, Kate. 2013. *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Brusco, Elizabeth. 2010. “Gender and Power.” In *Studying Global Pentecostalism: Theories and Methods*, edited by Allan H. Anderson, Michael Bergunder, André Droogers and Cornelius van der Laan, 74–92. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- CHARIS: Catholic Charismatic Renewal International Service, <https://www.charis.international/en/home/>.
- Chesnut, R. Andrew. 1997. *Born Again in Brazil: The Pentecostal Boom and the Pathogens of Poverty*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Chesnut, R. Andrew. 2003. *Competitive Spirits: Latin America's New Religious Economy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- da Silva, Vagner Gonçalves. 2007. “Neo-Pentecostalism and Afro-Brazilian Religions: Explaining the Attacks on Symbols of the African Religious Heritage in Contemporary Brazil.” *Mana* 13 (1): 207–236.
- Freston, Paul. 1999. “Neo-Pentecostalism in Brazil: Problems of Definition and the Struggle for Hegemony.” *Archives de Sciences des Religions* 105 (1): 145–162.
- Freston, Paul. 2013. “Pentecostals and Politics in Latin America: Compromise or Prophetic Witness.” In *Spirit and Power: The Growth and Global Impact of Pentecostalism*, edited by Donald E. Miller, Kimon H. Sargeant and Richard Flory, 101–118. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gutierrez, Gustavo. 1974. *A Theology of Liberation*. London: SCM Press.
- Hollenweger, Walter J. 1972. *The Pentecostals: The Charismatic Movement in the Churches*. London: SCM Press.
- Lingenthal, Lukas. 2012. “Pentecostalism in Brazil: Churches, Businesses and Political Parties.” *KAS International Reports* 1: 41–58.
- Martin, Bernice. 2001. “The Pentecostal Gender Paradox.” In *The Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Religion*, edited by Richard K. Fenn, 52–66. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Martin, Bernice. 2011. “Interpretations of Latin American Pentecostalism: 1960s to the Present.” In *Pentecostal Power: Expressions, Impact and Faith of Latin American Pentecostalism*, edited by Calvin L. Smith, 111–135. Leiden: Brill.
- Martin, David. 2005. *On Secularization: Towards a Revised General Theory*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Martin, David. 2013. “Pentecostalism: An Alternative Form of Modernity and Modernization.” In *Global Pentecostalism in the 21st Century*, edited by Robert W. Hefner, 37–62. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Martins, Andrea Damascena, and Lucia Pedrosa de Pádua. 2002. “The Option for the Poor and Pentecostalism in Brazil.” *Exchange* 31 (2): 136–156.
- Medcraft, John P. 1987. “The Roots and Fruits of Brazilian Pentecostalism.” *Vox Evangelica* 17: 66–94.
- Miller, Donald E. 2006. “An interview with the Pew Research Center.” <http://www.pewforum.org/2006/04/12/the-new-face-of-global-christianity-the-emergence-of-progressive-pentecostalism/>.
- Moreira, Alberto da Silva. 2018. “From Religious Diversity to Political Competition: The Differentiation Process of Pentecostalism in Brazil.” *Religions* 9 (14): 1–11.
- Perriman, Andrew. 2003. *Faith, Health and Prosperity: A Report on ‘Word of Faith’ and ‘Positive Confession’ Theologies by The Evangelical Alliance (UK) Commission on Unity and Truth among Evangelicals*. Carlisle: Paternoster Press.
- Roberts, Oral, 1970. *The Miracle of Seed Faith*. Tulsa, OK: Fleming H. Revell Company.
- Shaul, Richard and Waldo Cesar. 2000. *Pentecostalism and the Future of the Christian Churches: Promises, Limitations, Challenges*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Smith, Dennis A. and Leonildo S. Campos. 2015. “Concentrations of Faith: Mega Churches in Brazil.” In *A Mov-*



- ing Faith: Mega Churches Go South*, edited by Jonathan D. James, 169–190. Los Angeles: Sage.
- St. Clair, George. 2017. “‘God Even Blessed Me with Less Money’: Disappointment, Pentecostalism and the Middle Classes in Brazil.” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 49: 609–632.
- The Foundation for Pentecostal Scholarship. <https://sites.google.com/tffps.org/tffps/>.
- Universal Church of the Kingdom of God USA. 2019. “Sow Your Seed.” <https://www.universalchurchusa.org/en/sowyourseed/>.
- Universal Church of the Kingdom of God. 2019. <https://www.universal.org>.
- von Sinner, Rudolf. 2012a. “Pentecostalism and Citizenship in Brazil: Between Escapism and Dominance.” *International Journal of Public Theology* 6: 99–117.
- von Sinner, Rudolf. 2012b. *The Churches and Democracy: Towards a Public Theology Focused on Citizenship*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock.
- Walsh, Arlene Sánchez. 2011. “Santidad, Salvación, Sanidad, Liberación: The Word of Faith Movement among Twenty-First-Century Latina/o Pentecostals.” In *Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Healing*, edited by Candy Gunther Brown, 151–168. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Making progress or perpetuating power? A look at (de)colonial approaches in theologies of migration

Amy Casteel

What does it mean to “enact” the *imago dei*? The majority of theological work on migration is from the point of view of the host or receiving communities and their response towards newcomers. This results in an observer’s view of the challenges of migration not the experiences of migrants themselves. Is there an underlying bias in the language they choose that, even unwittingly, perpetuates a colonial mindset? Analyzing 105 theological articles, chapters, and books written about migration, this paper briefly considers the anthropological stances towards migrants present in these works. These are compared with theological anthropological stances. Then welcome or hospitality, which are described as the appropriate response to newcomers, are also considered in light of the anthropologies. These differences are juxtaposed with practices of churches in Greece variously involved with resettled migrants.

Introduction

Several theologians across the globe confront formal and informal migration systems. Identifying both strengths and injustices, theologians addressing migration attempt to offer a balanced view. Gemma Tulud Cruz addresses injustices faced by Filipina migrant workers in Asia and the Middle East who often face circumstances which deny their human dignity (Cruz 2010). Hagen Kopp gives a compelling description of the difficulties migrants face in the implementation of policies attempting to block passage across the Mediterranean even before the 2015 surge of migrants (Kopp 2015). Daniel Groody expanded his focus from the southern USA border, making a broader theoretical argument to address the injustices of systems that propose to control migration as divides that need to be crossed (Groody 2016). Theologians are engaged in identifying and confronting these systems, but is there an underlying bias in the language they choose that, even unwittingly, perpetuates a colonial mindset?

Contemporary studies on religion in migration continue to be framed using ideas like ‘religion as a

The author is a Ph. D. candidate at the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, KU Leuven. Her previous work among internationally mobile youth and families led to encounters between her systematic theological training and the lived practices of individuals, sparking an academic interest in the intersections of religion, migration, and adolescent development. Currently she is working on a qualitative research project studying the lived religion of adolescents in Europe who have a migration background.

barrier’ or ‘religion as a coping factor’ in terms of acculturation, betraying an underlying view of migration as a problem. Studies which consider religion a tool that helps or hinders acculturation tend to highlight the risks of migration while downplaying or ignoring positive aspects. One repeated bias is that migrants who adhere to religion represent a negative risk. One example of this is “Migration as Theologizing Experience” by John Corrie (Corrie 2014). In the article, he considers whether Christian migrants to the UK might have something positive to offer local churches. He begins with the acknowl-

edgement that migration is neither wholly positive nor negative. His conclusion at the end of the article is that Christian migrants and local Christians should worship in separate services in order to avoid attempts at reverse mission. Throughout the article, Corrie characterizes newcomers as powerless, weak, and lacking resources attributing some of this to the process of migration. At best, this conflates a system which is designed to keep newcomers in a position of powerlessness with the person experiencing the system (Corrie 2014, 13–14). At worst, it perpetuates a view of Western Christians as hosts who are more properly Christian than newcomers, echoing attitudes of a colonial past.

Theologians, while identifying systems of injustice also often communicate some variation of this underlying bias. The majority of theological work on migration is from the point of view of the host or receiving communities and their response towards newcomers. This results in an observer's view of the challenges of migration not the experiences of migrants themselves. A smaller number of theological works consider the perspective of migrants. By focusing on the experience of migrants, Gemma Tulud Cruz, for example, explores areas of agency as well as areas of powerlessness (Cruz 2010). While migration does pose challenges unique to moving between countries, in many of these writings it is not the circumstances which migrants face that are problematized, but the people themselves.

In theological writing, the general category 'migrant' is problematized, troubled, or at risk. Religion is deployed as an integration tactic or viewed as an opponent in the process of conforming to the host society's norms. Even when newcomers share the same Christian faith, there are moves towards separation (Corrie 2014, 19–20). Still, rather than focus on the content of texts, such as the one above, the focus of this paper is the underlying assumptions on the part of writers. To do that, 105 academic texts which focus on migration theology or migration and religion were selected for further review from a database search. Selection was based on searches of the terms 'theology and migration' and 'theologizing migration' which yielded 297 texts in ATLA, 143 of which were peer reviewed. Excluding texts in languages other than English, Biblical exegesis, and missiology left 105. These selected chapters, articles, and books were published between 2009 and 2018. They reflect attitudes before and after the so-called 'surges' of asylum seekers in 2014 in the USA and in 2015 in Europe, where the majority of the authors

reside. What underlying bias is apparent in the choice of language that continues to exert power?

'Migrant' – a broad term

When using the term 'migrant,' writers rarely identify as migrants themselves. One theologian rather self-consciously admits that although their own international background "demographically fitted" the category of migrant, they choose to "construe this period of my life differently" (Fredericks 2016, 12). So that even while editing a book on how to better define migration for the field of theology, this author was careful to make a distinction between their self and, the given example – a migrant crossing the southern USA border without papers (Fredericks 2016, 12). On one hand, this illustrates the point of the author that the term 'migrant' is broad. Yet, on the other hand, this distinction also betrays an underlying assumption that the author has the privilege to choose the label or disregard it. That choice is not offered to the subjects in the book. What was intended as acknowledgement that one person's story may be more difficult or may be differently motivated is swallowed by the exercise of privilege.

It may seem that acknowledging that there is a diversity of experiences in migration, each requiring their own descriptive labels, is necessary for sociological or administrative purposes. However, does this not serve to underscore differences in privilege instead? One group claims the ability to create, apply, redefine or reject the labels offered to them. The rest are labeled—othered. By unquestioningly adopting the label 'migrant' to delineate the less privileged group and then ignoring or labeling other migration experiences as expatriates or educational migrants or diplomats or so on, are theologians inadvertently adopting an ambiguous anthropology? At the most basic level, a migrant is simply a person who moves.

This unacknowledged assumption, that the unworthy who move are migrants while the worthy who move are something else, divides the powerful and the powerless, the conqueror and the conquered. How can theology 'de-link' the terminology of migration from the powerful systems that control and define it (Mignolo 2007)?

The task seems quite difficult when some theologians appear to agree that migrants have less human value. John Corrie asserted that the "reality is that



Christian migrants, especially refugees and asylum seekers, are not always in a position to offer very much from their position of powerlessness when they are struggling to survive day to day in a system which is doing its best to discourage them” (Corrie 2014, 13). This statement identifies the power imbalance in the system (which withholds power). Nevertheless, it begins with an assessment of a lack of value in the people themselves. Clearly, there are many challenges and struggles that migrants face, especially in systems with which they are not yet familiar. However, encountering challenge and struggle has no reflection on one’s value. This makes it all the more shocking to see a theological work characterize migrants as having little or no value.

The above perspective perpetuates the assumption that what someone has to offer is judged in terms of power or position. However, Jesus often turned conventional thinking on its head. He affirmed the value of persons in his healings although the system judged them to be of little value. Ross Langmead, in his discussion of migration, points out that “Jesus consistently broke boundaries and reversed the social order in affirming the human dignity and blessedness of those on the margins of his society” (Langmead 2016, 175). With a few exceptions, the overall pattern of ministry modeled in the gospels regularly emphasized this subversive power of affirming human dignity.

The experience of migration is a human experience. While every person who crosses an international border experiences that crossing differently, they share the experience of crossing a border as a human. One of the most difficult tasks in researching and writing about migration is defining the term ‘migrant’. In its legal sense, it is a broadly inclusive term. In current social and political discussions, the term is largely pejorative, indicating an unworthiness or deficit of some sort. In this article the term ‘migrant’ is used in its broadest sense, referring to migration as an experience.

Migration is defined as moving, not as moving in dangerous conditions. The assumption that all people who migrate through an airport do not experience danger, is untrue. The assumption that all people who migrate in large groups are unskilled and illegal, is also untrue. The truth is that privileged migrants may also live through or leave dangerous situations: an adolescent (expatriate) who was airlifted out of a natural disaster zone and suffers from survivor guilt; a group of siblings who lived through much of the war in the former Yugoslavia because

their parents were aid workers. Alternatively, some unaccompanied minors are chosen to leave their communities because of their high social status and level of education as those most likely to succeed in a new place. Doctors and lawyers also leave their homes in the middle of the night to flee violence. Medical problems, domestic violence, human trafficking, and scores of other issues affect migrants from all walks of life, all socioeconomic, educational and religious backgrounds. One person’s story of migration is not more ‘migrant’ because it was more difficult or dangerous. A ‘migrant’ is an administrative label. It cannot be a distinct sociological type because a ‘migrant’ is not a type of person.

It bears repeating, a migrant is not a type of person; they are simply a person with the experience of migrating. Migration is a process with a beginning, a middle, and an end. A migrant is a person who has an experience of that process of moving—*migrating*—from one country to another. While the vast majority of people on earth continue to live within the borders of the country they were born in, the number of people living outside the borders of their country of origin continues to grow. This happens due to a variety of reasons and situations. Yet a person who migrates is not a type of person who fits into a demographic category, personality or cultural profile. On the contrary, there are a variety of people on the move. This is why attempts to define people who move internationally have fallen short across many fields, not only theology.

Attempts to define people ultimately rely on an anthropological stance. Zwi Werblowsky, in discussing the field of comparative religions, suggested that the study of religion requires the scholar to be very clear about the philosophical anthropology underscoring their work (Werblowsky 1975, 155). In his view, the anthropological stance is the foundation of any study of religion. Therefore, before articulating what is or is not practiced, before suggesting what can or should be practiced by and for people who have migrated, it is important to lay a clear anthropological foundation. Considering the various stances on the identity of migrants, a closer consideration of the theological anthropology supporting theologies of migration is needed.

Anthropological Questions

Not all theologians writing on migration make clear their own anthropological stance. Daniel Groody

however, argues that it is necessary to reflect explicitly on presumed theological anthropology. He begins with the *imago dei*. The idea of humans being made in the image of God seems like it would be a common starting point. To explore how often this anthropology is used, a text search using NVivo of the 105 theological writings described earlier, revealed only four sources mention the Latin term *imago dei*. Claudio Carvalhaes uses the term 6 times in “Worshipping with the Homeless” (Carvalhaes 2016). Nico Botha (Botha 2013) and Giaocchino Campese (Campese 2012) each use it once to refer to the 2009 work of Daniel Groody. Daniel Groody himself uses the term *imago dei* as one bridge to four divides between migration and theology (Groody 2009). These four divides together make up Groody’s anthropological stance in his theology of migration. Since *imago dei* is a foundational principle, it is surprising that it is not utilized more widely. While not using the Latin, other authors do refer to an anthropological stance based on humans being made in the image of God, the English description of the term.

Altogether, 21 texts engaged with human dignity, the image of God, or *imago dei* in some way among the 105 works in this analysis. Among these 21 texts, the predominant point of view was European/North American (11), with one author from Eastern Europe, three from South America, two from Africa, and four from countries in Asia. While there is certainly more room to cultivate more diversity, this sample demonstrates the wide range of authors acknowledging the need to identify a theological anthropological stance. What is more surprising is that the majority of texts in this sample have chosen not to mention an anthropological stance explicitly.

Daniel Groody (2009) has offered the most clear and well-developed anthropology for migration theology in recent work. This is why others quote him. First, Daniel Groody’s four divides are briefly presented. Then they are considered with the anthropological stance of Michelle A. Gonzalez and then, Miltiadis Vantsos and Marina Kiroudi. Exploring a small diversity of viewpoints around the concept of Christian anthropology contributes to a more robust foundation. The insights of this exploration of theological anthropology are then applied to selected works from the twenty-one reviewed and analyzed texts on migration and theology.

The strategy of Daniel Groody’s 2009 article “Crossing the Divide: Foundations of a Theology of

Migration and Refugees,” is to identify then offer bridges to four divides: problem-person, divine-human, human-human, and country-kingdom. These form his anthropological basis. Recognizing the complexity of relationships, Groody offers theological ‘bridges’ as a way to overcome the split. Admittedly, this description relies heavily on dualistic patterns rather than on considering an overall structure. Unfortunately, this starting point has not resulted in a conversation. Instead, authors seem to repeat just one of the four splits Groody identified, the *imago dei*, as the summary of an anthropological stance towards people who have migrated.

While Groody’s proposal offers a beginning, it is not a *fait accompli*. Regina Polak points out that Daniel Groody, along with other theologians, continues to refer to migrants as “others” or “aliens” (Polak 2015, 68). She acknowledges the difficulty in addressing the complexity of using terms such as ‘migrant’ while trying to avoid “strengthening their stigmatizing tendencies” (Polak 2015, 68). This need to acknowledge difference in a way that does not result in further stigmatization brings to mind the carefully structured anthropological stance of Michelle A. Gonzalez (Gonzalez 2014, 131–147). Beginning with hybridity in Latino/a theology as a foundational construction of identity, Gonzalez moves to embrace the hybridity of humans in general (Gonzalez 2014, 135). In this way, Gonzalez identifies the social—person hybridity as a common ground of difference between people rather than as a divide. From this awareness, she argues it is possible to acknowledge both positive and negative experiences as a way of relating with others, as well as a way of relating to the Incarnation (Gonzalez 2014, 136). Beginning her anthropology from a hybrid stance, Gonzalez allows for a range of personal and social locations that can be described as ‘Christian’ (Gonzalez 2014, 136). Gonzalez begins with difference as the starting point rather than similarity. In this way, her anthropological approach offers interaction with difference and complexity that leads to the realization that there is always difference. Rather than offering a singular ideal, Gonzalez argues for a concrete, embodied anthropology that acknowledges and embraces contradiction and difference.

At the other extreme is the concept that anthropology is best articulated in unity and oneness that presupposes a deep similarity. The Greek Orthodox ethicist, Miltiadis Vantsos, explains the practical application of the ethical theory of *imago dei* (Vant-



vos and Kiroudi 2007, 253). It begins with the supposition that since all humans are made in the image of God, they are entitled to human dignity. Greek Orthodox Christians are especially obliged to help meet practical needs of others, as they are able. While there is as yet no articulated Greek Orthodox response to migration, Vantsos, along with Marina Kiroudi, articulates the connection between philanthropy and an anthropological stance. In his explanation, human persons are made in the image of God and therefore also carry the likeness of God, the capacity to relate to God, and the opportunity to progress to a divine likeness (Vantsos and Kiroudi 2007, 253). Through these attributes, it becomes possible for humans to demonstrate compassion only because it is part of the identity of God (Vantsos and Kiroudi 2007, 253). The act of compassion overcomes distance between persons as a reflection of the compassion God demonstrated to humanity through the Incarnation. In theory, this line of thinking could be applied to any act of philanthropy although Vantsos limits his discussion to “the elderly, the orphans, and the poor” (Vantsos and Kiroudi 2007, 252). The discussion stops short of making an application of this philanthropic expression of God’s character, to migrants.

In either case, whether beginning from a uniform view of the image of God each person carries, or beginning from an embrace of diversity and difference, the expression of compassion is highly valued. In the 21 cases, this serves as a beginning of migration theology. The *imago dei* is the foundation of Christian anthropology and therefore, rightly, is the opening of the conversation. Yet that conversation must also acknowledge the creativity and diversity in Creation. Being made in God’s image does not necessarily imply a uniformity. Still, it is an anthropology that is itself shared by Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant theologies.

Acknowledging a common principle, a common basis on which as Christians we build a response to other humans – all other humans – is just a beginning. Claudio Carvalhaes cautions that “[t]he *Imago Dei* is often invoked but rarely enacted as a given for Christians” (Carvalhaes 2018, 10). There is a disconnection between knowledge and practice.

***Imago Dei* and ‘Migrant’ in Practice**

While there is agreement over the existence of *imago dei*, its application is uneven. Currently theologies

of migration, in line with the majority of migration studies, adopt administrative labels as *definitional* labels. The administrative attitude towards labels often overtakes the theory of *imago dei*. Dorottya Nagy notes, “the nation state paradigm dominates research on migration in all disciplines”, admitting that theology is no different (Nagy 2016, 42). She questions whether it is appropriate or morally right to continue “essentializing human identities by using the labels of migrants and non-migrants?” in her theological writings about migration (Nagy 2016, 42).

Power is exercised between the one who decides about the terms of belonging, and the one who can belong. In constructing a practical theology of migration, this struggle also needs to be acknowledged. When Daniel Groody introduced how he relates *imago dei* with a theology of migration, he cautioned, “theological terms include a set of moral demands as well” (Groody 2009, 642). Yet, in the streets, the theory is having trouble finding its feet: not only at borders but also in the communities where migrants arrive.

Power becomes evident in the process of welcome. This was clear in the churches I observed while in northern Greece in February 2019. I was able to attend services at five different Protestant Churches while there. Before attending, I was either invited by a member or I called and arranged the visit with staff. They knew I would be visiting as a researcher before I arrived. However, as a white Westerner I did not expect to blatantly stand out due to my ethnicity. This would mean that any power exerted in the welcome would not be based on my ethnicity, but on my status as newcomer.

All the churches I observed had a coffee/snack time after the service where people could talk and interact freely. As an outsider, I could choose whether to observe or participate. In some cases, I was not invited to participate. This could have been due to my role as researcher. In one case, although I was invited to participate and was introduced to the small group of people, they all turned back to their private conversations. I was left alone in the center of the room. In three cases, I was made part of conversations. The differences in welcome extended to other newcomers as well.

In one church, there were no obvious outsiders or visitors, and certainly no migrants. The other four churches all had a mixture of migrants and locals. Three of the five churches were led by Western immigrants trained in the West. One of the immi-

grant-led churches talked about reaching out to migrants as a mission, denying their own immigration status. Migrants from a range of migration status (refugees, immigrants, expats) as well as locals attended the other two. One of the Greek-led churches held a special Friday night service so they could provide transportation for a group of refugees when they had leave from their refugee camp. Each church had its own personality and way of interacting with the diversity of people present.

Each of these churches would consider themselves a place of welcome. Some were places that not only explicitly spoke of welcome but made room in their regular activities to offer welcome to newcomers. Others were places that had clear, although unspoken, boundaries about who was welcome (and who was not). Although none of the churches addressed *imago dei* in their services, on their websites, they all agree that people are made in the image of God. As I prepared this paper and visited these churches, I began to wonder what does it really mean to “enact” the *imago dei*?

A Welcome for the Image of God

Many theologians offer the concept of welcome or hospitality as the appropriate way to receive migrants. In the sample of 105 texts on migration and theology analyzed, 47 mention either welcome and/or hospitality. Many of these take the position that hospitality or welcome are a form of reception predicated on the statement of Jesus that providing for hunger, thirst, shelter and clothing – even for strangers – is equivalent to serving him (see Matthew 25: 31–46). Hospitality is offered as both a duty and as the ultimate answer. Other authors engage with the idea that welcome and hospitality encounter limits and entail risk (Campese 2012; Fredericks 2016). Cláudio Carvalhaes engages deeply with Derrida’s concept of the negative sides of hospitality, while Ross Langmead and Giaocchino Campese both allude to Derrida’s concept of hospitality more generally. In each of the three writings, there are examples of positive experiences of offering and receiving hospitality. Yet, Carvalhaes acknowledges that offering hospitality is not always positive; it can be inconvenient and uncomfortable to extend hospitality to people who have recently arrived.

How does extending hospitality, whether the experience is positive or negative, embody an anthropological stance? If one takes the position that mi-

grants have nothing of value to offer, then one takes a paternalistic stance: the migrant is child-like and not capable of caring for their own needs. This betrays a modified *imago dei* that another human is not quite the equal image of God. This stance is embodied by distribution ministries that focus on providing items. While this may meet immediate needs of thirst, hunger, shelter, it can easily become a transactional model. The intention to meet physical needs takes precedence over meeting emotional or spiritual needs.

Conversely, there is the option to ignore those outside of the church, behaving as if by being born in another place, some humans do not carry the image of God. This stance is embodied by churches that think of ministry with migrants as an extreme good work done by only the most radical believers. The danger is that hospitality-to-difference is not enacted as central to the identity of the church. The church is only focused on meeting its own internal needs. Yet, when Jesus named “the least of these,” the phrase implies those who are on the margins, ignored by society. An inward focus entirely ignores the image of God in the margins.

A third option is to offer a greeting instead of hospitality; a cup of coffee but no conversation. This stance initially acknowledges the image of God in another but considers hospitality to be equivalent to welcome or to a greeting on the street. There is no intention to meet physical, emotional, or spiritual needs. There is no willingness to risk or move beyond the limits of normative social graces.

These options seem stilted and unsatisfying to me. They may address some immediate physical needs of thirst, hunger, clothing, or shelter. But they do not address the emotional thirst, the relational hunger, the comfortable habits, or the devotional shelter that so many people who have moved long for. Neither do these options address the deep spiritual thirst for living water, hunger for the bread of life, need for the covering of the Spirit, or longing for the shelter of the Most High.

What does an embodied, welcoming anthropology that embraces difference look like? In order to offer a more open hospitality, “one has to lose something: space, money, identity, language, etc., even everything altogether...” Carvalhaes challenges the borders of what hosts are expected to give (Carvalhaes 2010, 50). Such a completely open hospitality is radical. It is true that relationally engaging with others costs us something. It is not without risk, and hospitality is not always accepted. Truly offering an



open, welcoming hospitality to another person means a willingness, an openness to the risk, to the cost.

Consequences

Rather than theories or formulas, this article will close with acknowledging the consequences of ignoring an uncritical and confused anthropological stance. The first is the consequence to ourselves as theologians engaged with migration. Without critically addressing what gives humans dignity, one eventually becomes entangled in defending the mistreatment of other humans. The ease with which this occurs in both small and large ways, is in itself significant. Continuing to assume a paternalistic posture towards non-Westerners betrays the lingering effects of colonial thinking which is another consequence altogether.

Perpetuating confused anthropological stances becomes enacted in practice. Just as theologians need a clear epistemological foundation, so do Christian ministries and individual Christians. Engaging with the image of God as diverse and complex makes recognizing the image of God in a face unlike our own much more likely.

Finally, whether writing theology or cooperating in practical ministry with and for migrants, asserting a position of power devalues humans with an experience of migration. Instead, we are challenged to enact the generous likeness and presence of God among those on the margins of society; challenged to risk something in order to demonstrate welcome in tangible ways. Choosing descriptive language that balances power rather than perpetuating imbalance, challenges theologians who write about migration to rethink the terms we use and the way we employ them. It asks us to commit fully to acknowledging the image of God in all and thus risk losing the power of naming and labeling.

References

- Botha, Nico A. 2013. "A Theological Perspective on Migrants and Migration Focusing on the Southern African Development Community (SADC)." *Missionalia* 41 (2): 104–119.
- Campese, Giaocchino. 2012. "The Irruption of Migrants: Theology of Migration in the 21st Century." *Theological Studies* 73 (1): 3–32.
- Carvalhoes, Cláudio. 2010. "Borders, Globalization and Eu-charistic Hospitality." *Dialog* 49 (1): 45–55.
- Carvalhoes, Cláudio. 2016. "Worshiping with the Homeless: Foreign Ecclesiologies." In *Church in an Age of Global Migration*, edited by Susanna Snyder, 131–145. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Carvalhoes, Cláudio. 2018. "We Are All Immigrants! Imago Dei, Citizenship, and The Im/Possibility of Hospitality." *Practical Matters Journal*. <http://practicalmattersjournal.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Carvalhoes-We-are-all-Immigrants-2.pdf>.
- Corrie, John. 2014. "Migration as a Theologizing Experience: The Promise of Interculturality for Transformative Mission." *Mission Studies* 31 (1): 9–21.
- Cruz, Gemma Tulud. 2010. *An Intercultural Theology of Migration: Pilgrims in the Wilderness*. Leiden; Boston: Brill.
- Frederiks, Martha. 2016. "Religion, Migration, and Identity: a Conceptual and Theoretical Exploration." In *Religion, Migration and Identity*, edited by Martha Frederiks and Dorottya Nagy, 9–29. Leiden: Brill.
- Gonzalez, Michelle A. 2014. "Difference, Body, and Race." In *Questioning the Human: Toward a Theological Anthropology for the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Yves De Maeseneer and Ellen Van Stichel. 131–147. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Groody, Daniel G. 2009. "Crossing the Divide: Foundations of a Theology of Migration and Refugees." *Theological Studies* 70 (3): 638–667.
- Groody, Daniel G. 2016. "Migration: A Theological Vision." In *Intersections of Religion and Migration*, edited by Jennifer B. Saunders, Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, and Susanna Snyder, 225–240. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kopp, Hagen. 2015. "Report From the Borders." In *Migration as a Sign of the Times: Towards a Theology of Migration*, edited by Judith Gruber and Sigrid Rettenbacher, 5–14. Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV.
- Langmead, Ross. 2016. "Refugees as Guests and Hosts: Towards a Theology of Mission among Refugees and Asylum Seekers." In *Religion, Migration and Identity*, edited by Martha Frederiks and Dorottya Nagy, 171–188. Leiden: Brill.
- Mignolo, Walter. 2007. "Delinking." *Cultural Studies* 21 (2–3): 449–514.
- Nagy, Dorottya. 2016. "Minding Methodology Theology-Missiology and Migration Studies." in *Religion, Migration and Identity: Methodological and Theological Explorations*, edited by Martha Frederiks and Dorottya Nagy, 30–59. Leiden; Boston: Brill.
- Polak, Regina. 2015. "Migration as a Sign of the Times: Questions and Remarks from a Practical-Theological Perspective." In *Migration as a Sign of the Times: Towards a Theology of Migration*, edited by Judith Gruber and Sigrid Rettenbacher, 47–78. Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV.
- Silva, Nicola D, Frank R. Dillon, Toni R. Verdejo, Mariana Sanchez, and Mario De La Rosa. 2017. "Acculturative Stress, Psychological Distress, and Religious Coping



- Among Latina Young Adult Immigrants.” *The Counseling Psychologist* 45 (2): 213–236.
- Suarez-Morales, Lourdes and Barbara Lopez. 2009. “The Impact of Acculturative Stress and Daily Hassles on Pre-adolescent Psychological Adjustment: Examining Anxiety Symptoms.” *The Journal of Primary Prevention* 30 (3–4): 335–349.
- Suárez-Orozco, Carola, Frosso Motti-Stefanidi, Amy Marks and Dalal Katsiaficas, “An Integrative Risk and Resilience Model for Understanding the Adaptation of Immigrant-origin Children and Youth.” *American Psychologist* 73 (6):781–796.
- Swamy, Muthuraj. 2017. “Refugee Migration Today: Challenges for Doing Theology.” *Theology* 120 (5): 334–346.
- Vantsos, Miltiadis and Marina Kiroudi. 2007. “An Orthodox View of Philanthropy and Church Diaconia.” *Christian Bioethics* 13 (3): 251–268. doi: 10.1080/13803600701732082.
- Werblowsky, R. J. Zwi. 1975. “On Studying Comparative Religion: some Naive Reflections of a simple-minded non-philosopher.” *Religious Studies* 11 (2): 145–156.

Sentipensando Latina/o/x Theoethics

Néstor Medina

Taking the work of decolonial scholar Arturo Escobar, this article explores the notion of *sentipensar* (lit. thinking feeling) and its possible intersections and implications for Latina/o/x theoethics. The concept of *sentipensar* signals a different type of rationality by which people are able to account for their immediate environment, history, and identity. Latina/o/x theoethics embodies its own kind of decolonial *sentipensar* beyond inherited Eurocentric intellectual frames. Latina/o/x scholars ground theoethics in their daily experience of *Lo cotidiano* (the everyday), by anchoring their construction of knowledge on *Lo cultural*, and by uncovering the violence of empire and colonization in their own ethno-bio-cultural mestizaje.

Sentipensar as Decolonial Category

As an expression of decolonial thinking, Arturo Escobar proposes the notion of *sentipensar*. According to him, *sentipensar con el territorio* implies thinking with the heart and with the mind, or *co-razonar*.¹ He adopts the term from Fals Borda, who in turned borrowed it from the communities that live near, and draw their sustenance from, the rivers in northern Colombia, who make up what is known as *la cultura riverena* or the culture of the peoples of the rivers. These communities, Borda explains, further enrich the notion of *sentipensante* pointing to how they reflect and think with their heart in intimate relation to and in balance with their immediate natural environment. These river people, Borda claims, follow the example of endurance and persistence of the *Icotea* turtle; they display the qualities of endurance in the midst of life's setbacks and have the

Néstor Medina teaches Religious Ethics and Culture at Emmanuel College, Victoria University, University of Toronto. His studies theo-ethics from contextual, liberationist, intercultural, and post/decolonial perspectives. He explores the multiple intersections between religious discourses, race & cultural theory, and ethics. Among his publications are *Christianity, Empire, and the Spirit* (Brill 2018) and "A Decolonial Primer", *Toronto Journal of Theology*, 32 no. 2 (2017): 279–287.

knowledge to overcome them.² For his part, Escobar tells us that *sentipensar* points to the forms in which territorialized communities have learned the art of living. As he explains, it is a call – which I would describe as an ethical call – for people to *sentipensar* with the local cultures and knowledges of the peoples in their own geographic and territorial spaces instead of using external decontextualized knowledge that undergird the notions of "development," "growth," and even "economy."

1 This is a play of words. In Spanish, the word for heart is *corazón* and the word for reasoning is *razonar*. In Spanish, when one becomes aware of things beyond the mental processes, what we would call intuitions, then the Spanish word *corazonada* is used. *Co-razonar* is thus reasoning intuitively with the heart and the emotions. See (Escobar 2014, 16).

2 See his interview: "Fals Borda, Sentipensante," Youtube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LbJWqetRuMo> (accessed March 19, 2019).

Focusing primarily on Afro-Colombian contexts and secondarily on Indigenous communities and their concerns, Escobar discusses how these multiple communities weave life / *tejen la vida* as they interact with their immediate environment, always keeping in mind a sense of relationship with the land, the rivers, and the rest of nature. Their ways are radically different from the globalizing, neoliberal, capitalist calculi which turn everything into products of consumption and promote rapacious forms of development and economic growth. These calculi operate without factoring in the costs of environmental despoliation through extractivism, the destruction of entire ecosystems, and the erosion of the millenarian cultures and sense of community of the inhabitants of the region.

Re-defining *Sentipensar*

On one hand, I celebrate *sentipensar* as another crucial category of the larger decolonial lexicon. It harnesses the epistemological impetus from Indigenous and Afrodescendant communities in the Americas, though these impetuses are not exclusive to them. The term redraws the scope of intellectual and epistemological engagement away from inherited anthropocentric and instrumental reasoning-centred perspectives, to allow for other forms of knowledge and living life that take place with profound respect for and in close interaction with nature, animals, and other communities— what he calls, other ways of being or ontologies.

On the other hand, I understand the way in which Escobar highlights different ways of being / *formas de ser*; that is, the multiplicity of ways in which different peoples live life in close interaction and interdependence with their immediate environment as ontologies. However, it seems to me that there is still an operative Eurocentrism in his understanding of “being.” He, along with Nelson Maldonado-Torres’ in his proposal of “coloniality of being” (Maldonado-Torres 2007), depends too much on Heidegger’s *Dasein*. In other words, they understand being as the intellectual and existential activity and level of consciousness that takes place as individuals focus in on themselves, the meaning of their existence as individuals, and their relationship to the world (Heidegger 1962). Admittedly, Escobar attempts to go beyond ideas about individualist forms of being and towards *formas de ser* or ontologies which epitomize communality and interdepen-

dence. I propose, however, that his emphasis on *formas de ser* can be enriched by the understanding of being in Spanish: that of having two translations which do not exist in English, *ser* and *estar*. The expressions in Spanish: *ser* and *estar* are translated as *being* in English, but they convey different postures and intellectual orientations, which, I would argue, point us to different aspects of *sentipensar*. Grammatically, *ser* refers to something that is permanent and unchangeable. It assumes a finished product. Meanwhile, *estar* refers to a state of being or feeling, or occupying a space, a location or time, but which is not fixed, is bound to change. It is therefore more fluid and relational, with a deeper sense of becoming. The crucial contribution of *estar* is the celebration of interaction with the world and deeper levels of interdependence with nature through *active in-action*; that is, by waiting and learning to live with the landscape, the land and rivers, without wanting to aggressively change it, dominate it, or exploit it for profit. Here, the work of Rodolfo Kusch can prove helpful (Kusch 1970; Kusch 1975). He reminds us how Indigenous cosmologies preserve life in all its tensions. He draws attention to the connections between *ser* and *estar* as the two complementing sides of the ontological understanding of life that the indigenous communities teach, and which ought to be kept in tension to preserve an ontological equilibrium. *Estar*, he claims, antecedes *ser* because it is the space from which life emerges / *se da la vida*. He is critical of the potential fragmenting character of *ser* by focusing on the individual and which can dangerously become aggressive and utilitarian with the rest of nature. This impetus could be contrasted to the active and attentive waiting on nature in *estar*, which is manifest in agrarian cultures (Kusch 1975).

Along the same lines, and somewhat problematically, Escobar’s focus on different *formas de ser* as ontologies leads him to reject the notion of culture, even while he preserves the term *lo cultural* (the cultural). He rejects “culture” because of inherited Eurocentric universalizing claims which disallow other epistemologies. Unfortunately, instead of opening the category “culture,” Escobar seems to take for granted the European anthropocentric intellectual tradition and understanding of culture, prompting him to replace it with the much more abstract—and perhaps even more Eurocentric—category “ontology,” to speak about the concrete ways Afrocolombians live life in relation with their immediate environment and context.



I certainly agree with Escobar's evaluation of the term "culture" for its residual Eurocentric underpinnings which bolster the belief of a one world system (*unimundismo*) which encompasses all of reality.³ Yet, here Escobar seems to have thrown the baby out with the bathwater. The notion of "culture" (as an unqualified category and in the singular) is most definitely a technology of the modern colonizing project insofar as it contributed to asserting the "superiority" of Europeans over the rest of the world. But the present reconfiguration of the world by way of multiple cultural communities can hardly be understood in such terms. The plural *cultures*, specific adjectival modification such as Afro-Latina/o culture, Maya culture, etc., and the notion of *the cultural*, to speak about how different human collectives live life and interact with the environment and with each other socially, seem to most effectively communicate what Escobar is attempting to say by using the abstract notion of *ontologies*.⁴

Latina/o/x Theoethics as "Decolonial" *Sentipensar*

An emphasis on the cultural illuminates other discourses and debates in which people have also been wrestling with these issues articulating "decolonizing" paradigms for some time. In what follows, I explore some key points of intersection between Escobar's proposal of *sentipensar* and one such discourse,

–Latina/o/x⁵ theoethics.⁶ For the last 50 years, Latina/o/x scholars have insisted on reframing the theological, ethical, and pastoral tasks from the vantage point of the faith experiences and cultural traditions of Latina/o/xs. Among other categories, their articulation of the central role of *lo cotidiano*, the central role of the cultural dimension, and the notion of *mestizaje* epitomize their own forms of *sentipensar*

3 According to Escobar, there are different understandings of culture: one, culture as symbolic structure, which corresponds with the most accepted views among anthropologists and cultural studies. And two, culture as radical difference, which plays out in terms such as "civilization", "cosmovision", "epistemic difference", and "communitarian logic", which, for him, complexify ideas of culture as symbolic structure. See (Escobar 2014, 17).

4 For a fuller discussion of the cultural as a proper way to speak of the processes of culturalization see (Medina 2018, Chapter 1).

5 The search for appropriate labels to speak about these diverse communities has become an intellectual minefield. For some time, many scholars have appropriated LatinX in an attempt to include members of the LGBTQAI+ communities. While I agree that the function of any label must be as inclusive as possible, here I agree with Nicole Trujillo-Pagán who demonstrates that the use of LatinX undermines the inherent diversity of Latina communities. More specifically for women, she claims that LatinX neutralizes claims of sexism by giving the appearance of gender neutrality. See (Trujillo-Pagán 2018). It is for this reason that I adopt the variation Latina/o/x because it preserves the internal diversity of these communities even while attempting to include and account for members of the LGBTQAI+ who have ancestral connections with Latin America or who are Latina/o/x. I am adopting this variation as Jeremy Cruz, Neomi DeAnda and I articulated it in "Respondiendo a las demandas históricas: Analyses of the Transformative Legacy of Samuel Ruiz García of Chiapas," (Medina, DeAnda and Cruz 2013). For further details of this variation see also (De Anda 2015, 169).

6 I use the term theoethics to highlight the interrelationship between ethics and theology as expressed by Latina/o/x scholars. By contrast to traditional approaches that seek to preserve the disciplinary boundaries between theology and ethics, Latinas/os/xs do not write theology and ethics separately. Speaking of Latina/o/x theology and ethics does not do justice to the work of Latina/o/x scholars. Implicit in Latina/o/x "theological" perspectives are ethical implications and principles. Similarly, implicit in Latina/o/x "ethics" are theological insights, affirmations, and principles. Theology and ethics are not understood as being separate. In fact, they are viewed as corresponding and mutually informing. Hence my use of theoethics. Moreover, I speak of theoethics because Latina/o/x communities do not live life in academic silos. Rather, their deep-seated religious devotions, practices, and beliefs (theology) carry with them the necessary material by which their morality is defined and into which their actions for justice are rooted. Finally, I use theoethics as an intentional decolonial move away from traditional hard-and-fast disciplinary boundaries. If ethics corresponds with the ways in which different communities reflect upon questions of morality and human activity, then theology corresponds with the content with which those notions of morality and human activity are informed, inspired, and provoked.

and as part of doing theoethics in a decolonial key. Their proposal points to how Latinas/os/xs incarnate other forms of living life/ of being, and in so doing they weave and articulate other forms of knowledge, other epistemologies. In what follows, I briefly discuss some of the intersecting aspects between these categories and decolonial thinking.

A. Lo Cotidiano.

Lo cotidiano, or the everyday, became one of the central categories of Latina/o/x theoethics for its potentially transformative power to change social structures of oppression and marginalization. According to Latinas/os/xs, *lo cotidiano* is the juncture at which people confront and struggle against the social, political, and economic forces that prevent Latina/o/x communities from thriving.⁷ *Lo cotidiano*, claims Ada María Isasi-Díaz, describes the spaces where people live and experience life, where they choose survival and contribute to struggles for survival (Isasi-Díaz 1993). Meanwhile, Gilberto Cavazos-González tells us that *lo cotidiano* and *cotidianeidad* describe the commonplace, the daily routine where the mundane takes place but also where people are surprised by the wonderful gift of life breaking through, even as they struggle with the reality of sorrow and the difficulties of life (Cavazos-González 2010, 2). It is for this reason that María Pilar Aquino insists that in *lo cotidiano* people (her focus is on women) experience sin and grace, hope and despair, resistance and oppression, loneliness, and solidarity (Aquino 2000, 102–108). Thus, *lo cotidiano* constitutes a unique hermeneutics that permits people both to interpret reality as simultaneously one of oppression and resistance, while providing them with the ethical tools to counter all that threatens life (Aquino 2000, 13, 29). *Lo cotidiano*, that is, life as it is actually lived also constitutes the dimension at which people experience the divine, express their faith in God, and imagine the possible futures for subsequent generations.

Crucial for our decolonial purposes, *lo cotidiano* constitutes a different epistemology and theological source which draws on community and the individual in relation to others as the *locus* for the creation of a liberative ethics, irreducible to the sphere of the “domestic,” the “private,” or the “individual.” (Espín 2006, 5) Consistent with the Latin American libera-

tion theological understanding of praxis as preceding theological reflection, Latina/o/x scholars argue that *lo cotidiano* describes the frontlines of theological knowledge and guides ethical action. It is both the temporal juncture at which people actively resist their condition of marginalization as well as the ethical frame from which to act, imagine, envision, and struggle for a different society. The crucial insight is that God is revealed in *lo cotidiano*. Also, the everyday is the space in which people come to make sense of and express their faith in God. Professional theological knowledge is but a second or even a third movement because it draws its knowledge and insights from this concrete historical context where people live life and express their faith (Riebe-Estrella 1999, 210–213).

B. The Cultural.

For Latinas/os/xs, *lo cotidiano* is intimately interwoven with the cultural dimension, since inherited cultural traditions define, shape, and condition how people understand the world, interact with each other, and respond to the divine (Espín 2007; Espín 2006). There is a resonance here with Escobar’s notion of ontologies. Latina/o/x theoethicists understand *lo cultural* not only as a set of interpersonal protocols or social interaction. Rather, the cultural refers much more broadly to the way in which Latinas/os/xs understand life, interact with the environment and with each other, and respond to the divine. In other words, Latina/o/x communities confront reality and live daily life as Latinas/os/xs: they feel joy, love, hope, and despair as well as celebrate their faith, wrestle with moral decisions, approach God, and think theology in the manner in which their Latina/o/x cultural traditions allow them. In this manner, Latinas/os/xs’ way of living through the cultural is a rejection of inherited Eurocentric ideas of a universal human, notions of a universal culture, or the pretense of universally applicable theoethical principles. Resonating with Escobar’s category here, Latinas/os/xs reject the notion of *unimundismo*. They insist instead that *lo cultural* is a central feature, vantage point of enunciation, and source of theological knowledge. The affirmation of the cultural is not simply the way by which Latina/o/x scholars attempt to be contextual. It is rather an affirmation that all ethnoracial communities are also conditioned by their own cultural traditions. Inherited Eurocentric theoethical affirmations are also the result of specific cultural traditions, episte-

7 See (Aquino 2000; Isasi-Díaz 1993).



mologies, and contexts; they are also specific responses to contextual questions and challenges. A crucial point is that each cultural tradition epitomizes its own global view of the world and a unique epistemology, ethics, and theology (Fornet-Betancourt 2002).

It must also be said that the endorsement of the cultural as a site of theological knowledge is not a romantic wholesale acceptance of Latina/o/x cultural traditions. At various moments, Latina/o/x scholars have been strongly critical of intra-Latina/o/x cultural attitudes and practices such as androcentric male chauvinism (*machismo*) (Aquino, 2001; Aquino, 1992), racism (De La Torre 2006), and attitudes of discrimination against members of the LGBTQAI+ communities (Espín 2000), all of which denigrate the humanity of members of their own communities. At the same time, the celebration of Latina/o/x cultural traditions by Latina/o/x scholars involves an introspective look to reclaim their ancestral forms of knowledge (indigenous and African). These forms of knowledge have often been suppressed because of the operative Eurocentric forces of assimilation and the social structures of discrimination established by the dominant culture, which many Latinas/os/xs have internalized.

For instance, on one hand, as a Latino Canadian, I celebrate the centrality of the cultural which allows for an openness to cultural multiplicity. On the other hand, the cultural can also serve as a critical lens for white liberal proposals which fail to deliver as it is the case with the Canadian affirmation of multiculturalism. It did nothing to challenge the expectations and dominance of linguistic and cultural English or French performativity in the public sphere, while consigning the languages of other cultural traditions to the private sphere (Medina 2013; Fleras 2014).

C. Mestizaje.

Mestizaje is the third aspect of Latina/o/x theoethics that I wish to highlight for its decolonizing impetus. In many ways, *mestizaje* brings *lo cotidiano* and the cultural together by emphasizing the complex processes of biological, cultural, and religious intermixture, which resulted from double colonization (by Spanish and Portuguese first and the USA second) (Elizondo 1983). In responding to the social, political, racialized, and cultural experiences of discrimination, Latina/o/x scholars insist that Latina/o/x theoethics cannot be done without revisiting

and interrogating the history of violent colonization (Elizondo 1978). Building on class analysis as done by Latin American liberation scholars and interrogating their history of colonization through the engagement of *mestizaje*, Latina/o/xs uncovered the crossings of multiple forms of social oppression and exclusion (ethnoracial, cultural, social, economic, gender, sexual orientation). Colonization in the Americas was not the simple act of imposition of empire over other peoples and territories alone. Rather, it impacted and shaped all aspects of the lives of Indigenous and African peoples and their descendants through the reality of intermixture with Europeans: it redefined their world, their religious traditions, their cultures, and their forms of knowledge.

The adoption of *mestizaje*, that is, the experience and condition of being mixed (Indigenous, African, and European), is then a critical reminder of this violent history. At the same time, by reclaiming *mestizaje* Latinas/os/xs offer a counter-narrative which accounts for and at the same time challenges the violence of colonization as well as ideologies of ethnoracial and cultural purity. Similarly, by adopting *mestizaje* Latinas/os/xs challenge pervasive notions of identity as self-contained, airtight, finished products. Instead, they demonstrate that identities are porous and the result of complex processes of intermixture (Segovia 1996, 203). The adoption of *mestizaje* is decolonizing in content and impetus. It encourages Latinas/os/xs to move away from inherited colonizing ideas of human existence, ethnoracial and cultural identity, and to seek out other forms of knowledge that until now have remained absent in mainstream debates. In a decolonial vein, *mestizaje* is reclaimed as a crucial site and source of theoethical knowledge.⁸

Latina/o/x Theoethics and Decoloniality: (Dis)Connections

Despite the positive decolonial thrust of Latina/o/x theoethics, presently it is undergoing self-critical internal reconfigurations. To this end, the way in which *mestizaje* is seen as promoting Eurocentric ideas and cultural and ethnoracial whitening is being interrogated by younger scholars (Medina 2009; Aquino 2015; González 2006). In the emerging dis-

8 For a fuller discussion on *mestizaje* see (Medina 2009).

courses, Latina/o/x theoethics could be enriched by Nelson Maldonado-Torres' notion of coloniality of being (Maldonado-Torres 2007). By the same token, the idea of "coloniality of being" which focuses on the way in which present capitalist structures shape how people live and behave, could be enriched by a Latina/o/x exploration of how *mestizaje*, with its long history and ideological baggage, has also been an expression of colonizing structures of being.

As a different episteme which stems from peoples' lived experiences and multiple histories, the notion of *mestizaje* serves as a cipher anticipating the divine dismantling of racialized, cultural, and religious structures of power (Medina 2020). It also epitomizes an ethical praxis and ethos, as well as pastoral approaches, unwilling to succumb to easy recipes of "inclusion," "unity," and "hospitality." Instead, *Mestizaje* allows for an envisioning of the spaces necessary for the creation of an intercultural, interreligious, interethnic, and multilingual society, a society where there is room for many worlds, many histories, many ancestral lines, and many epistemologies. In so doing, it invites a subversion of false notions of purity, homogeneity, unity, and whiteness.

Latina/o/x theoethics are articulated by drawing on people's experiences. Scholars reclaim and affirm their cultural traditions, historical experience of *mestizaje*, and the space of *lo cotidiano* as forms of knowledge which go beyond abstract categories alone. Through these experience-based categories, Latina/o/x scholars identify the intersection of forms of oppression: gender, ethnoracial, cultural, and economic, as constitutive aspects of the colonial apparatus especially in today's globalizing neoliberal capitalist networks which promote the commodification of life itself. In this way, Latinas/os/xs anticipated the concept of intersectionality. Latinas are also part of the longer history of intersectional feminist discourses along with Gloria Anzaldúa and Chela Sandoval, among others. By interrogating their own history of colonization and its accompanying destructive social, cultural, political, and economic effects, Latina/o/x scholars resonate with Anibal Quijano's notion of coloniality of power (Quijano 2000). Their insistence on reclaiming their own cultural traditions created the conditions for a distancing from inherited Eurocentric forms of knowledge even before decolonial thinking was articulated in the social sciences (Mignolo 2007; Castro-Gómez and Grosfoguel 2007). In these and other ways, Latinas/os/xs already include attempts to

"decolonize" ethics and theology by emphasizing the concrete lived experiences of colonization, oppression, marginalization, and poverty as points of departure. Moreover, decolonization is a feature in Latina/o/x ethical and theological discourses through the identification of colonization, along with its history and present expressions, as an important factor that must be accounted for in theoethical considerations. Stated differently, Latina/o/x theoethics is a form of *sentipensar con el pueblo y por la vida del pueblo*/with the people and for the lives of the people. In this way they embody what Adolfo Albán Achinte calls disruptive epistemes (Albán Achinte 2012).

References

2008. "Orlando Fals Borda-Sentipensante." (Video) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LbJWqetRuMo>.
- Albán Achinte, Adolfo. 2012. "Epistemes 'otras': ¿epistemes disruptivas?" KULA 6: 22–34.
- Aquino, Jorge, A. 2015. "Mestizaje: The Latina/o Religious Imaginary in the North American Racial Crucible." In *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Latino/a Theology*, edited by Orlando Espín, 283–311. West Sussex, UK; Mjalden, MA: Wiley Blackwell.
- Aquino, María Pilar. 1992. "Perspectives on a Latina's Feminist Liberation Theology." Translated by John W. Diercksmeier. In *Frontiers of Hispanic Theology in the United States*, edited with an introduction by Allan Figueroa Deck, 23–40. Maryknoll: Orbis Books.
- Aquino, María Pilar. 2000. "Our Cry for Life: Feminist Theology from Latin America." Translated by Dina Livingstone. Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers.
- Aquino, María Pilar. 2001. "Justice Upholds Peace: A Feminist Approach." Translated by Paul Burns. In *The Return of the Just War*, vol. 2, edited by María Pilar Aquino and Mieth Dietmar. Concilium, 102–110. London: SCM Publishers.
- Castro-Gómez, Santiago, and Ramón Grosfoguel. 2007. "Prólogo. Giro decolonial, teoría crítica y pensamiento heterárquico." In *El Giro Decolonial: Reflexiones para una Diversidad Epistémica Más Allá del Capitalismo Global*, edited by Santiago Castro-Gómez and Ramón Grosfoguel, 9–23. Bogotá: Siglo del Hombre; Universidad Central; Instituto de Estudios Sociales Contemporáneos; Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, Instituto Pensar.
- Cavazos-González, Gilberto. 2010. "The Christian Spiritual Life, Justice, and Liberation." Eugene: Wipf & Stock.
- Cruz, Jeremy, Neomi DeAnda and Néstor Medina. 2013. "Respondiendo a las demandas históricas: Analyses of the Transformative Legacy of Samuel Ruiz García of Chiapas." *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology: Samuel Ruiz* 19 (1): 2–8.



- De La Torre. 2006. "Rethinking Mulatez." In *Rethinking Latino(a) Religion and Identity*, edited by Miguel De La Torre and Gastón Espinosa, 158–175. Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press.
- DeAnda, Neomi. 2015. "Jesus the Christ." In *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Latino/a Theology*, edited by Orlando Espín. West Sussex, UK; Mjalden, MA: Wiley Blackwell.
- Elizondo, Virgilio. 1978. "Mestizaje: The Dialectic of Cultural Birth and the Gospel." San Antonio: Mexican American Cultural Center.
- Elizondo, Virgilio. 1983. "Galilean Journey: The Mexican-American Promise." Maryknoll: Orbis Books.
- Escobar, Arturo. 2014. "Sentipensar con la tierra. Nuevas lecturas sobre desarrollo, territorio y diferencia." Medellín: Ediciones UNAULA.
- Espín, Orlando O. 2000. "The State of U. S. Latino/a Theology: An Understanding." *Perspectivas: Hispanic Theological Initiative Occasional Paper Series* (3): 19–55.
- Espín, Orlando O. 2006. "Traditioning: Culture, Daily Life and Popular Religion, and Their Impact on Christian Tradition." In *Futuring Our Past: Explorations in the Theology of Tradition*, edited by Orlando O. Espín and Gary Macy, 1–22. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.
- Espín, Orlando O. 2007. *Grace and Humanness: Theological Reflections Because of Culture*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.
- Fleras, Augie. 2014. "Racisms in Multicultural Canada: Paradoxes, Politics, and Resistance." Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press.
- Fornet-Betancourt, Raúl. 2002. "An Alternative to Globalization: Theses for the Development of an Intercultural Philosophy." Translated by Mario Sáenz. In *Latin American Perspectives on Globalization: Ethics, Politics and Alternative Visions*, edited by Mario Sáenz, 230–236. New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- González, Michelle A. 2006. "What About Mulatez? An Afro-Cuban Contribution." In *Futuring Our Past: Explorations in the Theology of Tradition*, edited by Orlando O. Espín and Gary Macy, 180–203. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.
- Heidegger, Martin. 1962. "Being and Time. Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson." New York: Harper and Row.
- Isasi-Díaz, Ada María. 1993. "En la Lucha / In the Struggle: Elaborating A Mujerista Theology." Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Kusch, Rodolfo. 1970. "El pensamiento indígena americano. Biblioteca Cajica de Cultura Universal." Puebla, México: Editorial José M. Cajica, Jr., S. A.
- Kusch, Rodolfo. 1975. "América profunda. Enfoques Latinoamericanos." Buenos Aires: Editorial BONUM.
- Maldonado-Torres, Nelson. 2007. "On the Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the Development of a Concept." *Cultural Studies* 21 (2–3): 240–70.
- Medina, Néstor. 2009. "Mestizaje: (Re)Mapping 'Race, Culture, and Faith in Latina/o Catholicism.'" Maryknoll: Orbis Books.
- Medina, Néstor. 2013. "Rethinking Liberation: Toward a Canadian Latin@ Theology." In *The Reemergence of Liberation Theologies: Models for the Twenty-First Century: New Approaches to Religion and Power*, edited by Thia Cooper, 77–87. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Medina, Néstor. 2018. "Christianity, Empire, and the Spirit: (Re)Configuring Faith and the Cultural." Leiden: Brill.
- Medina, Néstor. 2020. "(De)Cyphering Mestizaje; Encrypting Lived Faith: Simultaneous Promise and Problem." In *Disruptive Cartographers: A Preferential Option for Culture*, edited by Miguel H. Díaz, with a foreword by Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi.
- Mignolo, Walter D. 2007. "El pensamiento decolonial: Desprendimiento y apertura." In *El Giro Decolonial: Reflexiones para una Diversidad Epistémica Más Allá del Capitalismo Global*, edited by Santiago Castro-Gómez and Ramón Grosfoguel, 25–46. Bogotá, Colombia: Siglo del Hombre; Universidad Central; Instituto de Estudios Sociales Contemporáneos; Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, Instituto Pensar.
- Nicole Trujillo-Pagán. 2018. "Crossed Out by LatinX: Gender Neutrality and Genderblind Sexism." *Latino Studies* 16 (3): 396–406. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41276-018-0138-7>.
- Quijano, Anibal. 2000. "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America." *Nepantla: Views from the Margins* 1 (3): 533–80.
- Riebe-Estrella, Gary. 1999. "Theological Education as Convivencia." In *From the Heart of Our People: Latino/a Explorations in Catholic Systematic Theology*, edited by Orlando O. Espín and Miguel H. Díaz, 209–216. Maryknoll: Orbis Books.
- Segovia, Fernando F. 1996. "In the World but not of It: Exile As a Locus for a Theology of the Diaspora." In *Hispanic / Latino Theology: Challenge and Promise*, edited by Ada María Isasi-Díaz and Fernando F. Segovia, 195–217. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

Decoloniality and Liberating Hope at the Border: The Case of El Faro Border Church in Friendship Park, California, USA

Susanne Johnson

This paper is a practical theological inquiry into liturgical practice and popular visual art used in the trans-border ecclesial community known as the El Faro Border Church situated on the U.S.–Mexico border in California, whereby participants imagine and perform a decolonial counter-narrative, and resist false claims of the ‘imagined community’ known as the territorial nation-state, especially as imposed by life-diminishing border policies.

Introduction

Imagine that it is a typical Sunday morning in your life. After your usual routine, you head out to join your congregation for worship. After you have gotten seated and centered, you look over to the side and see something utterly confounding and incomprehensible—an eighteen-foot high fence, made of heavy steel mesh wire so closely knit you can barely make out images of fellow worshipers on the other side of it. As the service of worship proceeds—as you and the people read scripture, give testimony, preach, pray, meditate, move your bodies while singing, clap hands, lift up your arms, dwell on colorful visual images in the worship space, pass the peace, partake of bread and wine in communion—something mysterious and Divine happens that transfigures the space in a way that is completely different from, and runs counter to, the message and enactment of domination, division, and exclusion the looming fence is poised to deliver.

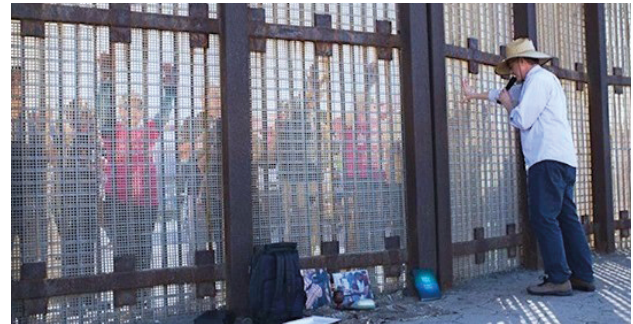
This is precisely the weekly experience of members of the El Faro Border Church, a binational ecclesial community which gathers early each Sunday afternoon for worship, fellowship, and outreach in the open-air plaza of Friendship Park, a half-acre area situated on the US-Mexico border between San

Susanne Johnson is an associate professor at Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, in Dallas, Texas, USA, and teaches courses in practical theology, Christian formation, and education for social justice. She is currently finishing a grant-related research project at the U.S.-Mexico border in Tijuana, MEX/San Diego, CA. She is also an ordained minister in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

Diego, California, and Tijuana, Mexico, immediately adjacent to the Atlantic Ocean. While there are multicultural, multiracial congregations across the U.S., including open-air street churches for persons experiencing homelessness, such as Church at the Square near my workplace in Dallas, Texas, what is unique and remarkable about this ecclesial community is that parallel border fences built and militarized by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) cut through the physical space of worship, dividing the worshiping community into a gathering of Christians: one group on the U.S. side, and another on the Mexico side.

The church’s beginnings trace back to June 1, 2008, when Reverend John Fanestil, a United Methodist pastor in San Diego, and Dr. Jaime Gates, Director of the Center for Justice and Reconciliation,





Point Loma Nazarene University in San Diego, led a cross-border prayer vigil and Love Feast at Friendship Park, with an ecumenical gathering on each side of the border fence (Gates 2010). This event evolved into a regular Sunday service of worship and communion. Today, several pastors on the U. S. side, including Rev. Fanestil, rotate the delivery of a homily and the leading of other parts of the liturgy. Liturgical and pastoral leadership is given on the Mexico side by a *capillan* (chaplain) appointed by the Iglesia Metodista de Mexico A. R. (IMMAR)—a position currently held by Guillermo Navarrete, who lives in Tijuana.

Going to the Other Side

Writers who explore goings-on in the El Faro Border Church mostly do so from the standpoint of participants on the U. S. side: persons who hold white privilege, male privilege, and geo-political privilege and power. I suggest that without immersing oneself in El Faro's ministry on the Mexico side, you cannot fully grasp the complexity and "messiness" of this community's life, especially given the diverse ways that racial, ethnic, and national identities intersect on each respective side—along with immigrant status, which may or may not afford freedom to cross back and forth.

Moreover, members of the El Faro community on respective sides of the border are affected in divergent ways by the historical legacy of colonialism, and occupy contradictory positionings vis a vis this history. Colonialism (direct control over one nation by another) has ended, but not *coloniality*—i. e. the enduring effects of colonialism, maintained by and through patterns of domination and subjugation in intersubjective relations between racial and ethnic groups; assignment of inferiority based on racial classification; knowledge production and criteria of

what does and does not count; self-images and aspirations; mechanisms of economic globalization; and much more. In a way, "we breathe coloniality all the time and every day," (Maldonado-Torres 2007, 243).

Because the lived experience of coloniality is different on each side of the border community, without immersion on both sides it is difficult to see the full scope of the inscrutable hurt and harm inflicted on brown migrant bodies and families ripped apart by sinful nationalistic-driven immigration policies and neocolonialist practices of the U. S. empire. This is especially the case given that many worshipers on the Tijuana side are deportees who now live in isolation not only from their family network back in the U. S. but also from family members living in scattered parts of Mexico or Central America. Every day, Tijuana receives scores of new deportees from the U. S.—and most of them end up jobless, penniless, homeless, hopeless, and often in the grip of addiction to substances used to narcotize and numb their pain.

We in the dominant church in North America can learn from the way in which members of the El Faro Border Church interact with geo-political realities of the border and the U. S. empire through the practices of their ecclesial and liturgical life: a bundle of actions, arts, artifacts, architecture, all in a gestalt of dynamic interaction, what Don Saliers calls a "performative matrix" (Saliers 2014, 4). In this work, I accept Salier's premise that worship itself is an art, similar to, yet distinct from other forms of art. Liturgy as a distinctive art, he suggests, "is best understood as the art of receiving God's future for the world—that is, an eschatological art" (Saliers 1994, 25). Thus, worship does not simply *use* art—it *is* art. All artistic effort in the service of worship, he suggests, is participatory in God's own creativity (Saliers 1994, 215).

Coming to Terms: The Performative Turn

This essay is influenced by notions undergirding the broad field of Performance Studies (PS), an approach that proffers a broad-spectrum interdisciplinary lens. PS scholars posit an underlying *performativity* to all actions and artifacts, whether verbal, written, or physical—and see all of social reality as constructed by ‘doings’—actions, behaviors, and events (Komitee, 2). Performance is construed as a “broad spectrum” or “continuum” of human actions, and PS scholars tend to agree that there is virtually no fixable limit to what is or is not ‘performance.’

Richard Schechner, one of the leading shapers of the PS field, notes that “artistic practice is a big part of the performance studies project” (Schechner 2013, 1). As he explains, “When texts, architecture, visual arts, or anything else are looked at, they are studied ‘as’ performances...that is, they are regarded as practices, events, and behaviors, not as ‘objects’ or ‘things’” (Schechner 2013, 2). At El Faro, the genres of visual art painted on the border fence can thus be seen as performances, as can the very fence (‘wall’) itself.

Further, Schechner says that “To treat any object, work or product ‘as’ performance—a painting, a novel, a shoe, or anything at all—means to investigate what the object does, how it *interacts* with other objects or beings, and how it *relates* to other objects or beings. Performances exist only as actions, interactions and relationships” (Schechner 2013, 30).

Because performances are basic building blocks that structure our reality, say PS scholars, we must work to understand how they function—that is, to explain what any given performance does, and how it is doing it. Among other questions, we can ask: “What circumstances helped create this performance? How is it structured? What relationships does it enable? What effect does it have in a society, and has that function changed over time?” (Komitee, 4). This essay addresses these basic queries.

The World in a Wafer: Worship, Eucharist, and Resistance

The El Faro Border Church is a microcosm of a global community on the border, gathered together through worship around the Lord’s Table. In a seminal article, “The World in a Wafer: A Geography of the Eucharist as Resistance to Globalization,” William Cavanaugh points out that while some groups

use the metaphor of the “global village” as a way to evoke sentiments of the world’s peoples being brought into communion with each other across borders—this image often actually operates to mask forms of division, domination, and exploitation produced through mechanisms of economic globalization (Cavanaugh 1999, 186). Globalization does different things to different peoples; “globalizing sovereignty” produces multiple inequalities and multiple exclusions (Fernandez 2011, 66). One major thing being produced is an underclass of people permanently confined to lives of marginality who, for the most part, are racially marked. “Marginals,” Iris Young contends, are left-overs that the dominant system has no use for; either they were of no economic use in the first place, or are no longer so (Young 2011, 59). They become disposable after being squeezed by the system. Take, for example, undocumented veterans ripped from their families and deported from the U. S., often for minor infractions.

Walter Wink uses the phrase “the Domination System” to critique a set of realities operating globally to produce “unjust economic relations, oppressive political relations, biased race relations, patriarchal gender relations, hierarchical power relations, and the use of violence to maintain them all” (Wink 1998, 39–40). Eleazar Fernandez (Fernandez 2011, 53) uses phrases such as “global hegemonic power” and “the network of Powers,” while Walter Mignolo employs the phrase “colonial matrix of power (CMP)” (Mignolo and Walsh 2018, 111) to refer to essentially the same nexus of realities. Along with these writers, I have argued that globalized neoliberal capitalism is but one among a host of interlocking, mutually reinforcing social imaginaries of our day—most particularly, white nationalism, imperialism, and militarism (handmaiden to multinational corporations)—that function to (mis)shape the moral and political imagination of U. S. citizens (including Christians), and to underwrite the American Empire and perpetuate coloniality (Johnson 2013, 108).

In a similar vein, James K. A. Smith talks about competing *liturgies*. “What I call liturgies are not just churchy, institutional religious things,” he says. “I’m broadening the term. Liturgies are love-shaping practices; they are communal social rhythms, routines, and rituals that we immerse ourselves in, that we give ourselves over to, that aren’t just something that we do, but they’re doing something to us. They’re forging in us an orientation to the good life.



They're inscribing in us a conception of what we think flourishing is. And because there are competing versions, so there are rival liturgies" (Smith and Summers 2018).

Daily, we are caught up and enmeshed in contradictory social imaginaries and liturgies, and thus as Smith asserts, "we need to tend to our liturgies in order to see what kind of political vision we are absorbing, and whether or not that is eroding or contributing to solidarity" (Smith and Summers 2018). Cavanaugh notes, "once the imaginations underlying modern political processes have been exposed as false theologies [false liturgies, false social imaginaries], we can begin to recover true theological imaginings of space and time around which to enact communities of solidarity and resistance" (Cavanaugh 2013, 4). To be in solidarity, as Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz explains, is not simply to have an inner disposition of sympathy for oppressed people. It is, rather, embodied participation in ongoing praxis toward liberation, in a context of relations and practices of mutuality and friendship with the oppressed--a process through which Christians appropriate and enact in concrete human history God's gratuitous gift of "kin-dom" (Isasi-Diaz 1996, 89).

Walter Mignolo, along with certain other Latin American decolonial thinkers, insists that exposing false social imaginaries which subjugate Third World migrants and racialized others exploited by the ongoing 'imperial/colonial matrix of power' is the work of decoloniality and border epistemology. Decolonial thinkers, Mignolo insists, must delink from dominant Western imaginaries and Eurocentric epistemologies, and become "epistemically disobedient," which is a call to knowing, thinking, doing, and being decolonially (Mignolo 2011, 277), and to "dwelling and thinking in the borders of local histories confronting global designs" (Mignolo 2011, 277), all of which, I suggest, is precisely what is

happening in the El Faro Border Church, as disclosed in *testimonios* I have gathered, and the way worshipers actively draw on dimensions of their liturgical life--their music, Eucharist, prayers, and art--to resist the false claims of the 'imagined community' known as the U. S. Empire, and other players in the global matrix of power.

As Cavanaugh posits, for Christians it is pre-eminent the Eucharist that resists and refutes the *mythos* of the nation-state in several ways, and that shapes and forms in worshipers what he calls a 'theopolitical imagination,' a term that helps us avoid splitting and compartmentalizing what is religious and theological from social, economic, and political spheres and concerns. To begin with, Cavanaugh says, the Eucharistic liturgy can be understood as a 'spatial story' that performs certain operations on places--in this case by God, with human cooperation--and that produces a different kind of space. "The preeminent 'spatial story,'" he suggests, "is that of the formation of the Body of Christ in the Eucharist." Just as eating and drinking together do not merely symbolize a family, he says, but help to constitute a family, so eating and drinking together at the Table transforms the partakers into a body with a public, theopolitical dimension (Cavanaugh 2013, 93).

For Cavanaugh, "the Eucharist does not simply tell the story of a united human race, but brings to light barriers where they actually exist" (Cavanaugh 1999, 193). Cavanaugh reminds us, for example, that the apostle Paul discovered the Corinthians were unworthily partaking of the Lord's Supper because the rich were humiliating the poor. Here we see that the Eucharist can be falsely or too facilely described as that which unites Christians around the globe while in fact many Christians live exploitatively off the hunger and hopelessness of others, as when Christians in the U. S. benefit from extracting cheap

labor from migrants, and from allowing the flow of goods across the border, but not the bodies of those whose labor produced those goods in the first place. Further, in that the Eucharist, normatively seen, creates a body and community in solidarity with poor people, widows, orphans, and immigrants, it implies a stance against indiscriminate deportation policies that produce virtual widows and orphans, and that immiserate people in poverty. In the U.S., too many Eucharistic celebrations are colonized by global sentimentality on the one hand, and by covert white nationalism on the other. When the inclusive Body of Christ is not properly practiced, Christ is betrayed, and the Eucharist performs as an eschatological sign of prophetic judgment on the celebrants.

The People's Art: The People's Practical Theology

In remaining sections, I explore one way, among various ways in which members of the El Faro community express their Eucharistic, theopolitical imagination and perform the Christian Story—namely, through images and murals painted along many miles of the border fence. These belong to a genre known as street art, which I call ‘the people’s art’ (liturgy itself is ‘the people’s art’) “that does not participate in ‘high’ or ‘institutionalized’ art of museums or galleries and their often-narrow construal of what counts as art” (O’Connell 2012, 74). In this respect, it is ‘epistemically disobedient’ and subversive-, pointing towards a theological aesthetics and practical theology done ‘from below,’ within the borderlands.

Through the lens of Performance Studies, we see that the border fence cutting through the middle of El Faro’s worship space is much more than an inert object getting in the way. Reece Jones contends that the construction of a physical barrier on a border simultaneously legitimizes and intensifies exclusionary practices of a nation-state—bringing the claim of territorial and other forms of difference into being. Once the boundary is marked and ‘the container’ of the state takes form, “the perception of difference between the two places becomes stronger” (Jones 2012, 174). By performing this, the state reifies authority in defining the limits of people who do and do not belong. “These perceived differences then fuel more passionate feelings of belonging to the in-group and distinction from the other on the

outside” (Jones 2012, 174). Border walls not only represent the organization of political, economic, and cultural space, they also shape identities. As Vallet notes, “The objective of an armored or fortified border is to cut off and exclude...It fuels the feeling that the *other* is a threat and that militarization, policing and walling are the panacea” (Vallet 2017). Thus, borders are not simply confined to an inert external and physical boundary; border walls become internalized as individual and collective identities, and as emotionally-laden values, including idolatrous forms of patriotism.

The border wall is one way the ‘imagined community’ known as the territorial nation-state, the U.S. Empire, performs its own distinctive liturgy—interlacing themes of ethnocentric and white nationalist idolatries, domination, exclusion, and hyper-individualism. The wall and its false liturgy operate on people pre-reflectively and viscerally to construct and reinforce myths and stereotypes of the racialized other, and to structure relations of domination, subjugation and exclusion. Under the guise of a narrative framework of border safety and security, it appeals to white nationalism and racism precisely in order to create, exclude, and exploit a pool of cheap labor for the benefit of U.S. corporations and citizens. It is a symbolic expression of a national narrative of economic and geo-political dominance, militarism, and cultural violence.

Similar to the two-fold task of the prophetic imagination set forth by Walter Brueggemann (Brueggemann 2001), the Eucharistic theopolitical imagination iterated by Cavanaugh engages the people in *criticizing* the ‘liturgy’ enacted by the border fence, and the dominant globalized culture of Empire, and in *energizing* an alternative community toward enacting a new future. Like practical theology, Eucharistic theopolitics must seek to render visible not only pain and suffering, but also Spirit-breathed hope and love, and creative resistance against violence and oppression. One way that members of the El Faro Border Church are enacting these two tasks is through their subversive use of the border fence as a vast canvas for art, expressive of a liturgical counter-narrative to what the wall and its liturgy propose.

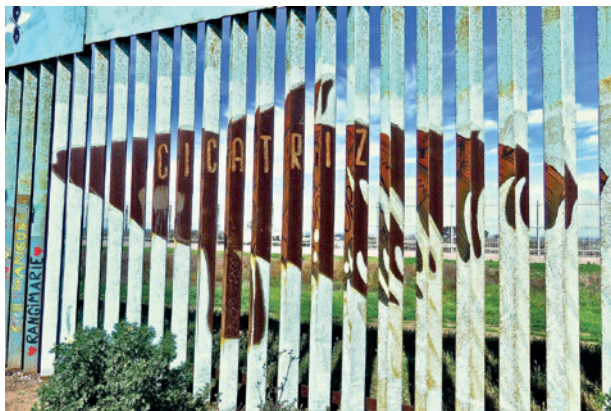
Art as Visual Lament

In doing prophetic, theopolitical critique in worshipping communities where members are exploited



and subjugated in their daily lives, there must be a way for the people to name, expose, and voice the pain and suffering inflicted on them. The liturgy must provide people with a way not only to name but also to mourn, grieve, and weep together about their experience of loss, pain, and injustice. In other words, the people must be able to engage in the scriptural practice of *lament*. In this regard, various images on the border fence perform liturgically as *visual laments*.

For the people of El Faro, the image of la cicatriz laments, for example, the scar on the body politic and the body of Christ, and on individual bodies of migrants broken by the trauma of deportation, and the ensuing immiseration in poverty, homelessness, and a sense of abandonment. Walter Mignolo would describe la cicatriz as an image of the 'racialized colonial wound' (Mignolo 2005, 386). It is a visual outcry against U. S. immigration policies and practices that undercut the wellbeing and flourishing of Hispanics and Latino/as, and even maim and kill. "As our people constantly remind us," says Miguel A. De La Torre, "this is not a border that separates the U. S. from Latin America; it is a bleeding scar caused by the Third World rubbing up against the empire" (De La Torre 2010, 120).



In her book *Lamentation and the Tears of the World*, biblical scholar Kathleen O'Connor captures the spiritual and theopolitical power of lament and its connection to justice-making. She holds that "laments announce aloud and publicly what is wrong right now. Laments create room within the individual and the community not only for grief and loss but also for seeing and naming injustice. Laments name the warping and fracturing of relationships—personal, political, domestic, ecclesial, national, and global. The point of lamenting is...to name injustice, hurt, and anger...When people live

in conditions that deprive them of dignity, of control of their bodies, of what they need to eat and clothe themselves, or of what they need to flourish in mind and spirit, they need to lament" (O'Connor 2002, 128).

As Maureen O'Connell suggests, outcries of lament and pain in a liturgical setting actually "are public expressions of profound faith, prophetic in context and content" (O'Connell 2012, 189). They call attention to the stark contrast between the way things are, and the way things could be, and should be. They are an embodied performance, she says, that give collective "eyes to see and to weep," borrowing on the language of Paul Ricoeur (O'Connell 2012, 190). Walter Brueggemann argues that banning lament from the liturgy—as many North American congregations habitually do—does not square with reality, "and is finally a practice of denial, cover-up, and pretense, which sanctions social control" (Brueggemann 1986, 60). When lament is absent, he says, "justice questions cannot be asked and eventually become invisible and illegitimate" (Brueggemann 1986, 63). Theologically, lament makes an assertion about God: that God is available, and that God matters in, and cares about, every dimension of life.

Art as Resistance and Subversion

If O'Connell is right in her assertion that lamenting "is an important form of moral agency, particularly for people who have been oppressed or dehumanized by circumstances of injustice" (O'Connell 2012, 189), then resisting exploitation and all forms of oppression and injustice—and false liturgies that underwrite these—is likewise a form of such agency. Similarly, O'Conner asserts that "by urging truth-telling before the powerful, and providing language, form, and practice of defiance, Lamentation encourages resistance and promotes human agency" (O'Conner 2002, 131). Bruggemann calls these "tears-to-power" (O'Connell 2012, 339).

In the art on the border fence in El Faro, one of the most dramatic expressions of agency and resistance is, perhaps, the image of an upside-down U. S. flag, painted with crosses rather than stars—intended as a visual critique of death-dealing immigration and border patrol policies of the U. S. Empire. When the U. S. started militarizing the nearly 2,000-mile U.S.-Mexico border through deterrence projects, such as Operation Gatekeeper in San Diego, the of-

ficial strategy was to deliberately force undocumented migrants to risk their very lives in efforts to cross the border, by forcing them into the most remote, dangerous terrain of mountainous and desert regions of the four states forming the border. Out of economic desperation to feed, clothe, and house their families, and to flee from death-dealing drug cartels and gangs, migrants cross anyway. The treacherous journeys all too often end up with migrants dying in the desert from fatal dehydration, and from hypothermia or hyperthermia; or drowning in the Rio Grande River; suffocating in overcrowded cargo transports; losing limbs or losing their lives from mishaps in jumping on and off moving trains or falling off the back of insecure pickup trucks. Thousands of migrants have died on the U. S. side of the border, and there are makeshift memorials scattered across the desert. Research reveals a strong correlation between higher annual averages of deaths and heightened border patrol. The International Federation for Human Rights has ruled that these deaths constitute compelling evidence that the U.S. is violating human rights with death-dealing deterrence strategies (Bernard 2008).



In 2013, members of the Veterans Mural Project, an activist group of deported U. S. military veterans, worked together painting the image of the flag with the crosses not only to signal solidarity with migrants who died during efforts to cross the border, but also to protest the deportation of veterans who risked their lives serving in U. S. armed forces and were honorably discharged, but now face inexorable hardship after being separated from their families in the U.S., and exiled to a country they barely know. They themselves experience a form of death—loss of a sense of self, of purpose in life, and of self-esteem and human dignity. The Veterans Mural Project was founded by Amos Gregory, a disabled

U. S. Navy veteran and visual artist, in order to encourage the therapeutic power and healing benefits of art for veterans, especially in painting public murals.

Another image which El Faro members describe in testimonios as intensely meaningful to them is of community members sharing food and fellowship around a long table, symbolizing Eucharistic fellowship and solidarity. But the table has a barrier running down the middle. Yet, rather than a depiction of the barrier as militarized, broken lines depict a border made porous and permeable by Eucharistic fellowship, and the deep sense of *la familia* and *comunidad* created by communion around the Lord's Table. The image of the table where people celebrate community and diversity, and make sure that all have a seat and that all are fed, is an alternative to the societal pyramid of power and privilege where migrants, the poor, and racialized people are consigned to the lowest ranks and exploited for the benefit of elites at the top.



Collectively, the images that El Faro members paint on the border fence are part of a larger endeavor to create what is envisioned as the world's largest and longest outdoor mural, *Mural de la Hermandad*. The initiative is led by Enrique Chiu, a widely respected Mexican artist and community muralist. The goal is to paint some 600 miles of the border fence. To date, the mural project has engaged nearly 3,000 people, including university students, community activists, faith-based groups, and persons with family members separated by deportation. The images comprising the vast mural aim to communicate messages of solidarity and hope to people crossing the border by car or on foot; to register protest against the existing border, as well as a redundant wall proposed by the U.S. empire as an election campaign strategy.



Conclusion

Neither the visual artists, nor those who engage with their art, view the images and murals on the border fence as merely a way to add window dressing, or to make a hideous structure somehow look pretty. Rather, the art is intended to unmask, expose, and disrupt a dominant narrative that exploits and oppresses, and instead to depict the victims this false narrative creates, and the injustice and suffering it inflicts. Yet, in their communal endeavors, the artists communicate not only what they stand *against*, but also offer a positive vision of what they stand *for*. The art both critiques the way things are, and envisions and proposes the way things could be and should be—a truly just and equitable world where there is mutual, interdependent flourishing among creatures and the created order, where power and other resources are shared and not hoarded by elites, and where borders are porous, and diversity is seen as a divine gift.

References

- Bernard, A. 2008. "United States-Mexico Walls, Abuses, and Deaths at the Borders: Flagrant Violations of the Rights of Undocumented Migrants on their Way to the United States." *International Federation for Human Rights, Paris, France*. <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/47e0ea16d.pdf>.
- Brueggemann, Walter. 1986. "The Costly Loss of Lament." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 36: 57–71.
- Brueggemann, Walter. 2001. *The Prophetic Imagination*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.
- Brueggemann, Walter. 2012. *An Introduction to the Old Testament: The Canon and Christian Imagination*. Westminster John Knox Press; 2nd edition.
- De La Torre, Miguel. 2010. *Latina/o Social Ethics: Moving Beyond Eurocentric Moral Thinking*. Waco, TX.
- Cavanaugh, William T. 1999. "The World in a Wafer: A Geography of the Eucharist as Resistance to Globalization." *Modern Theology* 15 (2): 181–196.
- Cavanaugh, William T. 2013. *Theopolitical Imagination: Discovering the Liturgy as a Political Act in an Age of Global Consumerism*. New York, NY: Bloomsbury.
- Fernandez, Eleazar S. 2011. "Global Hegemonic Power, Democracy, and the Theological Praxis of the subaltern Multitude." In *Wading Through Many Voices: Toward a Theology of Public Conversation*, edited by Harold Recinos, 53–67. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Gates, Jamie. 2010, January 9. "Communion at Friendship Park: Liturgy and Politics at the U.S.-Mexico Border." Paper presented at the Society for Christian Ethics, San Jose, CA.
- Isasi-Diaz, Ada Maria. 1996. *Mujerista Theology: A Theology for the 21st Century*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.
- Johnson, Susanne. 2013. "Class Matters in an Age of Empire: A White Feminist Working-Class American Speaks." In *God Loves Diversity and Justice: Progressive Scholars Speak About Faith, Politics, and the World*, edited by Susanne Scholz, 89–112. New York: Lexington Books.
- Jones, Reece. 2012. *Border Walls: Security and the War on Terror in the United States, India, and Israel*. London: Zed Books.
- Komitee, Shana. n.d. "A Student's Guide to Performance Studies." Cambridge, MA: Harvard Bureau of Study Counsel. https://writingproject.fas.harvard.edu/files/hwp/files/peformance_studies.pdf.
- Maldonado-Torres, Nelson. 2007. "On the Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the development of a concept." *Cultural Studies*, 21 (2): 240–270. doi: 10.1080/09502380601162548.
- Mignolo, Walter D. 2005. "On Subalterns and Other Agencies." *Postcolonial Studies* 8 (4): 381–407.
- Mignolo, Walter D. 2011. "Geopolitics of Sensing and Knowing: On (de)coloniality, Border Thinking and Epistemic Disobedience." *Postcolonial Studies* 14 (3): 273–283.
- Mignolo, Walter D., and Catherine E. Walsh. 2018. *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*. Durham, N. C.: Duke University Press.
- O'Connell, Maureen. 2012. *If These Walls Could Talk: Community Muralism and the Beauty of Justice*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press.
- O'Conner, Kathleen. 2002. *Lamentation and the Tears of the World*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis.
- Saliers, Don. 1994. *Worship as Theology: Foretaste of Glory Divine*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press.
- Saliers, Don. 2014. "Artistry and Aesthetics in Modern and Postmodern Worship." In *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and the Arts*, edited by Frank Burch Brown. doi: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195176674.013.030.
- Schechner, Richard. 2013. *Performance Studies: An Introduction*. London: Routledge; 3rd ed.
- Smith, James K. A., and Stephanie Summers. 2018. "Awaiting the King: An Interview with James K. A. Smith." *Public Justice Review*. Washington, D. C. https://www.cpjustice.org/public/page/content/pjr_vol7_no1_smith_awaiting_the_king_interview.
- Vallet, Elisabeth. 2007. "The Border is No Longer a Line." *The Mantle*. (September 4). <http://www.mantlethought.org/international-affairs/border-no-longer-line>.
- Wink, Walter. 1998. *The Powers That Be: Theology for a New Millennium*. New York: Doubleday.
- Young, Iris Marion. 2011. *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Decoloniality and Inter-religious Transformation among Christians and Muslims in Northern Nigeria: A Practical Theological Approach

Oholiabs D. Tuduks

Christians and Muslims in Northern Nigeria experience a dysfunctional relationship which is responsible for the recurrent inter-religious crises that create a deep-rooted trauma. This trauma co-exists with anger, fear and suspicion. As a result of their volatile relationship, the two religious groups live with a mindset that spurs the practices of exclusion, discrimination and marginalization. In addressing the volatile relationship, the study was guided by a practical theological methodology through the hermeneutical process of the EDNA model proposed by Noel Woodbridge. The 'Exploratory' task reflected the era of the British colonial administration in Northern Nigeria in relation to religious policy. The 'Descriptive' task describes the continuity of colonially-established inter-religious discrimination among Christians and Muslims today. The 'Normative' task considered inter-religious consciousness with the examples of Jesus Christ and the Prophet Mohammed. Having identified the challenge of Christian/Muslim co-existence in Northern Nigeria, the 'Action' task focused on decoloniality and inter-religious transformation.

Introduction

Nigeria, like many other countries today, faces challenges of security, accountability in the government, unity, inter-religious relationship and tolerance. These tensions have fueled the crises of Boko Haram's terrorism, inter-religious conflicts, the Fulani herdsmen attacks, and popular agitation regarding regional independence. In this context, religion plays a critical role. According to Best (Best 2001, 63), "Religion is becoming a divisive issue and constitutes a growing conflict flash point." Religion participates in generating, escalating, and resolving crisis. As the Archbishop Desmond Tutu put it, "Religion is like a knife: you can either use it to cut bread or stick in someone's back." The ambivalent use of religion has emerged as a great challenge to Christian/Muslim inter-religious co-existence in Nigeria.

This research concentrates on a region identified as Northern Nigeria which has experienced post-colonial inter-religious crises that resulted in out-

Rev. Dr. Oholiabs D. Tuduks is a lecturer at Gombe State University, Nigeria. He recently obtained his PhD in Practical Theology with a sub-discipline in Pastoral Care and Counselling at Stellenbosch University, South Africa. Rev. Tuduks is passionately concerned about the challenge of inter-religious co-existence in Nigeria, where he has published in this field.

breaks of violence among Christians and Muslims. According to research (e.g. Mulders 2016), the region has been under periodic religious crises since 1980. Despite this state of tension, the two groups still live together: some families have mixed via proselytization and inter-marriage. However, as religious groups, the state of being together is often characterized by fear and suspicion. Therefore, each religious group has opted for an enclosed lifestyle that forces it into believing that it is and should continue to be alone, thus excluding and abandoning the other in the affairs of public services, the use of



social amenities and inter-personal relationships. This insularity spurs the practices of exclusion and discrimination in public spaces at the expense of the minority group and leaves a dysfunctional Christian/Muslim inter-religious relationship.

As I have argued (Tuduks 2018, 178), the inter-religious dysfunctional relationship originated in the British colonial era in Northern Nigeria with a creation of Muslim/Non-Muslim distinct identities and a discriminatory administration. Coloniality, which upholds and promotes the continuity of the legacy of the colonial administration in the context of separate religious development, puts the inter-religious relationship in further jeopardy. As a way of addressing the threat, I argue for decoloniality and inter-religious transformation for dialogue and bridge-building; as policies of inclusion towards a functional relationship, through a hermeneutical process in practical theology.

Practical Theology and Hermeneutical Process

The challenge of human relationship requires a hermeneutical process for adequate understanding and interpretation. In the context of religious practices, I concur with Weyel (Weyel 2014, 153) who asserts that 'lived religion' is a subject of practical theology that reflects the interdependencies of the modern lifeworld and the manifestations of religious practices. Practical theology is concerned with hermeneutics as it locates itself within the diversity of human experience, making its home in the complex web of relationships and experiences that form the fabric of all that is known (Swinton and Mowat 2006, 3). According to Kim (Kim 2007, 420), since the mid-20th century, practical theology as hermeneutics, and a renewed emphasis on 'praxis' has been the prime concern of the methodology of practical theology. He asserted that the term 'hermeneutical' demonstrates the interpretive activity of practical theology which attempts to both understand concrete human situations and discern God's will.

Humans are interpretive beings, thus inherently 'hermeneutical', as they are always in the activity of interpreting and making sense of their existential experience (Osmer 2008, 4). The hermeneutical endeavor is necessitated by the reality of the pluralistic voices of interpretations and experiences; it supports people in finding, speaking, and interpreting their voices (Dillen 2008, 387). Therefore, in practi-

cal theology, Louw (Louw 1998, 95) provides the following hermeneutical process as research methodology: first is to describe or observe the situation. Second, to critically analyse what was observed. Third, to critically reflect and systematize what was observed by providing theological meaning and the impact of data. And the last task is to design a strategic plan for contributing towards addressing the situation. In the same vein, Osmer (Osmer 2008, 4) presents a hermeneutical process which also involves four tasks: 'the descriptive-empirical', 'the interpretive', 'the normative', and 'the pragmatic'. The four tasks are expressed through asking the following questions respectively: What is going on? Why is this going on? What ought to be going on? and How might we respond?

However, Woodbridge (Woodbridge 2014, 92) challenged Osmer's process for placing the 'descriptive task' before the 'interpretive'. He argues that the latter should rather precede the former to enable the researcher to obtain a better understanding of the nature, extent and origin of the present situation. He therefore presents a revised model coined in an acronym 'EDNA' – Exploratory, Descriptive, Normative, and Action. It could be argued that the EDNA model works best when the knowledge of a situation is already perceived, so that the exploratory (interpretive) task which asks the question – 'why is this happening?' will be reasoned as the first task in the hermeneutical process. But if the researcher is completely ignorant of the situation, then Osmer's process takes preference in first seeking to know what is happening through the 'descriptive-empirical' endeavor before engaging in interpretation. Therefore, both hermeneutical processes are feasible depending on the researcher's point of departure. In this study, the EDNA model will be considered because the situation of Christian/Muslim inter-religious relationship is already described as dysfunctional due to coloniality, as researched in my previous work (see Tuduks 2018).

In focusing on the hermeneutical process, the 'Exploratory task' would reflect on the British colonial history of religious policy in Northern Nigeria. The 'Descriptive endeavor' points to coloniality that describes the current state of Christian/Muslim relationships. The 'Normative effort' would consider inter-religious consciousness and the models of Jesus Christ and the Prophet Mohammed. And the 'Action consideration' makes a pragmatic contribution through decoloniality and inter-religious transformation.

Reflecting the Colonial History of Inter-religious Relationship

In research that revealed the need for addressing the state of the dysfunctional Christian/Muslim relationship, I (Tuduks 2018, 180) traced the root back to colonial times in Northern Nigeria where distinct religious identities were established and sustained. When the British colonial administrators arrived in the region from 1900 to 1903, the Muslims were the only group found with an organized structure of community and religious leadership (Ubah 1991, 133). Through 'indirect rule', the British authorities took advantage of the leadership structure, allowing the continuity of the basic institutions of the emirates to facilitate and consolidate imperial rule. The Muslims were therefore promised security and non-religious interference, they were appointed and imposed as judges in courts located in non-Muslim communities (Ubah 1991, 135). The Muslim religious group continued to enjoy their privileges including colonial educational, judicial and social policies instituted on the policy of separate development and isolation against the non-Muslim (Turaki 1993, 188). Islam gained a stronghold in Northern Nigeria as the result of the support enjoyed from the colonial administration and thereby became the state religion, with its adherents dominating the colonial hierarchical structure (Sodiq 2009, 649).

When Christian Missionaries arrived, the covert policy action of colonial leadership favored the expansion of Islam at the expense of Christianity (Barnes 2004, 63). Thus, the relationship between Muslims and Christians was evidently dysfunctional, marked with distinct identities of superiority and inferiority. The colonial administration identified the leadership of the non-Muslim area as the 'Pagan Administration' with the inhabitance provokingly referred to as 'arna'¹ by the privileged religious group (Turaki 1993, 189). The derogatory term is still used today, constituting part of the causes for the inter-religious dysfunctional relationship.

The dysfunctional state, maintained through coloniality, explains the lasting structure of inequality and domination, which continues to challenge the inter-religious relationship in the context of 'religious stratification'. Pyle and Davidson (Pyle and

Davidson 2003, 58) describe religious stratification as an institutionalized use of religious affiliation as a criterion for accessing social, economic, and political resources. They stress three key components in the definition: first, the adherents use religious affiliation as a criterion; second, when the adherents institutionalized the use of the criterion; and third, when the adherents access scarce resources. Pyle and Davidson (Pyle and Davidson 2003, 58) assert that religious inequality can only exist in societies where there are two or more religious groups and when adherence to one tradition provides social, economic, and political benefits that are not available to members of the other faith.

In Northern Nigeria, research has shown that from colonial to post-colonial times, being a member of one religious group has advantages over being in the other. The British colonial era depicted an event where the adherents of traditional religions were forced to convert to Islam as the last resort for enjoying the security and free trade accessed by the Muslims (Sodiq 2009, 649). Such an unfortunate conversion strategy could be understood in the classic form of exclusion described as assimilation that calls one group into being like 'them' for survival (Volf 1996, 75). Similarly, Mulders (Mulders 2016, 29) reveals that in Northern Nigeria Christians are often faced with the temptation of changing their name to bear a Muslim name in order to access and gain favours in public service.

Christian/Muslim distinct identities in Northern Nigeria create tension among adherents. Davidson (Davidson 2008, 374) explains the conditions of distinct identities that portray inequalities as ethnocentrism, competition, and power differentials: when a group sees itself as better off than the others; when the interaction between the groups results in a desire to gain control of the same scarce resources; and, when the dominant group has stronger organizational bases, more access to external support, and has more power than others. Davidson further reveals the manipulation of the dominant group in developing strategies that allow it to accumulate resources and pass them on to children and grandchildren. In Northern Nigeria, Turaki (Turaki 1993, 189) stressed the effects of the colonial religious inequality in the context of succession of power among the Muslim political elites to the detriment of the subordination of the non-Muslim group. The state of religious inequality is also reflected in a geographical polarization where Muslims' residential areas, and in some cases local markets, are segregated from those of Christians. In view of these

¹ Arna is a Hausa word referring to pagans, its singular form is arne. The term arne (singular) is sometimes used interchangeably with Kafir (Arabic) which means infidel.



dysfunctional situations in Northern Nigeria, the normative task would consider inter-religious consciousness as necessary among Christians and Muslims for a functional relationship.

Inter-religious Consciousness

In her quest for what she called ‘an umbrella phrase’, Lucinda Mosher (Mosher 2011, 637) was motivated by Stephen Cherry who holds an idea that his calling includes enabling inter-religious understanding, asserting that his skills make him a good companion, as one who ‘deliberately walks into difference’. Mosher thus adopts ‘walking deliberately into difference’ as the nature of her ministry that enables inter-religious understanding. Becoming an ‘inter-religious relations consultant’ in the promotion of inter-religious awareness, Mosher engages in consultative, educational and writing projects. Her interest is to encourage Christian love of the neighbor as the other who possesses different religious commitments and convictions. Knitter (Knitter 2011, 127) affirms that a religious group that engages in knowing about the other will eventually appreciate the uniqueness of its religion. He stressed that the existence of people religiously should be with the consciousness of and in co-existence with other religious people in different ways from theirs, hence his expression “to be religious today is to be religious inter-religiously”. Knitter believes that being religious inter-religiously is a matter of praxis, and that there is urgent need to build a society that is inter-religiously making peace and establishing justice.

Inter-religious consciousness creates an inclusive mindset among adherents of the religions where all people are seen and treated as human beings created in the image of God. Mother Teresa expressed this conviction in her inter-religious compassionate service when she asserted, “I see God in every human being” (Wuthnow 2005, 1). The conviction made her serve people regardless of their religious affiliations, implying her recognition and respect for human beings created in the image of God. According to Sachedina (Sachedina 2001, 110), the consciousness of human beings as related creatures of God was the conviction of a man highly respected in Islam – Ali ibn Abi Talib² (d. 660) who taught that people are of

two types: “they are either brothers in faith or equals in humanity.” He believed the consciousness of oneness in humanity is the foundation of Muslim civil society where the privilege of citizenry accorded to Muslim and non-Muslim are the same, while sharing equal dignity of God’s creation. Even though there are differences among religious groups, the common things amongst them are worth celebrating. However, rich differences benefit the groups as they learn from each other. In the words of the Archbishop Desmond Tutu, “*Differences are not intended to separate, to alienate. We are different precisely in order to realize our need of one another.*”³ A group is unique because of the difference of the other. Thus, each group is an ingredient of the other’s uniqueness. Therefore, the religious groups share in the uniqueness of each other.

From the Muslim perspective, giant strides have been made in initiating and promoting inter-religious consciousness. ‘A common word between us and you’ was a courageous effort of some top Muslim personalities from across the world drawing the attention of Christians towards the need for the two religious groups to consider issues of common ground for peaceful co-existence (Awwad, 2009, 78). According to HRH Prince Ghazi Bin Muhammad of Jordan and the author of the ‘a common word between us and you’, the initiative was an open letter signed by 138 prominent Muslim scholars and intellectuals. It also included figures such as the Grand Muftis of Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Oman, Bosnia, Russia, and Istanbul (Bin Muhammad 2010, 3). The letter was addressed to Christian leaders of churches and denominations across the globe, including His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI. Bin Mohammad pointed out that the initiative was based on the common reference found in both the Qur’an (Surah Ali ‘Imran 3:64) and the Bible (Mark 12:29–31).

Bin Mohammad (Bin Mohammad 2010, 8) described the goals and motives of ‘a common word between us and you’ as follows:

We wanted – and want – to avoid a greater worldwide conflict between Muslims and the West. We wanted to – and must – resolve all our current crises. To do both, we had – and have – to find a *modus vivendi* to live and let live, to ‘love thy neighbor’; this idea must be expressed

2 According to Oxford Islamic Studies online, Ali ibn Abi Talib was the cousin and son-in-law of Prophet Muham-

mad. He was the fourth caliph of Sunni Muslims, and first imam of Shii Muslims. First male convert to Islam and second convert after Muhammad’s wife Khadijah (Oxford Islamic Studies online 2020).

3 See Tutu 2016.

from within our religious scriptures and must then be applied everywhere.

With these goals and motives in mind, Bin Mohammad described the letter as a global extension of Muslims' handshake with Christians for making and spreading peaceful harmony through friendship and fellowship of inter-religious peace. Ghazi Bin Muhammad and Aref Nayed point that the summary of the document is the Two Golden Commandments – Love God, and Love Neighbor – and includes the invitation to join hands together with Christians based on common ground, for the sake of God and towards ensuring global peace and harmony. An inter-religious application of the message of 'a common word between us and you' would be to address the dysfunctional relationship between Christians and Muslims. If adherents were to give attention to the religious books, they would discover many points of convergence for functional co-existence. The Da'wah Institute of Nigeria (DIN, 2009) of the Islamic Education Trust engages in creating inter-religious consciousness in an intra-religious setting through programs such as the Train the Trainers Course (TTC) on Islam and dialogue.

The Marrakesh declaration⁴ is another document initiated by Muslims for the promotion of inter-religious consciousness. The document is authored by Sheikh Abdullah bin Bayyah and endorsed by participants of the conference that led to the declaration on the 27th January 2016. The document is invariably a Muslim international call for the protection of religious minorities. The Marrakesh declaration was largely drawn from the legacy of the Prophet Mohammad's 'charter of Medina' with which the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) has been found to be in harmony. The charter was initiated as a result of the acknowledgment of challenges faced by minority religious groups in Muslim majority countries or regions. Inter-religious leaders, scholars, activists, and politicians in Marrakesh, Morocco converged to address the challenges facing minorities mostly inflicted by violent extremist groups who claim Islamic legitimization.

The declaration stresses the following points:

- A need for a reconsideration of the concept of 'citizenship' that is to be inclusive of diverse groups.

- A need for a review of educational curricula to ensure content that promotes honesty and has nothing in it that instigates aggression and extremism.
- A need for politicians and decision makers to be inter-religious in their dealings.
- A need for the educated, artistic and creative members of societies to support and campaign for the Marrakesh declaration by extending awareness of the rights of minorities.
- A need for various religious groups to build bridges with the past and to confront any forms of religious bigotry as well as religious hate speech.

Inter-religious relationship and co-operation will serve as motivation for respect, tolerance and fair consideration of each religious group. Imam Mohammed Baianonie stressed inter-religious relationship in one of his Friday messages affirming that the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims is a Qur'anic injunction to Muslims. He exemplifies the life of the Prophet Muhammad who is Muslims' greatest model, for keeping a relationship with non-Muslims in his days. He mentions peace, tolerance, compassion, and good relationship as the norm in the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims. He further explained the word 'Bir' as used in the Qur'an to describe the highest relationship expected by an individual to have with his or her parents; the same word is also used by the Qur'an to describe the relationship a Muslim is expected to keep with a non-Muslim. Baianonie asserts that the use of the term 'Bir' for Muslims implies the importance of keeping a good relationship with non-Muslims, and the nature of the relationship includes all the good things needed for companionship and excludes all the bad things that are abhorred.

The Inter-religious Consciousness of Prophet Mohammed

Historically, Prophet Mohammed had an interesting inter-religious relationship with some individuals and groups of Christians. The relationship began around 610 CE at Mecca with a monk called Waraqa Ibn Nawfal who was considered very close to the Prophet in amity and was relied on for counsel (Sodiq 2009, 647). As a Christian, Ibn Nawfal was said to have congratulated the Prophet on his appointment as Messenger of God and continued to

4 Copy available at <http://www.marrakeshdeclaration.org/declaration/>.



support and encourage him in the process of receiving revelation. When the adherents of Islam began to grow, inter-religious dialogue was initiated in Medina with the Muslims extending invitations to the Jews and Christians who were believed to have the same source of revelation and oneness with God as found in the Qur'an Surah Al-Ankabut 29:46 and Surah Ali 'Imran 3:64 (Omotosho 2003, 21).

During the earlier persecution in Mecca, being confident in the Muslim/Christian amity, the Prophet sent out his followers to the security and protection of a Christian king in Abyssinia (Ethiopia) who welcomed and hosted them (Sodiq 2009, 647). The Christian/Muslim amity had Qur'anic support, "...And nearest among them in love to the believers will thou find those who say, 'we are Christians.' Because amongst these are men devoted to learning and men who have renounced the world, and they are not arrogant" (Surah Al-Ma'idah 5:82). In a commentary on the statement "those who say, 'we are Christians'", Ali (Ali 1934, 268) asserts that they did not merely call themselves Christians, truly and sincerely they are, for they respect and appreciate Muslim virtues.

Another famous Islamic inter-religious relationship includes the visit of a group of Christians from Najran to the Prophet Mohammad in Medina. Muir (Muir 1923, 458) revealed that the visit was intended to investigate and understand the nature of the revelation that the Prophet was receiving from God. He explained that the group was hosted for about three days and engaged in inter-religious dialogue over this period. After realizing their theological differences, they both resolved not to compromise but instead to respect each other's unique positions. The interaction ended with a written treaty as the Prophet pledged security to Christians, their religion, leaders, and places of worship (Muir 1923, 458). The written pledge was captioned "The Covenant of the Prophet Mohammad with the Christians of Najran"⁵. According to Ayoub (Ayoub 2007, 14), the content of the covenant suggested that the Prophet did not expect Christians to renounce their faith, but that the intention was for peaceful co-existence. Based on this vignette, inter-religious understanding, through dialogue and tolerance with intrinsic compassionate caring is what ought to be taking place among religious groups.

5 Translated copy available at <https://archive.org/details/ProphetMuhammedsCovenantToTheChristiansOfNajran>.

The Inter-religious Consciousness of Jesus Christ

Inter-religious consciousness was seen in the earthly life of Jesus Christ. He often moved beyond Jewish communities to meet the needs of people from other religious traditions. The mission of Jesus was concrete, he offered immediate care for people in need, and his ministry restored dignity and included in the community those who were excluded (Graff 1994, 107). The compassion of Jesus is described as a reaction against oppressors and victimizers interested in maintaining the divide between 'us' and 'them' (Sobrinho 2009, 454). In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus answered the question from an expert in the law (Luke 10:29) with a message of inter-religious compassion. Batson et al. (Batson et al, 2001, 39) argue that Jesus' answer has a double meaning. The first note in the parable is the universal compassion of the Samaritan who, though a non-Jew and a religiously outcast person, offered his best for the dying man. Second, the parable condemns the piety of the two religious leaders who ignored the dying man. Cornelius (Cornelius 2013, 3) asserts that the self-preservation and self-interest of the priest and the Levite, intent on following ritual purity laws, made them ignore the man in need of compassion. While the Levite and the priest avoided the dying man to comply with the purity laws, the Samaritan instead avoided ethnic and religious animosity between his people and the Jews in order to reach out to the dying man (O'Connell 2009, 69). In the context of being religious extrinsically or intrinsically in relation to universal compassion, the latter has an orientation that makes one care for others against all forms of self-centered life and exclusionary praxis. Intrinsic religion describes a neighbor as anyone who is in need regardless of their religious affiliation.

Jesus' involvement with people outside the Jewish community includes the centurion man (Matthew 8:5-13) and the Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:21-28) who both received his compassionate attention. During his earthly ministry, non-Jews were not excluded, despite his statement that he came for the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matthew 15:24). However, His ministry was later opened to the Gentiles, as he declared "I say to you that many will come from the east and west and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 8:11). Another

message of inclusion is found in the parable of the great banquet (Luke 14:15-24) presented by Jesus. According to Sankamo (Sankamo 2012, 245), the first group of people who were invited but unable to attend the feast are traditionally argued to be from the Jewish group, while the group who later received invitation and surprisingly filled the banquet hall constitute the outcasts and Gentiles. The parable of the mustard seed (Mark 4:30-32) captures the inclusive message of Jesus towards outsiders. The presence of the birds of the air enjoying the refreshment of the gigantic tree implies the inclusion of the Gentiles into the restored kingdom of God (Sankamo 2012, 252). Jesus' reaction to exclusion and discrimination today would not be different in terms of challenging the group that engages in oppression and injustice, be it Christian or Muslim. The consciousness of peoples' needs, regardless of their religious adherence should permeate and motivate inter-religious compassionate caring. This too calls for transformation in Christian/Muslim co-existence.

Decoloniality and Inter-religious Transformation

Decoloniality denotes the confrontation of religious discriminations that colonialism is responsible for. It rehumanizes the world by breaking hierarchies created for differences that dehumanize people and communities (Maldonado-Torres 2016, 10). Decoloniality identifies coloniality as a major barrier to development in Africa, and thus seeks to unveil and unmask it as an underside of modernity that coexisted together with the rhetoric of progress, equality, fraternity, and liberty (Kaunda 2015, 76). In the context of Northern Nigeria, Decoloniality condemns the practices of exclusion and discrimination, it argues against religiously distinct identities, and strives towards breaking all barriers that make implementation and practice possible. Decoloniality creates space for inclusive, transformational inter-religious relationships.

To aid decoloniality, religious leaders must accept the responsibility of standing in the gap to facilitate the inter-religious transformational process of building bridges towards common identity and inclusive relationship. Different fora for inter-religious discussion must be utilized for inculcating the consciousness of pluralistic communities. In a pluralistic state, despite religious differences, social

cohesion has the capacity to keep adherents in relationship towards building an inter-religious society.

In order to build a functional relationship through transformational efforts, Kritzinger (Kritzinger 2018, 9) argues that there are three ways in which inter-religious relationships could be developed: (1) 'face-to-face relationship'– engaging in conversation that allows a deeper entrance into one another's world of faith and scholarship. (2) 'Shoulder-to-shoulder relationship'– enabling an inter-religious tackling of social, economic and political problems in society together as people of faith. And (3) 'back-to-back relationship'– following up previous relationships by retaining the trust they developed together and purging from their own traditions the negative and one-sided rejections and condemnations of each other, as they work together to create a respectful, just and inclusive society. When a back-to-back relationship is efficiently managed, it has great potential for transforming Christian/Muslim inter-religious states.

Christian/Muslim Inter-religious Functional Relationship

The Kritzinger's model could further be strengthened through a framework designed for Christian/Muslim functional relationship.

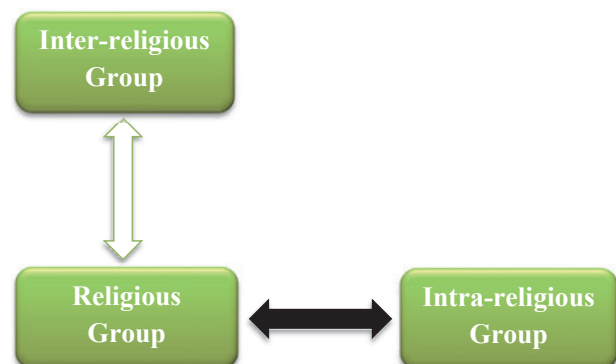


Diagram: A framework for Christian/Muslim inter-religious functional relationship

In the diagram above, two channels of communications could be noticed with arrows. The white arrow connects the relationship between a religious group and inter-religious body; while the black arrow connects a religious group with its different agencies. The channels strengthen inter-religious relation-



ships through religious and intra-religious groups in the two-way communication directions. Therefore, each religious group is required to initiate plans that will motivate inter-religious consciousness for building a peaceful pluralistic community. The initiatives are transmitted into the intra-religious group and to the inter-religious body, and then backward with reinforcement to 'complete the inter-religious relationship circuit'.

Strengthening and Securing Inter-religious Functional Relationship

To strengthen inter-religious relationships, I will implore the concept of 'inter-pathy' conceptualized by David Augsburger. According to him (Augsburger 1986, 29), inter-pathic caring has to do with entering the other's world of assumptions, beliefs, and values and temporarily claiming them, while 'bracketing' one's own. He identified the benefit of moving into the world of another with openness and reverence, in order to return with enrichment, awareness and more humility (Augsburger 1986, 29). After almost three decades exploring the concept of inter-pathy, Augsburger (Augsburger 2014, 17) acknowledged the need for strengthening the term as a result of so many happenings in the world. He stressed that the demand of inter-pathy is a profound reverence towards the worthiness and sanctity of the other. Thus, he asserted that as a form of pathos, the inter-pathic interest is a relationship with the other through passionate emotion and concern for their welfare. Therefore, to be more theological, inter-pathy is the love for neighbor as found in the words of Jesus, "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Augsburger 2014, 20). Inter-religiously, inter-pathy would create opportunities for learning from the uniqueness of each religion. Experiencing the other must be sincere. Interaction must be built on dialogue, not debate.

Finally, to secure the Christian/Muslim inter-religious relationship, I highlight the model of 'Wasatia' conceptualized by Mohammed Dajani, from the Arabic 'Wasat' meaning 'middle of the road' or 'center of the circle' embodying moderation, centrism, justice, balance, and fairness. Explaining the concept to denote a balance of extremes, Dajani (Dajani 2007, 1) uses 'moderation' as an English equivalent revealing its meaning in the Qur'an as justice and goodness. He thus stressed 'Wasatia' as the avoidance of extremes, rejecting any form of radicalism.

Christian/Muslim relationship has often been challenged by extremism, fundamentalism, and radicalism. Wasatia will play a vital role in moderating and controlling inter-religious relationship through religious leaders.

Conclusion

In this article through practical theological methodology, I worked through the hermeneutical process of explaining the challenge of Christian/Muslim relationship in Northern Nigeria and contributed towards addressing it. The study was important in view of how dysfunctional relationship, discrimination, and exclusion create a deep-rooted trauma which often causes inter-religious crises that create violence and devastation. Considering the volatile relationship between the two religious groups that necessitated the study, I argued that decoloniality and inter-religious transformation was vital for a functional relationship: in order to address coloniality and the institutions and policies that support discrimination and exclusion. It will create room for inter-religious learning and tolerance.

References

- Ali, Abdullah Yusuf. 1934. *The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation and Commentary*. Lahore: Muhammad Ashraf Kashmiri Bazar.
- Augsburger, David W. 1986. *Pastoral Counselling across Cultures*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press.
- Augsburger, David W. 2014. "Interpathy Re-envisioned: Reflecting on Observed Practice of Mutuality by Counselors who Muddle along Cultural Boundaries or are thrown into a Wholly Strange Location." *Reflective Practice: Formation and Supervision in Ministry*. <http://journals.sfu.ca/rpfs/index.php/rpfs/article/view-File/320/314>.
- Awwad, Johnny B. 2009. "Who is my God and who is my neighbour? A response to 'A common word between us and you'." *Theological Review* 30 (1):78–88.
- Ayoub, Mahmoud. 2007. *A Muslim View of Christianity: Essays on Dialogue*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books.
- Baianonie, Mohammed. 2002. "The relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims (Friday speech delivered by Imam Mohamed Baianonie at the Islamic centre of Raleigh, NC)." *Islam*. http://www.islam1.org/khutub/relationships_between_muslims_an.htm.
- Barnes, Andrew E. 2004. "'Religious Insults': Christian Critiques of Islam and the Government in Colonial Northern Nigeria." *Journal of Religion in Africa* 34 (1–2): 62–81.



- Batson, C. Daniel, Scott H. Eidelman, Seanna L. Higley, and Sarah A. Russell. 2001. "And Who is my Neighbor?" II: Quest Religion as a Source of Universal Compassion." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 40 (1): 39–50.
- Best, Shadrack Gaya. 2001. "Religion and Religious Conflicts in Northern Nigeria." *University of Jos Journal of Political Science* 2 (3): 64–81.
- Bin Mohammad, Ghazi. 2010. "On A common Word between us and you." In *A common Word: Muslims and Christians on loving God and neighbour*, edited by Miroslav Volf, Ghazi bin Muhammad, and Yarrington, Melissa, 3–17. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.
- Cornelius, Elma. 2013. "The Motivation and Limits of Compassion." *Hervormde Theologische Studies* 69 (1): 1–7.
- Dajani, Mohammed. 2007. "The Wasatia Movement: An Alternative to Radical Islam." *Worldpress.org*. <http://www.worldpress.org/Mideast/2832.cfm>.
- Davidson, James D. 2008. "Religious Stratification: Its Origins, Persistence, and Consequences." *Sociology of Religion* 69 (4): 371–395.
- Da'wah Institute of Nigeria. 2009. *Relations with Non-Muslims: An introductory examination of the Islamic textual evidence for peaceful inter-faith relations*. Minna: Islamic Education Trust.
- Dillen, Annemie. 2008. "Hermeneutics in Real Life: Practical Theology in Flanders (Belgium)." *IJPT* 12 (1): 357–387. doi: 10.1515/IJPT.2008.16.
- Graff, Ann O'Hara. 1994. "The Practice of Compassion and the Discipleship of Equals." *Ex Auditu* 10 (1): 105–112.
- Kaunda, Chammah J. 2015. "The Denial of African Agency: A Decolonial Theological Turn." *Black Theology* 13 (1): 73–92.
- Kim, Hyun-Sook. 2007. "The Hermeneutical-Praxis Paradigm and Practical Theology." *Religious Education* 102 (4): 419–431. doi: 10.1080/00344080701657873.
- Knitter, Paul F. 2011. "Doing theology Interreligiously: Union and the Legacy of Paul Tillich." *Cross Currents* 61 (1): 117–132.
- Kritzinger, Klippies. 2018. "Authoritative Scriptures and Transformation." Academic paper presented at a workshop on the proposed Centre for the Interpretation of Authoritative Scriptures in Ancient and Contemporary Contexts (CIAS) at the Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study (STIAS), Stellenbosch University.
- Louw, Daniel J. 1998. *A Pastoral Hermeneutics of Care and Encounter*. Cape Town: Lux Verbi.
- Maldonado-Torres, Nelson. 2016. "Outline of Ten Theses on Coloniality and Decoloniality." http://frantzfanonfoundation-fondationfrantzfanon.com/IMG/pdf/maldonado-torres_outline_of_ten_theses-10.23.16_.pdf.
- Mosher, Lucinda. 2011. "Walking Deliberately into Difference: A Theology of Enabling Interreligious Understanding." *Anglican Theological Review* 93 (4): 637–644.
- Muir, William. 1923. *The Life of Mohammad from Original Sources*. New York: AMS Press Inc.
- Mulders, Arne. 2016. "Crushed but Not Defeated: The Impact of Persistent Violence of the Church in Northern Nigeria." *Open Doors and Christian Association of Nigeria*. <https://www.opendoorsuk.org/about/how-we-help/advocacy/nigeria-report-12>.
- O'Connell, Maureen H. 2009. *Compassion: Loving our Neighbor in an Age of Globalization*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books.
- Omotosho, A. O. 2003. "Religious Violence in Nigeria – the Causes and Solutions: An Islamic Perspective." *Swedish Missiological Theme* 91 (1): 15–31.
- Osmer, Richard R. 2008. *Practical Theology: An Introduction*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Pyle.
- Oxford Islamic Studies online. 2020. "Ali Ibn Abu Talib." Oxford University Press. <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e120>.
- Pyle, Ralph E. and James D. Davidson. 2003. "The Origins of Religious Stratification in Colonial America." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 42 (1): 57–75.
- Sachedina, Abdulaziz. 2001. *The Islamic roots of democratic pluralism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sankamo, Juho. 2012. *Jesus and the Gentiles*. Finland: Abo Akademi University Press.
- Sobrinho, Jon. 2009. "Jesus of Galilee from the Salvadoran Context: Compassion, Hope, and following the Light of the Cross." *Theological Studies* 70 (1): 437–460.
- Sodi, Yushau. 2009. "Can Muslims and Christians Live together Peacefully in Nigeria?" *The Muslim World* 99 (4): 646–688.
- Swinton, John, and Harriet Mowat. 2006. *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*. London: SCM Press.
- The Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible. 1984. *New American Standard Bible (Red letter edition)*. Chattanooga: AMG Publishers.
- Tuduks, Oholiabs D. 2018. "(Dis-)continuity of Colonial Religious Identities: A Challenge for Christian/Muslim Coexistence in Northern Nigeria." In *Identities in Flux: Globalization, Trauma, and Reconciliation*, edited by Dagmar Kusa, 178–187. Bratislava: Kritika & Kontext.
- Turaki, Yusufu. 1993. *The British Colonial Legacy in Northern Nigeria: A Social Ethical Analysis of the Colonial and Post-Colonial Society and Politics in Nigeria*. Jos: Challenge Press.
- Tutu, Desmond. 2016. "Ten Pieces of Wisdom from Desmond Tutu to inspire Change Makers in 2016." Desmond Tutu Peace Foundation. <http://www.tutufoundationusa.org/2016/01/03/ten-quotes-from-desmond-tutu-to-inspire-change-makers-in-2016/>.
- Ubah, Chinedu Nwafor. 1991. "Colonial Administration and the Spread of Islam in Northern Nigeria." *The Muslim World* 81 (2): 133–148.
- Volf, Miroslav. 1996. *Exclusion and Embrace. A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*. Nashville: Abingdon Press.
- Weyel, Birgit. 2014. "Practical Theology as a Hermeneutical Science of Lived Religion." *IJPT* 18 (1): 150–159. doi: 10.1515/ijpt-2014-0012.



-
- Woodbridge, Noel. 2014. "The EDNA Model for Doing Research in Practical Theology: A Biblical Approach." *Conspectus* 17 (1): 89–121.
- Wuthnow, Robert. 2005. *America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

(De)colonizing the image of female beauty and (de)commodifying women: the industry of plastic surgery in Brazil and Texas

Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner

Plastic is capital. We readily think of the plastic of credit cards and debit cards for the financial power they give us. Right now, there is a burgeoning industry of plastic surgery in North and South America. This type of *Plástica* introduces an economy of appearances in which physical beauty is the valued product. In my area of Dallas, Texas, women's social gatherings can include Botox parties in the place of bridge (card) parties or garden clubs. Using a study of beauty and plastic surgery among *Siliconadas* in Brazil and comparing it with research on cosmetic or aesthetic plastic surgery in Texas, I will draw on some findings of interest to us as practical and pastoral theologians. Specifically, this research looks at self-esteem of women opting for augmentation or alteration of their physical self and at how colonialism, post-colonialism, and de-colonialism has addressed and impacted this issue. The paper explores asymmetries of power that impact individual and group social identity. For those whose history has been shaped ontologically, theologically, and psychologically by colonial forces, detaching from the lure of the "colonial gaze" as defined by the powerful, the elite, the slave holders, the media, capitalism, film, and conquerors, requires both resistance and resilience. How do we as pastoral and practical theologians in our work facilitate freedom from the images and the industry "of beauty"? This is an issue for practical theology in both research and action as we seek to liberate Hope and Self-Esteem.

Introduction

Plastic is capital. We readily think of the plastic of credit cards and debit cards for the financial power they give us. Right now, there is a burgeoning industry of plastic surgery in North and South America. *Plástica*, or the medical procedure of plastic surgery, introduces an economy of appearances in which physical beauty is the valued product. For the purposes of this article, I am distinguishing cosmetic plastic surgery from reconstructive surgery (as in burn victims). In my area of Dallas, Texas, which represents an economically and socially privileged class, women's social gatherings can include Botox parties in the place of bridge games, book clubs, or garden clubs. At first glance, because my interest in

Dr. Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner is Professor of Pastoral Care and Pastoral Theology at Perkins School of Theology (Southern Methodist University), an ordained Presbyterian minister (PCUSA), a Fellow in the American Association of Pastoral Counselors, an Association of Clinical Pastoral Education (ACPE) Psychotherapist, a Member of the International Academy of Practical Theology, a Henry Luce III Fellow, a former President of the Society for Pastoral Theology, and a Resident Member at the Center of Theological Inquiry in Princeton (2012). She is a graduate of Vanderbilt University, Princeton Theological Seminary, and the University of Basel, Switzerland.

plastic surgery is that sought by middle-aged women, I thought the search was for the Fountain of





Youth. As well as defeating aging, plastic surgery also conveys power over the body and a desire to reach a certain ideal. Pressure is also on teenage girls in the United States to look good. For example, *The Washington Post* released an article in 2019 from Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School in Maryland with boys' ratings and rankings of their female classmates based on looks, from 5.5–9.4 (Schmidt 2019). My first assumption that the high rate of cosmetic surgery in Texas was linked to the high social economic status of those seeking alteration of their bodies was countered by the prevalence and high statistics of low-income persons in Brazil seeking plastic surgery. Is this peak in surgery only really a search for the Fountain of Youth or is there more to it than meets the eye?¹

First, I am going to look at the statistics of cosmetic surgery in the United States and Brazil compared to other leading countries. Then, my design is threefold: utilize two ethnographic studies from Brazil, discuss the impact and introjection of the colonial gaze, and look at the impediments to resistance in (de)colonizing the image of female beauty. As Dr. Wanda Deifelt mentioned during a keynote address at the International Academy of Practical Theology, the mentality of the colonizers still prevails in Brazil (Deifelt 2019b). If practical theologians are to come to the table of influence to help change the narrative of continuing colonization as regards the bodies of women, we must discuss anew the meaning of *imago Dei*, embodied capital, and self-esteem.

Statistics are high in both the United States and Brazil regarding cosmetic plastic surgery. As the chart shows, these two countries had the highest numbers of cosmetic procedures in 2015.

The Number of Cosmetic Surgery Procedures by Country (Pariona 2018)

Rank	Country	Total Number of Cosmetic Procedures, 2015
1	United States	4,042,610
2	Brazil	2,324,245
3	South Korea	1,156,234
4	India	935,487
5	Mexico	907,913
6	Germany	617,408
7	Colombia	548,635
8	France	488,718
9	Italy	418,760

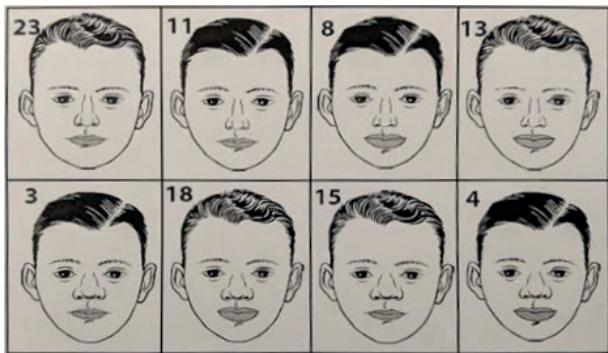
On the state of plastic surgery in Brazil, Bernardo N. Batista notes, "According to the most recent study on aesthetic procedures from the International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery, Brazilian plastic surgeons performed almost 7 surgical procedures per 1,000 persons in 2016. This is surprisingly high, especially if compared with the 4.6 procedures per 1,000 persons performed by our American colleagues in the same period" (Batista 2017, e1627).

Using two ethnographic studies of beauty and plastic surgery among *siliconadas* (those who have had aesthetic cosmetic plastic surgery) in Brazil and comparing the results with research on aesthetic cosmetic plastic surgery in Texas, I will draw some findings that might be of interest to practical theologians. Specifically, this research looks at the self-esteem of women opting for augmentation or alteration of their physical self and how colonialism has impacted this issue. Has (de)colonizing adequately addressed this issue? This article explores asymmetries of power that impact individual and group social identity. For those whose history has been shaped ontologically, theologically, and psychologically by colonial forces, detaching from the lure of the "colonial gaze" as defined by the powerful, the elite, the slave holders, the media, capitalism, the film industry, and conquerors requires both resistance and resilience. How do we as practical theologians facilitate freedom from the images and the industry "of beauty" as we seek to liberate hope and self-esteem? How does this surge in plastic surgery

¹ As I dissect motivations for this industry of plastic beauty, I do not write in judgment of those seeking such beauty. Other explorations consume people in addition to *The Search for Beauty: The Search for the Fountain of Youth. The Search for the Holy Chalice. The Search for the Holy Grail*. Perhaps some of us search for an intellectual ideal through writing and reading books and papers and thus use education as social capital. Knowledge can be power and social capital as well.

impact our understanding of liberatory theology, the *imago Dei*, embodied capital, and self-esteem? I will argue that liberatory theology includes a means of resistance to the commodification of the beautiful body and a catalyst for restoration of self-esteem. The latter can be achieved in part as the inferior other or the less-than-beautiful see themselves in relation to the *imago Dei*, in whose image we are created.

The impact of colonialism and the lingering effect of the colonial face as the model of beauty is clearly illustrated in the work of Lauren Gulbas, a cultural and medical anthropologist. She spent fourteen months in Caracas, Venezuela, and conducted 499 formal interviews. Her project was an attempt to obtain “a more comprehensive understanding of how the body is variably constituted in ideologies of race, class, and gender in Caracas” in part by “investigating how the body becomes engaged as a form of social and economic capital through the practice of cosmetic surgery” (Gulbas 2008, 35). In her interviews, Gulbas used a deck of seventy-two images of faces, which were created by Marvin Harris for his own Brazilian ethnographic work (Harris 1970). An example of these images, those Gulbas’s interviewees described as *blanco*, is below (Gulbas 2008, 93).



It was found that the most desired face was number 11, a light-skinned complexion with straight hair, thin lips, and an aquiline nose. In all of the other facial pictures, one or more of the following undesired characteristics will be found: wavy hair, full lips, and a flattened nose. For men, one of the most popular forms of plastic surgery is rhinoplasty, surgery on the nose (International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery 2018). Face 11 is the ideal image of masculine beauty because it more closely resembles European features of the colonizers.

While in São Leopoldo for the International Academy of Practical Theology in 2019, I saw light-

skinned complexions with European features on billboards near the Campus at Faculdades EST and in the duty-free shops of the São Paulo airport (some examples of these images, which I took on April 3–4, are below). How can we analyze the prominent and lingering images of colonizers on Brazilian streets and in Brazil’s hub of international transit?



Alexander Edmonds’s study *Pretty Modern* draws on a range of examples to “analyze how sexual and class aspirations subtly mingle in beauty culture” (Edmonds 2010, 34). In conclusion to his work, he returns “to the central theme of beauty’s relationship to social conflicts in modernity” (Edmonds



2010, 34). He argues that physical beauty disregards social hierarchy and grants social mobility. It grants power to “those excluded from other systems of privilege based in wealth, pedigree, or education” (Edmonds 2010, 20). As such, plastic surgery turns the body into a valuable asset that can threaten hierarchies, and in so doing, the beautiful body benefits self-esteem (Edmonds 2010, 250). Fungibility (an ease to trade) in a beauty culture allows an exchange between sexual attributes, acts, bodily parts and economic commodities. Plastic surgery is a commodity exchange between two forms of cultural capital, and thus beauty is not controlled by the socially dominant class culture (Edmonds 2010, 25). *Plástica* “responds to, and incites, [a] view of beauty as an egalitarian form of social capital, one that depends less on birth, education, and connections to cultivate” (Edmonds 2010, 252). Social imagination allows people to dream; in this way, beauty becomes a popular form of hope and liberation (Edmonds 2010, 252).

Edmonds notes that, in Brazil, “the female body was certainly an object of an elite, patriarchal gaze. Yet women too became consumers of beauty as the colonial patriarchy and later state paternalism faded, and as Brazil developed a flourishing consumer culture” (Edmonds 2010, 25).

Medical anthropologists, social anthropologists, sociologists, and historians are discussing and researching the burgeoning industry of plastic surgery. My goal is to come to the table of discussion as a theologian and engage in the dialogue. In doing so, I raise four issues: theology, *imago Dei*, embodied capital, and self-esteem.

Theology is a critical study of the nature and essence of the divine. The idea of God as the beholder (Psalm 139) is foundational to theology. However, women are the primary objects of a social gaze (Edmonds 2010, 25; Davis 2003, 185). Society looks for an image of beauty as defined by a colonial heritage. When women are perceived as symbolic objects and defined through the gaze of others as available objects, they are “a being-perceived” (Bourdieu 2001, 66). Drawing on more than ten years in Brazil, anthropologist Donna Goldstein concludes that women of the favelas, or shantytowns, of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo are also historically embedded in a colonial heritage that has prioritized light skin and European physical features as high status (Goldstein 2003, 25). For example, on “a white or light face,” these “high-status” features include straight hair, thin nose, and small lips. Would a paradigm shift

from the passive position of “a being-perceived” to an active posture of “a being who perceives” contribute to a liberatory theory and practice? How could the power of the *colonial gaze* be broken?

Imago Dei is the translated image of God. This term is applied only to humankind and has its roots in Genesis 1:27. We are created in God’s image. Thus, the *imago Dei* is a symbolic relationship between us and God. Theologians develop this connection largely in terms of spirit, mind, and soul. How can we as practical theologians expand this concept to include daily lived reality in the body that does not match or strive to match a colonial ideal? As Goldstein emphasizes, “a colonial heritage ... has prioritized certain bodies over others” (Goldstein 2003, 25). How do we as theologians form movements of resistance to this prioritization? How do we prevent colonial ideologies from being reproduced today in the guise of dominant ideologies?

The burgeoning business of plastic surgery intersects with ideologies of race, class, and gender. Plastic surgery becomes a political rather than an aesthetic practice as hierarchies of power and class privilege are negotiated (Davis 2003, 79). For example, “a woman’s experience of her body, and her body as undesirable, is shaped by complicated ideological dilemmas where individuals struggle with cultural discourses of gender, perceived ‘racial’ attributes, and economic status” (Davis 2003, 185). Plastic bodies are perceived as beautiful bodies, as the beauty pageants in South America reveal and advertising confirms. The winners of beauty pageants become major celebrities, akin to Academy Award or Heisman Trophy winners, and the pageants are major sources of revenue for advertisers, sponsors, and the plastic surgery industry. How do we speak into this “culture of beauty” in ways that are liberative?

Embodied capital. Capital is wealth usually thought of in terms of money, real estate, investments, or financial assets. Beauty is also capital. Cosmetic plastic surgery offers embodied cultural/social capital. Beauty is seen as a resource, closely correlating to wealth with its own economic value (Jarrín 2017, 2, 16). Beauty is also power and social capital. In his three years of ethnographic research in Brazil, medical anthropologist Alvaro Jarrín articulated the perceived connection between beauty and social capital: “Working-class Brazilians firmly believe that having a *boa aparência* (good appearance) is essential on the job market, because if one’s looks signify humble origins, there are few chances

of getting a white-collar job that pays better than average” (Jarrín 2017, 3). Beauty offers the hope of upward mobility, better marriages, modeling jobs, and fame.

When the human body is used as *embodied capital*, how do we as practical theologians develop an embodied theology and counter with the belief that bodily reality is sacred reality? As we “think with the body,” as theologian Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel says, and theologize from the starting point of the body, what is the place of beauty incarnate, embodied in flesh or in human form (Moltmann-Wendel 1995, 85)? How does the doctrine of Incarnation inform our understanding of the body? What exactly is beauty as understood in theological terms?

Self-esteem can be founded or grounded in the gaze of the beholder. However, self-esteem—originating out of the psychoanalytic “inferiority complex”—is a more all-encompassing global notion. Edmonds explains that psychoanalysis in Brazil “was notoriously ineffective with the working class, while *plástica* claims to be a universal cure” (Edmonds 2010, 76). Cosmetic surgery assists in egalitarian aspirations along with wealth and pedigree to address life’s inherited injustices (Edmonds 2010, 79). Cosmetic surgery is free in Brazilian public hospitals. The rationale for this is that beauty is a right for all. Beauty becomes an equalizer. Cosmetic plastic surgery, at its best, can enhance physical attractiveness. In Brazil, where plastic surgery is available to all classes, are the surgeons acting as humanitarian forces as they assist vulnerable people in their struggle for recognition, social mobility, and societal transformation? Jarrin exposes the underside of Brazilian plastic surgery in his recently published article, “Brazil Offers Free Plastic Surgery, and It Is Becoming a Problem.” He investigates risky surgeries and experimental techniques in the public hospitals as patients describe their treatment as “*cobaías* (guinea pigs)” (Jarrín 2018). In the late 1950s, Dr. Ivo Pitanguy, a famous Brazilian plastic surgeon who opened the first institute of plastic surgery for the poor in Brazil, convinced President Juscelino Kubitschek of the right of all people to beauty. This right still exists in Brazil, where ugliness is still seen as a cause of psychological suffering and the pursuit of being beautiful is its humanitarian antidote.

Might we as theologians use the Hebrew Bible or the New Testament as resources? The matriarchs of the Hebrew Bible are described as beautiful: Sarah in Genesis 12:11, 14, Rebekah in Genesis 26:7, and Rachel in Genesis 29:17. Later, Esther is chosen for

her beauty. King David does not know a thing about Bathsheba’s personality or spirituality. He is attracted by her beautiful nude body while she is bathing (2 Samuel 11:2-4). Male beauty is also highlighted in the Hebrew Bible, as in Joseph’s beauty in the eyes of Potiphar’s wife (Genesis 39:6). Absalom and King David are both depicted as beautiful (1 Samuel 16:12; 2 Samuel 14:25). Beauty can also work against someone, as in the case of Tamar (2 Samuel 14:27). Amnon is infatuated by Tamar, his half-sister, and rapes her. In each of these instances, the woman or the man is “a being-perceived.” Her or his beauty is identified by an external source (The New Oxford Annotated Bible).

Proverbs is replete with sensual, sexual, and bodily references, as is Song of Solomon. For example, the man in Song of Solomon says,

How beautiful and pleasant you are,
O loved one, with all your delights!
Your stature is like a palm tree,
and your breasts are like its clusters.
I say I will climb the palm tree
and lay hold of its fruit.
Oh may your breasts be like clusters of the vine,
and the scent of your breath like apples,
and your mouth like the best wine. (7:6-9 ESV)

There are examples from my work as a practical theologian, however, that instead show women who have become “a being who perceives.”

Brenda, a forty-five-year-old seminary student, struggled with loving herself.² As a woman in mid-life, she did not consider herself attractive to look at or worthy of companionship. One semester, she went on a week-long retreat with other seminary students. There was quite a bit of silent time at the retreat; she felt God very near. She walked the labyrinth, she journaled, she worshipped, she prayed, she sang. One day, in the solitariness of her simple room at the Dominican retreat center, she was drawn to the mirror. She began to look at her face. And it was beautiful. She looked at the pores of her skin. Some were large and pocked from pimples of her youth. On that day, they were beautiful. She looked at the lines on her face. She smiled. They were smile lines. And they were beautiful. Even the age spots looked beautiful. Her eyes were a radiant blue, even the gray in her hair was a pretty color on

2 Names have been changed to protect the identities of Brenda and Martha. Their communications have been used with permission.



that afternoon. Brenda wrote in her journal in January 2003,

As I looked at my face and caressed my skin, I was struck with a thought. It was God telling me, “This is how I see you. You are beautiful to me. What you don’t like: your pores, your lines, your age spots are all beautiful to me.” I couldn’t tear myself away from the mirror. For once I was not looking at the mirror, hating my flaws. I was looking at myself through God’s eyes. I was able to love myself as God loves me. I was seeing myself through God’s eyes and for the first time in my life, I was beautiful. As I walked down the stairs to go for my hike, I thanked God that I am not beautiful by society’s standards. I am just plain. Because I am plain, God has blessed me to see myself through God’s eyes. And I am beautiful (Brenda Smith, private journal entry, 2003).

Martha, a sixty-year-old professor, has a skin discoloration known as vitiligo. Michael Jackson had this same skin condition. Martha was mocked as a young child and was called “Spots” by her classmates. When I discussed this article on plastic surgery with her on March 24, 2019, she identified with the desire for physical beauty. However, Martha’s journey was not that of plastic surgery. In second grade, she received a Bible. She read John 3:16, memorized it, believed it. She said, “John 3:16 was about me. God loved me, created me, numbered the hairs on my head, and called me by name. God loves my physical self and my sexuality” (Martha Lewis, telephone interview, March 24, 2019). She was intrigued by the passion narratives of the Gospels, especially the mockery of Jesus. She adopted the response to those who mocked her by adhering to the injunction in Sermon on the Mount: turn the other cheek (Matthew 5:39).

In a follow-up email she sent on March 31, 2019, Martha added, “In I Samuel 16:6ff, Samuel anoints David as King in place of Saul. While David is described as beautiful in physical terms, God also tells Samuel not to look on outward appearances (in choosing from among Jesse’s sons), because God looks at the heart” (Martha Lewis, email on March 31, 2019). Here is a God who models the role of beholder or perceiver. God models the active posture of a being-who-perceives. Furthermore, Martha added, the beloved of God in Isaiah has an appearance so marred and a form so disfigured that others hide their faces (52:13–53:3). Even the Beloved was not beautiful by human standards.

What impact can practical theologians have in a media-driven and media-dominant society? If any discipline in theology can form a bridge between the

pedagogy of theology and its empirical application in a media-drenched society, it will be a critical mass of practical theologians working the dynamics of praxis-reflection-praxis (or reflection-praxis-reflection) within our subdisciplines. In the 1960s in the United States, the chant and phrase “Black is Beautiful” took root in the country as people of color resisted the imagery and dominance of “White is Beautiful.” Reading materials, especially in educational institutions, as well as liturgy and sermons in progressive churches, became more inclusive. Theological institutions became more diverse in student body and faculty as the institutions often engaged in preferential hiring of non-whites and in increased financial aid for minority students. A minister and homiletician, Revd. Martin Luther King Jr, became a leader of the civil rights movement; the Black Lives Matter movement is a continuation of that today. Ironically, the cell phone recording of a black man named George Floyd being slowly asphyxiated by police in Minneapolis was the **medium** for worldwide protests.

To replace an old or injurious image, that image must be shattered. Then, a new and healthy one can be formed (Morton 1985, 31). This will require the collaboration and activism of religious educators, homileticians, liturgists, ethicists, pastoral theologians, moral theologians, musicians, spiritual formation educators, and those teaching church and society to shatter exclusive and deleterious images that are media-driven. When practical theologians act, protest, or demonstrate, those actions themselves give the media positive images to promote. There are already public allies in this activism to whom we could point and support. “In the task of shattering injurious images, such as those pandered by air-brushing public images, there are already allies whose voices should be heard.” (Susanne Johnson, interview, June 26, 2020) “Many female celebrities [in the USA] recognized the negative impact on ordinary women – and especially in young females in their formative years – when pictures of models and celebrities are airbrushed to such an extent that they over-state the perfection of beauty in the women, and polish away things considered to be ‘flaws,’ such as freckles” (Johnson 2020). This airbrushing or “polishing” also includes modifications to the body contour, elimination of “kinky hair,” slimming down thighs and waists, enhancements of breasts, and retouching the color of skin. These electronic modifications increase the allure of “beauty” as “embodied capital”. The #MeToo movement,



started by Tarana Burke, is also a burgeoning outcry against the commodification of women and the rape of their bodies by prominent men in workplaces and in businesses like the movie industry.

In the midst of our countercultural activities to weaken the damaging effect of media, to subvert the allure of advertising, and to expose a beauty industry that can be exploitative; in our resistance to the *passive posture* of “a being-perceived”; in our promotion of agency for “a being who perceives,” perhaps a counterweight could also be a “God who perceives” (Psalm 139). This is a God of grace, not judgment. In metaphorical terms, in cultures that are obsessed with The Search for the Fountain of Youth, a worthy counterpoise could be the Search for the Holy Grail. The legendary Holy Grail was the cup of the Last Supper containing the blood of Christ from the Cross. The finder would receive neither monetary gain nor glamor, but healing and self-realization.

The concept of *Imago Dei* as revealed in sacred texts has been lost to colonial images of beauty and worth. Now is the time for academics and activists to shatter “Colonial is Beautiful.” Perhaps the prayerful words of Wanda Deifelt during opening worship at the International Academy of Practical Theology in Brazil expressed this search: “Help us to see the Beauty within each of us, so that we may see the Beauty of others” (Deifelt 2019a).

References

- Batista, Bernardo N. 2017. “State of Plastic Surgery in Brazil.” *Plastic Reconstructive Surgery Glob Open* 5 (12). doi:10.1097/GOX.0000000000001627.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 2001. *Masculine Domination*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Davis, Kathy. 2003. *Dubious Equalities and Embodied Differences: Cultural Studies on Cosmetic Surgery*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Deifelt, Wanda. 2019a. “Morning Prayer.” Prayer given at opening worship of the International Academy of Practical Theology meeting, São Leopoldo, Brazil, April 5.
- Deifelt, Wanda. 2019b. “Decoloniality, Ecology, and Sustainability.” Keynote address at the International Academy of Practical Theology meeting, São Leopoldo, Brazil, April 7.
- Edmonds, Alexander. 2010. *Pretty Modern: Beauty, Sex, and Plastic Surgery in Brazil*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Goldstein, Donna M. 2003. *Laughter Out of Place: Race, Class, Violence, and Sexuality in Rio Shantytown*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Gulbas, Lauren Elizabeth. 2008. “Cosmetic Surgery and the Politics of Race, Class, and Gender in Caracas, Venezuela.” Ph.D. dissertation, Southern Methodist University.
- Harris, Marvin. 1970. “Referential Ambiguity in the Calculus of Brazilian Racial Identity.” *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 26 (1): 1–14.
- International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery. 2018. “Latest International Study Shows Global Rise in Cosmetic Surgery.” Press release, November 1. https://www.isaps.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/2017-Global-Survey-Press-Release-Demand-for-Cosmetic-Surgery-Procedures-Around-The-World-Continues-To-Skyrocket_2_RW.pdf.
- Jarrín, Alvaro. 2017. *The Biopolitics of Beauty: Cosmetic Citizenship and Affective Capital in Brazil*. Oakland: University of California Press.
- Jarrín, Alvaro. 2018. “Brazil Offers Free Plastic Surgery, and It Is Becoming a Problem.” *Newsweek*, May 6. https://www.newsweek.com/plastic-surgery-brazil-public-right-beauty-right-free908941?utm_source=yahoo&utm_medium=yahoo_news&utm_campaign=rss&utm_content=/rss/yahoous/news.
- Johnson, Susanne. Conversation, June 26, 2020, in reference to an article on activist celebrities who have started a movement of resistance to the airbrushing or modification of the photos of their bodies. See “Keeping It Real! Busy Philipps Embraces Her Moles, Plus More Celebs Who Refuse to Be Airbrushed. See who’s opening up about their anti-Photoshop stance.” <https://people.com/celebrity/celebs-refuse-airbrush-photoshop/> by Lydia Price, June 21, 2018.
- Moltmann-Wendel, Elisabeth. 1995. *I Am My Body*. New York: Continuum.
- Morton, Nelle. 1985. *The Journey is Home*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Pariona, Amber. 2018. “The Number of Cosmetic Surgery Procedures by Country,” August 24. <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/the-number-of-cosmetic-surgery-procedures-by-country.html>.
- Schmidt, Samantha. 2019. “Teen Boys Rated Their Female Classmates Based on Looks. The Girls Fought Back.” <https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/2019/03/26/teen-boys-rate>.

The de-colonization of the digital world and Practical Theology

Christoph Schneider-Harpprecht, Valburga Schmiedt-Streck

Digital processes have developed an enormous power to shape social and individual lives because they are able to convert all aspects of reality into digital formats, to connect them, to collect an immense amount of data worldwide and to create complex instruments of technical control. They have the potential to transform the world. This phenomenon can be interpreted from the point of view of coloniality and de-coloniality. Digitalization opens access to nearly all human knowledge. Social players, governments and economic companies use the potential of cyberspace for their own interest. Artificial intelligence, self-learning systems in medicine, care, autonomous locomotion, all the way to autonomous weapon systems, can make decisions independently from direct human control. Practical theology is therefore challenged to research the influence of digitalization in social and individual life, to identify its colonizing effects, to face the ethical problems, and to defend ethical standards and basic human rights. This contribution will describe de colonizing effects of digitalization and identify strategies of de-colonization from the ethical point of view of practical theology.

Introduction

Digitalization now seems to be a keyword for the development of our human future. We can observe digitalization programs and strategies in nearly every sector of society. Robots and autonomous systems shape the Industry 4.0. The medical sector is developing internet-based systems of diagnosis and intervention. The economy and the banking system are using autonomous internet-based decision instruments for planning investments and deciding whether somebody will have credit and under which conditions. Schools and universities are promoting systems of digital learning. Churches too, are promoting digitalization via building up digital networks for communication between church workers and members, administration, information, the communication of the gospel and pastoral counselling on the web. The military sector is developing drones and autonomous weapons that make decisions based on algorithms of their targets and the

Valburga Schmiedt Streck is a Professor of Practical Theology and Pastoral Counselling. She is an Associated Researcher at Faculdades EST in São Leopoldo, Brazil, and was Professor of Social Sciences at the Unisinos University. She has worked with families in slum areas for over a decade and she was the coordinator of the graduate program of Theology and HIV/Aids in Latin America. She is also a Couples and Family Therapist.

Christoph Schneider-Harpprecht is Professor of Practical Theology at Ruprecht-Karls University Heidelberg. He is a researcher in Pastoral Psychology and Religious Education. Professor at Escola Superior de Teologia São Leopoldo, Brazil (1991–98), Director of the Institute for Pastoral Care and Counselling of the German Evangelical Church (EKD) (1998–2000), President of the Protestant University of applied Sciences Freiburg (2002–2007), and Member of the Board of the Evangelical Church of Baden (2007–2019).

necessity of an intervention. Secret services have access to an immense amount of digital communica-



tion and use it for profiling and investigation. Cyber war is a new reality and it includes hacker attacks against basic systems like water and energy suppliers, nuclear power stations or the internal network of a national government (Hindman 2009).

Are the terms colonization, colonialism and de-colonialism helpful for an analysis of the digital world? What can they contribute to a practical theological discourse in this area? “Decoloniality or de-colonization is a term used principally by an emerging Latin American Movement which focuses on understanding modernity in the context of a form of critical theory applied to ethnic studies and, increasingly, gender and area studies as well. It has been described as consisting of analytical and practical “options confronting and delinking from [...] the colonial matrix of power” (Mignolo 2011, 37) or from a “matrix of modernity” in which coloniality and colonialism constitute the “generative order” of a four-fold matrix of forces comprising colonialism/imperialism, capitalism, nationalism and modernity as a set of processes and discourses” (LeVine 2005a; 2005b; Wikipedia, Decoloniality). Decoloniality is a response to the relation of direct, political, social and cultural domination established by Europeans (Quijano 2007, 168). This means that decoloniality refers to the analytic approaches and socioeconomic and political practices that are opposed to “pillars of Western civilization: coloniality and modernity” (Quijano 2007, 168).

The concept of decoloniality refers to a radical exterritorial view that observes the dynamics of power and the factors that are shaping power (Quijano 2008). This reminds us of analyses of social discourse by Michel Foucault, focusing on social power. In this sense, decoloniality can also be used to analyze the digital world. The basic factors of colonialism/imperialism, capitalism, nationalism and modernity can also be identified as important elements of the internet. But in principle the internet is not defined by those factors. As a universal medium it is principally open to everybody who has access to it, and is apparently neutral. The concept of web neutrality means the equality (neutrality) of transmission of data for all users. This refers to the equal amount of data transmitted for a defined service like telephone, video etc. Providers want to differentiate the quality of data transmission dependent on the contract. In actual fact, the discussion is whether competition of different providers is indeed maintaining so-called web neutrality. In different countries (e.g. Germany), web neutrality is granted by

law (Wikipedia, Netzneutralität). It is clear however that digital technology is not ideologically neutral. It is a digital construction of reality and therefore offers a limited – and limiting – perspective in principle, the Internet is an open space of communication for everybody. But in reality, there are restrictions due to economic conditions, the level of instruction and the technical environment. Underprivileged people have less access to the Internet and this widens the gap between rich and poor¹. Notwithstanding, it offers a space for communication for the representatives of exterritorial perspectives, for the expression and meaning making of the colonized and oppressed. Social media has become a powerful instrument of communication for the organization of social protests for example. On the other hand, terrorists and people engaging in crime and abuse use the web for nefarious purposes, recruiting followers, grooming and exploiting people, and planning criminal acts. Digitalization can allow an articulation, communication and sharing of vastly different meanings and agendas, the good and the bad included.

The process of digitalization can be interpreted from the point of view of coloniality and de-coloniality. We can describe the Internet and virtual reality as an open space, a new dimension of reality that is constructed by digital technology and colonized by very different users. They occupy spaces via the creation of websites and platforms that organize information exchange and communication. We can observe that in a short time, such concentration processes have taken place. Hardware and software producers like Microsoft, Apple, Google, Facebook, Amazon have attracted a huge number of customers and even more money by advertisement and information services. The actual currency is information. Big Data analyses result in personal profiles that are used to control consumers’ activities and motion profiles. Internet portals can assess individual behavior, output and results of activities. Social feedback-portals and life logging bracelets for example, permit the surveillance of individuals and can direct their behavior. The immense amount of data, its application in the development of algorithms for analyzing and influencing individual behavior appears

1 For example, in Brazil, 4.8 million children and adolescents have no access to Internet and 39 % of the students in public schools have no computers, notebooks or a tablet to study. See: <https://porvir.org/acontece/cetic-brpesquisa-tic-educacao-2019/>.



as a new form of the colonization of private and public life.

But for most people access to the Internet is regulated by software systems from Microsoft or Apple. The market focuses on a few big companies, which are also competing in the market of smart phones and tablets. The controversy over whether the Chinese systems of Huawei may be allowed for government use in the US and in Europe or if they are a security risk, because they could systematically leak information to the Chinese government, shows the dimension of the problem. The concentration of capital and government interests directs access to the internet. There are many ways of repression and exclusion of free discourses in the digital world, from switching off a website to influencing discourses using trolls. Phenomena like cyber mobbing, shitstorms, and fake news in social media demonstrate that moral standards, ethical principles and legal regulations for the digital world are necessary. It is indeed the big question who is in control of the World Wide Web.

The task of Practical Theology

Practical theology asks for the leading images and principles of digitalization, the implicit or explicit anthropology, particularly regarding the domain of ethics and moral standards. It is interested in the way in which religion, and especially Christian beliefs of the different denominations, is present in the digital world. Practical theology seeks out the possibilities of digital religious communication. And there may be certain risks involved in establishing digital systems and communications for religious purposes, without a concomitant theological reflection of what is indeed occurring, or what the consequences could be. Christian theology should have a fundamentally critical perspective that is based in the radical otherness of God and in the radical inversion of the human order by the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ (Dussel 2017, 257). This implies the identification of God with all, who are excluded, on the margin of life and society, with the poor. This basic perspective of Christian theology concludes with the radical exterritoriality of the theory of decoloniality. But it means colonial aspects of digitalization from a theological point of view and therefore inscribing theological arguments into the theory.

Seeking out the image of the human being in digital processes in terms of theological anthropolo-

gy, we can see, that the human being as an image of God with its own dignity, liberty and responsible relationships is not present in digital processes. The human being is seen not as an individual or a person in the respective cultural patterns, but as a digital subject, that means a user number, a digital code (Gäfigen-Track 2019). And all their digital actions are accounted to one or several code numbers and included in algorithms. The user of digital programs is seen fundamentally as a consumer and object of innumerable offers that are adapted to their calculated individual profile. This individual profile is the total of all memorized online actions. It is built up as an *avatar* of the real person. And there are existing experiments and programs that this *avatar* may be able to communicate in the virtual world instead of the physical person. How is this compatible with the Judeo-Christian perspective on the human being as image of God? It is possible to understand the *avatar* as being an authentic representation of the person, if the individual is able to control it and is related to it. This relation between the virtual utterances and the physical subject is not a platonic one, as long as there is a physical subject. Becoming autonomous, the identity of the *avatar* and the one who caused it is no longer granted. Online, the *avatar* is in fact an amalgamated creation of statistics and a statistical function shaped by the interest of being optimized as a consumer. Indeed, "The Christian image of the human being with its emphasis on being a creature related to God, the creator, on liberty and responsibility for the own self and for others, the human relatedness and capacity for relations as well as the human search for truth and orientation can serve as critical corrective in processes of... digitalization" (Gäfigen-Track 2019). This includes reflection on the relation of the digital *avatar* to its likeness to the image of God.

In what follows we identify some topics that deserve special attention by practical theologians.

The protection of data

A fundamental ethical and legal consequence is that digitalization must guarantee the person's right to their own data. In order to keep human dignity as inviolable, as image of God, legislation for the protection of personal data is necessary. We need international standards and an international legal convention that grants the same rights for persons using the Internet in Europe, in the US, in Brazil and in

countries like China. Central legal aspects are the right of informational self-determination, the preservation against abusive data processing, the preservation of personality-rights and privacy. The *OECD Guidelines on the Protection of Privacy and Transborder Data Flows of Personal Data* (The OECD Privacy Framework. 2013) has existed on an international level since 1980. But its application in the different countries is wide-ranging. The *European Data Protection Convention* is relatively strict and is obligatory for the national legislation of the European Union States, while the United States of America does not have a national legislation and only a few States like California have integrated the constitutional right on the preservation of privacy in their law. In Europe, national law grants that every person has the right to be informed about all data collected about them. In Russia, China and certain Asian states the government is in control of the internet and does not respect the person's rights on their own data. The protection of those rights is an urgent necessity for the international community of nations and for respective national legislation.

Violation of fundamental citizen rights

The basic rights of persons as citizens can be violated on the Internet, and political actions and processes of opinion formation can take place that undermine the constitutional rules of democratic states and change the character of free and democratic elections. If personal data are collected, sold to political parties or to the movement of politicians and then used for individual nudging of opinions in election campaigns, then liberty of meaning is undermined. If robots post programmed political messages and interact in Chatrooms like Twitter or Instagram or in Facebook, we have the problem of opinion manipulation. The individual user cannot recognize whether the communication partner is a robot or a real person. An individual's opinion formation can instead take place in social networks and not via independent newspapers or on-line articles, this makes people more vulnerable to being caught in internet bubbles and manipulated by fake news.

The documentary film *The Great Hack* directed by Karen Amer and Jehane Noujaim (Netflix 2019) presents the ways in which Cambridge Analytica used information from Facebook users without their knowledge or consent in order to categorize

them so as to better reach them. This data was used in the election campaign of Brexit in the United Kingdom as well in the elections in the USA, Argentina, Malaysia, Brazil, Colombia and others. Most of the resources used from Cambridge Analytica were directed to users whose minds could be persuaded or changed and impact in the elections. These persons were bombarded with blogs, sites, articles, videos and were conditioned to see the world in a specific way. In this sense, technology manipulated the electors' minds without their consciousness and sabotaged the entire democratic process. The results of many of these elections are extreme right governments leaving social life and communities in ruins, as happened in Brazil for example. If for Zuckerberg, the purpose of Facebook was to connect people, create communities "and [bring] the world closer together" (Zuckerberg 2019), the contrary happened with people grouping up into bubble communities, excluded from the larger world and not realizing how they were manipulated. The research of Share Lab exposed the power of the algorithms that own the personal and intimate data of millions of people and shows how they were organized and sold for big capital (Silveira 2019, 43).

It is necessary to establish national and international ethical and legal control instruments to guarantee the constitutional basics of democratic states, specially the freedom of elections. Mark Zuckerberg himself, the founder of Facebook, is demanding international rules for the internet. In his article "Four ideas. to regulate the Internet" (Zuckerberg 2019) he suggests international standards "on harmful content", legislation for "election integrity", "a globally harmonized framework" for "effective privacy and data protection" based on the European GDPR regulation. Indeed, "Different rules in different regions would break one of the most important qualities of the Internet: it's one platform that everyone can access and build up". It seems to be necessary to observe whether this political statement of Zuckerberg does not serve primarily to stop national activities of legal control and is in function of a liberal discourse hiding the exploration of user data and the concentration of power into the hands of the shareholders. As mentioned by the Brazilian sociologist Jessé Souza: "Facebook is the perfect metaphor of the strategy of neoliberal financial capitalism, which is colonizing and exploiting us in an imperceptible way, while parasitizing and manipulating our relationships and our most intimate desires" (Souza 2017, 262).



Robotization and artificial intelligence in a theological perspective. The communication with robots confronts us with the question of the status of artificial intelligence. “A robot is a system that usually consists of three components: (1) a sensor which gathers information from its surroundings; (2) a processor, which processes that information; and (3) an effector which can interact with the surrounding environment” (The Catholic Church in the European Union 2019).

We follow here the analyzes on the robotization of life presented by the European catholic bishops associated in the Commission of the Bishops’ Conferences of the European Union (COMECE). Robots often are related to the internet. Whether a robot is a machine or a programmed software function in a computer system seems to be irrelevant in relation to the basic definition of a robot.

The Catholic bishops’ paper shows two main insights: “Some societies cannot afford efficient robotization and certain populations groups or classes which, because of economic reasons or personal physical or mental disabilities are left behind due to their lack of access to technologies. The robotization of life must therefore be wisely considered as an opportunity but not as an absolute necessity (because it is related to certain particular interests) and with a concern for those potentially left behind” (The Catholic Church in the European Union 2019). In the perspective of Christian ethics robotization is not demonized. But it should submit to the ethical principles of common welfare and self-realization. The Christian perspective of the option of the poor shows the potential damage, also for societies of the global south, if we think, for example in the robotization of agriculture. It is necessary to consider where robotization is an advantage and where it would constitute damage. “It must also be noted, that robotization is, in certain sectors driven by factors which are themselves reinforced by the robotization they have created” (The Catholic Church in the European Union 2019).

The second insight of the bishops is: The use of robots is at the same time strengthening and limiting human action. “This gives rise to a paradox: the more human power over the environment increases thanks to machines, the more human beings are deprived of agency and control” (The Catholic Church in the European Union 2019). The consequence can be a collective impression of “unease and powerlessness” that may create a climate of tension and aggression against robots. Therefore, the decision

about the introduction of robots into certain sectors must be ethically questioned. On the other hand, the human relation to existing robots must be shaped according to ethical standards. The catholic bishops suggest: “It is therefore necessary to extend the principle of good relations, which previously regulated human interaction with nature and with other human beings, to include robots” (The Catholic Church in the European Union 2019).

The anthropological foundation for this is the idea of ‘creaturality’. This means “... just as human persons in their freedom and nature with its regularity and unforeseeability, as creatures of God, so robots, despite their autonomy, are built and programmed by humans”. (The Catholic Church in the European Union 2019). Robots are thus human creatures. They share with humans the characteristics of being a creature, the ability to relate and interact with the other and that they “can be subject to moral judgement as to the good or evil – in the sense of harmful or harmless acting – of the exercise of initiative or the consequences of its actions” (The Catholic Church in the European Union 2019). Therefore, the human person can care for robots and be assisted by them.

This is based on in the vision of Christian anthropology, rooted in biblical wisdom, of the human person’s primary task being that of “preserv[ing] and cultivat[ing] nature” (The Catholic Church in the European Union 2019). The concept of nature is extended also to robots as creatures made by humans. It is the task of humans to preserve and cultivate robots. This implies a clear differentiation between humans and robots. The central mark for the difference is that humans enact “freedom and non-dependence upon the technology at their disposal” (The Catholic Church in the European Union 2019). Human beings can critically evaluate the use or misuse of technology. The catholic bishops see robots at this current stage of development “as not capable of this” (The Catholic Church in the European Union 2019). Therefore, they cannot consider them in this status of a ‘person’. “... only the human person can be considered a ‘person’ in the proper sense, and in their full dignity” (The Catholic Church in the European Union 2019). Their argumentation is based on “the assumption that there are fundamental qualitative differences between the human spirit and the ‘spirit of the machine’ and that there exists a ‘fundamental barrier that machines cannot exceed’” (Kreplin 2019, 114). Instead of an argumentation of retreat, which relates to the still existing or to

the principal difference between human beings and robots which in the near future could be outdated by brain research as well as by robotics, it could be more adequate to rethink the status of robots. The concept of robots as electronic personalities serves primarily as a legal term to hold an intelligent machine accountable for the damage it is causing and for the consequences of autonomous decisions (European Parliament 2017). The autonomy and accountability of robots will also make it necessary to rethink their status from a theological perspective. This may change the philosophical and theological concept of the person, but also concepts like freedom and dignity (Kreplin 2019, 114).

Ethical standards of digitalization

From a western perspective this could be related to the basic idea of Immanuel Kant's ethics not to use human beings as means for a purpose, not to instrumentalize humans by the relation to robots and by digital systems in general. Vice versa, Kant's idea makes it obvious that the relation of humans to digital systems and robots is always an instrumental relation. At this degree of development, this fits with the status of autonomous digital systems and robots that are exclusively operating based on statistics of trial and error. But in the future, they could reach the complexity of neuronal webs and develop autonomy like humans and animals. This would create a conflict with their character as being a means to an end. Therefore, digital ethics should develop new ethical models for the mutual relation of autonomous digital systems, robots and humans.

From the point of view of decolonialism, Kant's foundation of ethics is not a valid argument. It lost credibility because the prohibition to instrumentalize every human being did not hinder the representatives of the enlightenment to accept or tolerate slavery, colonialism, and the exploitation and the murder of indigenous populations. Human rights were actually designed for and restricted to white European males. Decolonial theory attempts to focus on and reignite excluded and repressed traditions and narratives. It also denies the western interpretation of the Bible and aims to create its own hermeneutic access to the Bible. The reference to indigenous narratives can lead to a holistic vision of human beings as part of creation, in deep animated relations with the whole of creation. The indigenous idea of the universal interconnectedness of crea-

tures, the earth and the universe as an organism may lead to a new interpretation of anthropology in the Jewish Christian tradition. It can, from an indigenous point of view, nurture the understanding of the biblical vision of the human destination to preserve and to cultivate nature. It can also open access to the understanding of the human being as co-operator with God, the creator, as co-creator. As well as the development of society, this could extend to the development of technology, of autonomous digital systems and processes as well as of robots. In this perspective, this can be considered as an expression of humans' co-creativity, shaping, complementing or even augmenting God's creation beyond nature by culture.

Today, the human being is on their way to assuming the position of creator instead of following the path towards becoming a modest and humble co-creator. It is a small degree from one position to the other. In his bestseller *Homo Deus* (Harari 2017), Yuval Noah Harari describes in general terms, the history of mankind as a process of transformation of our planet in which mankind is assuming the position of God. Digitalization has constructed a new belief system, which Harari calls "Dataism", which in the 21st century will substitute humanist achievements like individualism, the soul and free will.

A field in which this seems even more obvious is that of biotechnology. Elon Musk, the founder of Tesla, is investing in research on brain implants that would transform human beings into Cyborgs, chimeras of humans and machines. Musk is convinced that humans must upgrade to Cyborgs so as to not become superfluous in the environment of artificial intelligence (Lobe 2017). Indeed, research reports show that a research team of Hassan Akbari at Columbia University in the USA developed an artificial neuronal network that can identify, and process brain signals typical for language, and then by a vocoder transform them in spoken language. As a next step, the researchers want to develop neuro prostheses that would make possible speaking to and with paralyzed and non-verbal people. This example shows that the interface of brain and digital networks could in fact serve as a form of therapy or aid. But it is also clearly at risk of abuse: if for example, the neuro prostheses could be used to spy on what people are thinking. This would put the freedom of even thinking and individual privacy at risk. If the basic attitude is to use digital networks and artificial intelligence to perfect the human being via biological manipulations, then humans assume the



position of creator. The ethical challenge is to prevent mankind from the various possibilities to abuse digitalization for a new order of life serving for the perfection of a small elite and downgrading masses of people and excluding them from this perfect world, rendering them exploited, manipulated and powerless. The digital world represents a huge temptation, and sin is waiting, in plain sight, outside the door.

As Conclusions

What can be done? What is our task as practical theologians? Here we can take inspiration from the ideas the theologian Gäfgen-Track who states that: “In this situation a transparent global social discourse” about the future of digitalization is necessary and urgent. Practical theology in the diverse countries and societies in which it finds itself, should involve itself meaningfully and critically in processes of digitalization and insist on establishing this public discourse.

“In this discourse not at least the big four, Google, Amazon, Facebook and Apple, should publish their algorithms, the criteria and the operation mode of processing data, in the same way should do also researchers and developers who work with digitalization and artificial intelligence for instance in the areas of medicine, biology, chemistry or mobility. In an ethical self-obligation, the big four must manage the publicity of their data in a way that excludes each suspect that they could want to manipulate with their data. The objective is a socially and politically responsible use and further development of digitalization and artificial intelligence” (Gäfgen-Track 2019).

Required is a process of digitalization shaped by global social, political and juridical orders. “The note that neither Silicon Valley, nor the Chinese government will respect legal rules and ethical standards should not lead to the conclusion to give up everything in research and development to the forces of the market. Quite the contrary, all efforts should be focused on the goal to realize this process of rethinking worldwide and to legally enforce it” (The Catholic Church in the European Union 2019).

In this process, practical theology should assume a role of motivating: reinforcing churches and religious organizations to critically reflect on the process of digitalization, to participate in regional, national and global ethical discourse about digitalization, to analyze the ethics of digitalization in their

own institution and to rethink its objectives, standards and legal procedures from a theological point of view.

Theology is challenged to participate in a critical interdisciplinary dialogue with technology, about the construction of the concept of the human being. It should analyze and evaluate the communication of human beings and robots and, based on the idea of the responsibility for robots as a part of nature, as creatures constructed by humans, reflect theologically and ethically on the implications for shaping communication with robots or artificial intelligence in more general terms. Assuming responsibility for the World Wide Web and for digital products, practical theology has the task of reflecting on the ethical implications and to advocate for possibilities for shaping the internet according to ethical principles.

It is also important to go a step further and look at the parishes and communities that are polarized due to conflicts within digital platforms, and help members and people to understand how their personal data is being used. It is also important to be aware that in a near future, when the Internet will have access to our biological data, manipulation will be even more intense (Harari 2017). Practical theology in this perspective has a special challenging task: first to be able to understand how this system of technology works and, secondly, to educate people to have a critical understanding of it. Special pastoral training for ministers, priest and pastoral agents is required so that they can build awareness and educate and prepare members in communities and parishes to understand how the new technology operates. In this way one can work on conflict management, regaining trust, reconciliation and restore community life and democracies as well as claiming for our data as a human right (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018). It is also important to prepare church leaders to discuss with conservative religious leadership from both extremes (right and left) about fake news in Internet ecosystems and to reveal the truth behind fake news. Decolonialization in our understanding must consider this perspective as it affects all societies and people's lives.

References

- Dussel, Enrique. 2017. *Las Metáforas Teológicas de Marx*. Mexico: Siglo Veintiuno.
- European Parliament. 2017. “Report with recommendations to the Commission on Civil Law Rules on Robot-

- ics." https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-8-2017-0005_EN.html?redirect.
- Gäfigen-Track, Kerstin. 2019. "Digitalisierung als ethische und rechtliche Herausforderung." *Loccmer Pelikan* 1: 21–24.
- Harari, Yuval Noah. 2017. *Homo Deus*. New York: Harper Collins.
- LeVine, Mark. 2015a. *Overthrowing geography: Jaffa, Tel Aviv and the Struggle for Palestine*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- LeVine, Mark. 2015b. *Why they don't hate us: Lifting the Veil of the Axis of Evil*. Oxford UK: One World Publications.
- Hindman, Mathew. 2009. *The Myth of Digital Democracy*. Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University.
- Kreplin, Gernot Meier. 2019. "Künstliche Intelligenz und christliche Ethik." In *Die digitale Revolution und ihre Kinder*, edited by Hanna Fülling and Gernot Meier, 95–117. Berlin: Evangelische Zentralstelle für Weltanschauungsfragen.
- Levitzky, Steven and Daniel Ziblatt. 2018. *How Democracies Die*. New York: Penguin Random House.
- Lobe, Adrian. 2017. "Homo Deus – Ist die Menschheit bald am Ende." *Zeit online*. www.zeit.de.
- Zuckerberg, Marc. 2019. "Four ideas to regulate the internet." <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/wirtschaft/digitec/facebook-ceo-zuckerberg-ideas-to-regulate-the-internet-16116032.html>.
- Mignolo, Walter D. 2011. *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*. London: Duke University.
- The OECD Privacy Framework. 2013. "OECD Publishing." rights@oecd.org.
- Quijano, Anibal. 2007. "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality." *Cultural Studies* 21 (2–3): 168–178.
- Quijano, Anibal. 2008. "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism and Latin America." In *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate*, edited by Mabel Moraña, Enrique Dussel, and Carlos Jaureguí, 181–224. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Silveira, Sergio Amadeu. 2019. *Democracia e códigos invisíveis: como os algoritmos estão modulando comportamentos e escolhas políticas*. Coleção Democracia Digital. São Paulo: Edições Sesc.
- Souza, Jessé. 2017. *A classe média no espelho: sua história, seus sonhos e ilusões, sua realidade*. Rio de Janeiro: Estação Brasil.
- The Catholic Church in the European Union. 2019. "Robotization of Life – Ethics in View of new Challenges." http://www.comece.eu/dl/olOrJKJCKMLLJqx4KJK/Robotization_of_life_final_version_.pdf.
- The Great Hack* 2019. A Netflix Original Documentary. Directed by Karen Amer and Jehane Nojaim <https://www.thegreathack.com/>
- Wikipedia, Art. "Decoloniality." <https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Decoloniality>.
- Cetic.br. 2019. "Pesquisa TIC Educação." <https://porvir.org/acontece/cetic-br-pesquisa-tic-educacao-2019/>.
- Wikipedia, Art. "Netzneutralität." <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Netzneutralit%C3%A4t#:~:text=Netzneutralit%C3%A4t%20bezeichnet%20die%20Gleichbehandlung%20von,bei%20der%20Nutzung%20von%20Datennetzen>.

De-Colonialization of Body, Spirit and Mind in the Memoir of Deborah Feldman

Constanze Thierfelder

Conscious – and especially unconscious – God-representations play an important role in the development of an individual's psyche. God-representations can also be the agents of colonialization. They can make the individual consent to their own oppression. In the case of Deborah Feldman, they were part of the restrictive context in the ultra-orthodox community in which she grew up. But a different God-representation helped her to find a way out of this repressive system. In all of her struggles, the body was the site in which different God-representations played out and demonstrated their importance and meaning. Finally, Deborah had to make the decision over which God-representation she wanted to trust.

I. Preface

In her memoir “*Unorthodox – The Scandalous Rejection of My Hasidic Roots*,” Deborah Feldman reconstructs her life story and describes how she left the Hasidic Satmar community as a narrative of liberation. Feldman describes the oppressive structures facing this ultra-orthodox Jewish community, especially for women and girls.

Deborah Feldman's memoir can be read from many different perspectives. As a historian, you can see the preconditions of the Satmar community in the persecution of Jews in Europe, in the Holocaust, the Shoah. You can also look at it from the angle of feminist theologians like Judith Plaskow and Ellen Umansky and see that according to Jewish tradition, women will not stand at Sinai (Plaskow 1991, 11) and do not participate in the revelation of the coming Messiah (Umansky 1989, 190). You can also look at the memoir of Deborah Feldman from the perspective of sociology, or psychology of religion.

The oppressive structures Feldman describes need to be understood as a repressive intersectional reality where marginalization, colonial and patriarchal structures not only add up but represent an interwoven and complex reality of the oppression of

Dr. Constanze Thierfelder, PhD teaches as “Privatdozentin” at the Philipps-University of Marburg, Department of Practical Theology, and works as a Hospital Chaplain at the “Elisabethenstift” in Darmstadt, Germany. She wrote her dissertation in the field of psychology of religion and her habilitation on the importance of acknowledging difference in the field of Pastoral Care.

body, spirit, and mind. Reading it from only one perspective makes the interpretation of the novel prone to blind spots.

The deconstructive and feminist perspective of Gayatri Spivak assumes this intersectional perspective. She analyzes different forms of oppression and asks: “Can the Subaltern speak?” (Spivak 1994, 66). Spivak criticizes Marxist and Postcolonial theories that neglect the perspective of women and their contribution to society. Such theorists do not take into account the multiple ways in which women are exploited: by sexual violence, by giving birth to too many children and exploiting their body, sometimes whilst being the only breadwinner (Spivak 1988b). They disregard the ways in which women are rarely part of decision-making in politics, economy, or religion. They tune out how women and girls are dis-

criminated against in education and society and are seldom asked to speak their minds or develop a voice of their own.

Spivak points to the intersectional oppression of many women, in a very elaborate manner without ever losing sight of the economic and ideological methods of colonialization and their consequences.

Similarly, I do not wish to deny or marginalize the historical and everyday denigration and suppression of the Jewish people when trying to understand the way in which women are exploited and deprived of their voices within the Satmar Community. For this, I will use the methodology of the psychoanalytic psychology of religion of Ana Maria Rizzuto (1979) and the materialist biographical method of Frigga Haug (1983). Ana Maria Rizzuto helps to analyze the unconscious God-images that shape our identity and where they are situated. According to Rizzuto, our unconscious can sustain several God-images of different character.

Frigga Haug points to the fact that women are not only victims but consent to their own suppression in many ways. Acknowledging this they are able to become active agents in their own life and can free themselves from the entanglements that tie them down.

My interest is to show the intersectional reality of Deborah's oppression and also "the tools" she used to find her way out of this world of suppression.

Deborah Feldman gives an insight into a very restrictive sectarian community. But she does more than that. With her book she testifies that liberation is possible even if all stakes are against it. The breaking success of her book far beyond the US market brought her fame and helped her to survive. Part of the success may be a kind of voyeurism into a hidden exotic world. But Deborah Feldman also represents a woman who made her way out of this locked-in world, and many women can identify with this.

II. The historic background

The Satmar Community in Williamsburg, NY, was founded in 1946 by Rabbi Joel Teidelbaum. His nephew Moshe Teidelbaum followed him in 1979 (Rabinowicz 1996, 484). Born in 1887 in Transylvania (in Romania) Joel Teidelbaum gathered an ultra-orthodox community around him in 1905 in Satu Mare, "Satmar" in Yiddish, formerly in Hunga-

ry, and now in Romania. He was a fierce opponent of all forms of assimilation and against Zionism because only the Messiah himself was supposed to create a Jewish state.

In 1940, before the Holocaust, Teidelbaum ignored all threats against the Hungarian Jews and failed to engage in the preparation of rescue plans. As the situation became more dangerous, he equipped himself and his closest followers with visas to help them escape to Palestine or the US. At the same time, he thwarted all attempts to cooperate with Zionist and other organizations that could have helped the rest of the community to escape. Teidelbaum himself made a narrow escape, although he had already arrived at the concentration camp Bergen-Belsen. Bribing the Gestapo with the financial help of Jewish supporters, he managed to become part of a group that was set free to travel to Switzerland. He decided to settle in Williamsburg in the US (Keren-Kratz 2014).

There, he gathered other survivors of the Holocaust and founded the Satmar Community. Again, he opposed Zionism and any form of assimilation. He introduced strict measures to separate the Satmar Community from other parts of the US-American society. He tightened dress codes, especially for women who were to dress "in a modest way." For example, they were to wear thick brown stockings with seams. Teidelbaum even encouraged one of the Hasidim to produce these stockings called "palms," according to the English translation of "Teidelbaum". Married women were to shave their heads every month before they went to the Mikvah, the ritual bath (Mintz 1995).

Teitelbaum tightened the Hasidic rules against assimilation and intensified the "purification" of the community at a dire price, one which women and children in particular had to pay. He implemented a separate educational system, where girls were neglected. In the US, where freedom of religion rules over the rights of women and children and where the rights of the individual reigns over compulsory education, Joel Teidelbaum and his followers were free to make their own rules.

Neglecting education and pushing young families to generate as many children as possible has turned Hasidic Williamsburg and other neighborhoods into places where poverty and overcrowded housing are endemic. In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic hit the Satmar Community hard because of living conditions and Hasidic leaders' refusal to close schools and Synagogues (Stack 2020).



III. Outline of Deborah Feldman's memoir "Unorthodox"

Deborah Feldman published her memoir "Unorthodox" in 2012, having left the Satmar Community two years before. Even if it is at times hard to believe, her memoir gives an insight into the contemporary situation of a sectarian Jewish community.

Feldman describes living with her grandparents who were both survivors of the Shoah and were part of the Satmar Community's first generation. When her parents divorced, she lived with her grandparents. Her mother left the family and the congregation when Deborah was still a toddler. Her father was mentally ill and not able to look after her. Feldman grew up with the stigma of her parents' divorce and illness. In her memoir, Feldman describes herself as a curious girl asking too many questions, longing for English books and other things considered "evil," forbidden and out of bounds in the Satmar community. She transgressed many rules and was harshly judged when she did not obey the regulations, for example, when she did not dress according to Jewish laws. At the same time, she wanted to be part of the community and craved her classmates' acceptance, for example by trying to redeem her family by finding a famous rabbi within her ancestry.

When she turned seventeen, she agreed to marry a young man chosen by her aunt. For girls in her community, the most prestigious choice in life was to be married to a pious husband. Feldman reports that through marriage, she hoped to gain more freedom, to find acceptance and gain a new reputation. Over the time of her engagement, she was showered with valuable presents like never before. Marriage, for her, held the promise of becoming a real adult.

Feldman detailed that only then was she introduced to all the religious laws a woman needs to obey when menstruating, so as to not soil her husband's ritual purity. She became acquainted with the fact that she had a vulva and a womb. She had never heard of either before, neither had she understood that the exit 'down there' was more than the way to urinate.

Feldman indicates that it was in fact after marriage, that her most challenging time began. Instead of enjoying her new freedom, she came under the obligation to conceive as soon as possible. When she could not fulfill her "marital duties", her husband and parents-in-law increased the pressure. Physical

and psychological coercion finally made her conceive. During these difficult times, she decided to take a writing class at Sarah Lawrence College, telling her husband she was going there to train as a secretary.

Feldman describes how she wanted to escape the Satmar Community before her son was introduced into the school system. She realized that she wanted another life for him as well as for herself. The contract to publish her memoir gave her the financial means to leave the Satmar community.

Having the financial means to support herself and her son helped her to leave. But she also needed all her mental and spiritual resources. Like in most sectarian communities, she would lose all support of her family and the community, because they would see her as having betrayed their faith, sullying the community.

In the following paragraphs, I will analyze the different God-images relevant to Feldman's experience: those religious images that helped her leave the community, and those that she had to fight.

IV. God-images and identity

It was William James (James 1952) who in his Edinburgh lectures in 1901 and 1902 opened up the possibility of scrutinizing God-images not according to their conformity to church dogmatism and other religious institutions but according to their meaning for the life of the believer. John Dewey (Dewey 1934) emphasized that human beliefs do not originate in the individual psyche alone but are also shaped by personal relationships and the social environment.

As a psychoanalyst, Ana-Maria Rizzuto (Rizzuto 1979) discerns that there are conscious God-representations closely linked to the teachings of the church or other religious institutions and unconscious God-representations that are closely linked to the sense of self. Rizzuto calls these representations the Living God because it is a part of our self-conception that permeates all our thoughts and actions, all that we do and cherish.

For Charles Taylor (Taylor 1989), these God-images and religious beliefs are not only ideas that we hold but are representations embedded in social practices. They shape values and forms of life. Taylor also situates the interpretation of rules within the practices incorporated in our bodies in the form of habits, dispositions, and tendencies.

Following these theoretical frameworks, you can identify at least three significant God-representations within the memoir of Feldman (Page numbers without an author indicated, refer to Feldman 2012).

1. Firstly, there is the Satmar Community that shapes the faith and life of all families and individuals. The God-image that the Rebbe sustains is that of a God taking revenge when not worshipped properly by his people (96). Every moment of the daily tasks is regulated by religious laws that everyone has to fulfill. According to the community's tradition, the laws are the way to stay among the Chosen Ones. In this world, education is more or less dispensable because it distracts people from staying true to their beliefs. School is less about education, and more about being shaped into an obedient part of the community, worshipping and living in the ways the community wants everyone to live. The God of the Satmar community is a very distant God, full of wrath and always threatening to take revenge if you do not submit to religious laws.
2. If it were only about the laws of the community, it might be easier to shake off this God-image, preached and drummed into every member. But it is more than that. Feldman points to the fact that her grandfather's God images were a way of dealing with his feelings of guilt. Feldman relates: "In small ways Zeidy cages himself, depriving himself of harmless joys, and yet it seems that every privation fulfills him... I think that pain makes Zeidy feel clean, purified" (42). Deborah's relationship to her grandfather may shape one part of her God-representation. She tries to obey the rules because she wants his praise and also wants to ease his mind (32). Feldman refers to her grandfather saying: "So often I wondered why I was allowed to live... But with time it became clear to me that all of my children and grandchildren had to be born, and it is my responsibility to make sure they grow up to be good Jews, Ehrliche Yidden, to give meaning to my survival" (43). As a good Jewish girl, Deborah helped him give meaning to his own survival (89).
3. There had to be another God-representation that gave Deborah the strength to endure and to have her own ideas, a God-representation that supported her and enabled her and be creative, to find a voice of her own.

Unlike the God-representations derived from the relation to her grandfather, there is also one

that has many traits of her connection to her grandmother "Bubby," especially when she is at home in her kitchen. Feldman writes: "Bubby's kitchen is like the center of the world. It is in this kitchen that I have always felt safe. From what I cannot articulate, except to say that in the kitchen I did not feel that familiar sense of being lost in a strange land, where no one knew who I was or what language I spoke. In the kitchen I felt like I had reached the place from where I came, and I never wanted to be pulled back into the chaos again" (11). According to Rizzuto, God-representations have their roots in pre-symbolic times, before representations were shaped by language. Sensations of early times are incorporated in the feelings and symbols that are the reservoir for the formation of God-representations. Feldman remembers the time with her grandmother in the kitchen. She retained positive memories that may be important for her helpful God-representation. As a girl, Deborah could prove herself useful in the kitchen, and even more, she could make her Bubby "shak[e] with laughter" (48). This was important because, at other times, her Bubby was not interested in the child Deborah at all. Feldman states, "It's almost as if she doesn't really want to get to know me for who I truly am. She's like that with everyone. I think it's because her whole family was murdered in the concentration camps, and she no longer has the energy to connect emotionally with people" (13).

Feldman refers to Bubby supporting Deborah in questioning the arguments of the Satmar community (96). "The first and greatest Satmar Rebbe said that if we become model Jews, just like in the olden days, then something like the Holocaust would never happen again, because God would be pleased with us." Bubby says it can happen again anyway. She says that people don't realize it, but stuff like the Holocaust had been happening to Jews for centuries, every fifty or so years. ... To think that we are in control is ridiculous, she says. But she doesn't say this in front of Zeidy, who believes the Satmar Rebbe can save us from anything" (96).

According to Feldman, Deborah could connect to her personal God in different ways: "Although I talk to God it is not through prayer. I talk to him in my mind, and even I will admit that I do not come to God humbly, as I should. I talk to him frankly, as I would to a friend, and I am con-



stantly asking him for favours. Still, I feel like God and I are on very good terms, relatively speaking” (31).

The girl Deborah dared to challenge her God: “If God thinks I am so evil, then let him punish me, I think spitefully, wondering what kind of response my provocative claim might elicit in heaven. Bring it on, I think, show me what you’ve got” (107).

V. The shaping of the body in the Satmar Community

In Deborah Feldman’s memoir, the female body and its shaping according to the Jewish rules and regulations are of utter importance. The shaping cannot be accomplished by regulations alone. It needs the consent of the women as well. This is what the theory of the Sociologist and Philosopher Frigga Haug (Haug 1983) helps us understand. According to her, women are not only passive victims of oppression, but they consent to their own abuse in many ways. With her method of ‘Erinnerungsarbeit’ (Dealing with memories), she developed a tool to unravel these entanglements.

According to Haug, if women discover that they take an active part in their suppression, they can break these bondages. Frigga Haug asked women in groups to write down stories of everyday life about body parts like feet, legs, or hair. At first, their stories do not seem to be of importance to the authors. But when the group discusses the narratives, they discover the gaps, the tacit agreements, and self-understood presuppositions that are implicit within.

In her book, “Un-Orthodox” Feldman works precisely in this way. She looked back on the way the Satmar Community shaped her mind and her body. With this, she distanced herself from the images she grew up with and freed herself from oppression. Feldman gives an example of “shaping the body” in school and how Deborah dealt with it: “I’ve forgotten to put a shirt under my sweater. There’s a new rule about no knits directly on the body. Now that we are growing up, my teachers say, we have to be careful to avoid clingy fabrics. I could get in trouble, but it is ten minutes to nine and if I leave now I’ll make it just in time” (30). But as soon as she enters the classroom, she writes ““You are not wearing a shirt under your sweater.” Mrs. Mouse barks at me. “Don’t even think about going to your desk. You

are going straight to the principal’s office””(32). The principal tells her: “Your teacher says you’re having a problem following the rules. I don’t understand why you can’t be like everyone else. No one seems to have any problem wearing shirts under their sweaters. Why do you?”” (33).

While eroticizing the female body, the community did not want girls and women to know anything about their bodies and sexuality. As a child, Deborah asked her grandmother: “Bubby, what is a virgin?” – finding this word written on an olive oil container. Her grandmother was shocked and replied: “Well, it’s not a word for little girls to know” (24).

Feldman retells a story of resistance that her grandmother told her when she, Bubby had been married for two years. Her husband wanted her to shave off all her hair, because the rabbi had said so. “Husband of mine” she retorted indignantly “you went crazy in the head or what? It’s not enough for you that I cover my hair with a wig, even when my mother didn’t bother back in Europe, but now you want me to shave it all too? Never in my life did I hear of such frumkeit, of such a religion, that says a woman has to shave her head” (24). Her husband told her, that he would be embarrassed in front of the rabbi and the other men if she did not oblige and that she would bring shame over the whole family. Finally, she gave in.

When telling Deborah about it, she played down her surrender, saying: “The shaving you think was such a big deal? Not a big deal at all. I got used to it so fast. And honestly, it is much more comfortable, especially in summer” (25). So even her story of resistance became a lesson in the female role of subordination.

According to Feldman, women were not to know anything about their bodies, female or male sexual organs, and sexuality at all. Only when being engaged to marry, did this change completely. Young brides were told in marriage classes what they needed to know. Until then, everyone had told Deborah, that they were spiritual beings, and their bodies only necessary for carrying the soul. All of a sudden, it was all about her body and its functions (153).

Feldman tells the story about Deborah and the other brides when the marriage teacher said to them, that men and women’s bodies were created like two interlocking puzzle pieces and that the female body has a hallway with walls leading to a little door, which opens to a womb. Deborah tries to figure out where this hallway and the opening could be located

in her body. She decides that it cannot be the hole where the pee comes out because that is not that stretchy. She interrupts her teacher, saying: "I don't have that." The marriage teacher is nonplussed: "Of course you do. Everyone has." Deborah retorted: "I don't have the thing that you're talking about. I think I was born without it. How could I have something like that and not know about it?" (152). Feldman remembers the girl Deborah became angry later and felt betrayed: "How could something supposedly so important have been hidden from me all these years? Why was I now being forced abruptly to acknowledge it? Did that mean that until now it had not been okay to have a mekor (a womb), but now that I was getting married, it could make its great entrance, suddenly 'holy?'" (153)

Feldman also concedes, that the young bride Deborah wanted the wedding to become a success. But all her good intentions did not work. After the wedding ceremony, when the couple was to "consummate the marriage," they could not have intercourse. Deborah's body did not oblige to the purpose intended by the Satmar community. For a whole year she was not able to conceive. The family went through all expenses trying to find the problem and fix it. They paid doctors and therapists to deal with Deborah's problem – because, for them, it was her fault alone. The solution was quite a mechanical one. She had to expand her vagina so that the other puzzle piece fitted in.

Feldman reports that the time before she conceived was very painful. Bodily anxieties and panic attacks plagued her. She lost all the self-confidence she had. She realized that the state of marriage did not fulfill the hopes that she had set upon it. Marriage did not help her erase the shame that she carried, nor did her family have any reason to be proud of her. She did not have a husband to team up with to gain more freedom. All the concessions she made had not helped her to fit in.

VI. Threatening and supportive God-representations and body images

Feldman related that it was the conception of her child that gave her more freedom and a new power to pursue her goals. Being pregnant, she coaxed her husband into leaving Williamsburg and allowing her take driving lessons (191).

The author also describes that when giving birth, Deborah finds labor as the most powerful experi-

ence, especially when bearing down for the last time and releasing her son. "I felt as much alive as never felt before" (209). According to Feldman, this experience served for Deborah as a wakeup call and made her fight again. She decided to use birth control and not to go to the mikwa again but fake it. She knew well that the Torah condemned women like her: "It calls me a Jezebel, a truly evil seductress, dragging my husband into sin with me" (220 f) – because her husband had intercourse with a woman not purified by the mikwa.

According to Feldman, Deborah slowly changed her dressing style and her perspective on life during her college years but still waited for 'a sign' to leave the community permanently. To Deborah, this sign came with a serious car accident she had. She remembered one thought when being sure that she would die: "There really is a God, and he is punishing me" (242). Lying in the hospital, she tried to give a meaning to what had happened to her. "That something like this should happen to me, only a few days before I am supposed to leave my past behind for good, only makes sense if it were meant to stop me from doing so. Is it meant to scare me back into obedience?" (243).

Here the wrathful God of the Satmar Community tried to take revenge for all that she did and for her disobedience. But interestingly, at the same time her body made a contradictory statement. Feldman reports that after the thought of being punished, Deborah has another sensation: "I look down at my body and marvel at its ability to survive something so frightening, and I gaze lingeringly at my limbs as if there were magic blood coursing in my veins. How extraordinary it is, to be alive when one should be dead" (243).

For Deborah the car accident is open to two different interpretations. It is the wrath of the revengeful God that she did not obey, or it is the demonstration of her body's power to prevail, even an accident like this. She decides to believe in the message of her bodily experience of power. She leaves her husband and the Satmar community to live a life of her own with her son in Manhattan.

Her later books and also the documentary #female pleasure (Miller 2019) show that leaving the Satmar community was only the beginning of Deborah's journey. For a long time, she searched for a new identity and a new place to live. Finally, she found it in Berlin, Germany, where many outcasts from different contexts gather, support each other, and forge new ties, for example, through art.



VII. Conclusion

De-Colonial Theory focusses on the colonial structures that are still valid in different countries, even if the time of Colonial Empires is supposedly over. People still suffer from the consequences of colonialization not only in the Global South but also in the Global North where survivors of different forms of colonialization have tried to find refuge.

In the Global South and North, different structures of oppression like racism and sexism in their various shapes, are still in place. Asking “Can the Subaltern speak?” (Spivak 1994, 66), Spivak emphasizes that, especially for women, oppression works in intersectional ways. Women suffer suppression not only because of their gender but also because they are part of an underprivileged group. These groups of subalterns have no right to speak and their voice is not heard. Deborah suffers from an intersectional suppression being a woman in a sectarian misogynic faith community and being the offspring of parents disrespected in the Satmar community.

In her memoir, Deborah Feldman demonstrates that oppressive structures of a sectarian community where religion, tradition, a charismatic leader, and US-Legislation come together to hinder women and children from finding their voices.

With the methods of Ana-Maria Rizzuto’s Psychoanalysis and Frigga Haug’s ‘Erinnerungsarbeit,’ I showed that for Deborah, these repressive structures of God-images, self-images and body images worked to reinforce each other. Strengthening and supportive God-images and self-images helped Deborah to question the body images instilled by this sectarian community.

There is no simple answer to the question, why Deborah Feldman succeeded in leaving this community, while many others tried to break free but finally were lured back into the old structures (conf. Abraham, 1995). Retracing Deborah’s sources of strength and endurance is akin to a single case study. It helps to understand more of the intersectional realities of suppression but does not offer simple solutions.

Feldman’s courage and resilience made it possible for her to write her memoir and to leave the sectarian community. It may also help other women to find their own voice. But the memoir does not change the oppressive structures, nor was it written with this intention. There are other ways of working for change and liberation of oppressive systems: The political road of governmental and non-governmen-

tal organizations, the pedagogical approaches that Catherine Walsh (Mignolo/Walsh) proposes, but also the artistic way that Deborah Feldman and other women in the documentary ‘#female pleasure’ use when they tell their stories of liberation.

For me, ‘#Female Pleasure’ points to an artistic method and towards postcolonial liberation. To me this documentary is an example of ‘Artistic research’ (Kiljunen/Hannula 2002), a research that tool like other research is a “creative systematic activity undertaken to increase the stock of knowledge, including knowledge of man, culture and society” (OECD Glossary of statistical Terms, 2008).

The courage and creativity these women show, are an asset to the postcolonial movement. These women’s laughter is contagious and life-giving, though they all endured difficult times. To me, this may be a unique approach of divesting and destabilizing postcolonial structures and showing new perspectives and ways of overcoming intersectional hindrances that women have to suffer.

References

- Abraham, Pearl. 1995. *The Romance Reader*. New York City: Riverhead Books.
- Dewey, John. 1934. *A Common Faith. Based on the Terry Lectures delivered at Yale University*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Feldman, Deborah. 2012. *Unorthodox. The Scandalous Rejections of My Hasidic Roots*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Feldman, Deborah. 2014. *Exodus. A Memoir*. New York: Blue Rider Press.
- Feldman, Deborah. 2019. *Überbitten. Eine autobiographische Erzählung*. München: btb-Verlag. Original hardback 2017. Zürich: Secession Verlag für Literatur (published only in German).
- Haug, Frigga. 1983. *Frauenformen 2. Sexualisierung der Körper. Argument-Sonderband AS 90*. Berlin: Argumentverlag.
- James, William. 1952. *The Varieties of Religious Experience. A Study in Human Nature. Being the Gifford Lectures on Natural Religion delivered at Edinburgh 1901–1902*. London: Longmans, Green and Co.
- Keren-Kratz, Menachim. 2014. “The Satmar Rebbe and the Destruction of Hungarian Jewry: Part 1.” July, 16th 2014, retrieved July, 24th 2020. www.tabletmag.com.
- Kiljunen, Satu and Hannula, Mika. 2002 (Ed.). *Artistic Research*. Helsinki: Academy of Fine Arts.
- Miller, Barbara. 2019. *#Female Pleasure. Fünf Kulturen, fünf Frauen, eine Geschichte*. Warner Brothers Entertainment GmbH.
- Mingolo, Walter D. and Catherine Walsh. 2018. *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*. Durham N.C.: Duke University Press.



- Mintz, Jerome. 1995. *Hasidic People. A Place in The New World*. Cambridge (Mass): Havard Universtiy Press.
- Plaskow, Judith. 1991. *Standing again at Sinai. Judaism from a Feminist Perspective*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Rabinowicz, Tzi M. 1996. *The Encyclopedia of Hasidim*. Northwale NJ: Jason Aronson.
- Rizzuto, Ana-Maria. 1979. *The Birth of the Living God. A psychoanalytical Study*. Chicago: University Press.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. 1994. "Can the Subaltern speak?" In *Colonial discourse and Post-Colonial Theory*, edited by Patrick Williams and Lauroa Chisman, 66–111. Hemel Hemstead: Harvester Wheatsleaf.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. 1988. Scattered Speculations on the Question of Value. In: *Spivak: Other Worlds. Essays in Cultural Politics*. London: Routhledge.
- Stack, Liam. 2020. "Plague on Biblical Scales' Hasidic Families Hit Hard by Virus." *The New York Times*, April, 21st 2020.
- Taylor, Charles. 1989. *Sources of Self. The Making of Modern Identity*. Cambridge (Mass): Harvard University Press.
- Umansky, Ellen M. 1989. Creating a Jewish Feminist Theology. Possibilities and Problems. In: *Weaving the Visions. Patterns in Feminist Spirituality*, edited by Judith Plaskow and Carol P. Christ, 187–198. New York: Harper-SanFrancisco.

Liturgy in a decolonial key

Becca Whitla

This chapter explores the work of decolonial scholar Arturo Escobar in his volume *Sentipensar con la tierra* for its potential to enrich liberating liturgical approaches. Three characteristics of liberating liturgy are specifically explored: how it lifts up the concrete everyday experience of the people, how it is community based, and how it is transformative. These characteristics are shown to intersect with a decolonial theological approach and can be understood along the lines of *sentipensar*, as a tangible example of living, doing, and feeling actualized through the religious experiences and expressions of the people. The chapter concludes with the examination of the hymn, “What a Friend We Have in Jesus” as a brief case study.

Introduction

In the contexts in which I lead worship—in Toronto, Canada—the realities of life for the people who gather can be extremely diverse, representing many cultures, languages, social and economic classes, abilities, genders, sexual orientations etc. My journey towards engaging decolonial thinking comes out of and is a response to more than twenty five years of animating liturgy in these settings, where I have become aware of the power-plays and colonizing role of the dominant culture. My response to leading liturgy in these messy, intercultural, and often conflictual realities has been to celebrate the multiple and intersecting differences that are present. Inspired by liberation theological insights, I affirm the role of people’s experiences in the task of doing theology as a *locus theologicus* and embrace the decolonizing impetus as a necessary part of a liberating praxis.

In this article, I engage the work of decolonial scholar Arturo Escobar in his volume *Sentipensar con la tierra* to help me think about what insights his proposal could have for liturgy (Escobar 2014). In particular I will reflect on three decolonizing characteristics of liberating liturgy: how it lifts up the concrete everyday experience of the people, how it is community based, and how it is transformative. In

Becca Whitla is professor of pastoral studies at St. Andrew’s College in Saskatoon, where she teaches worship, preaching, and religious education. Her book, *Liberation (De)Coloniality, and Liturgical Practices: Flipping the Song Bird* (Palgrave Macmillan) was released in November, 2020.

my view, these characteristics can be understood along the lines of *sentipensar*, as a tangible example of living, doing, and feeling actualized through the religious experiences and expressions of the people. I conclude with the examination of a hymn as a brief case study.

Sentipensar con la tierra

In *Sentipensar con la tierra*, Escobar writes that thinking-feeling with the territory (*sentipensar con el territorio*) involves thinking from the heart and from the mind or *co-razonar*. Escobar’s articulation of *sentipensar* rises out of his work and experience with Afro-descendent communities in Colombia. Drawing primarily on the very particular experience of these communities—along with an acknowledgement of similar experiences and wisdoms from Indigenous contexts—Escobar insists that the act of

sentipensar entails the art of living learned in relation to the particular land inhabited by these communities as they think-feel with the territories, cultures, and knowledges (*conocimientos*) of their peoples.

For Escobar, this act and art of *sentipensar* is connected to a complex web of factors that resists, exists, or re-exists (Spanish *r-existir*) beyond the modern-colonial capitalist world system.¹ *Sentipensar* therefore rejects decontextualized knowledges that emerge from the notions of “development,” “growth,” and “economy” (Escobar, 2014, 16) and resists what he calls the “dualistic ontologies” of modern thinking by enacting viable alternatives to modern “one-worlders” (*Uni-Mundistas*) and their universal(ist) claims and narratives. Instead, *r-existir* is based on other ontological commitments and ways of “*mundificar la vida*,” similar to what decolonial scholars call “other ways of knowing” (Escobar 2014, 21).²

Escobar’s work is rooted in an understanding of the interconnectedness of life, in ways of being, thinking, and doing that go well-beyond colonizing Eurocentric modes of understanding the world. Such modes emphasize the individual, instrumental rationality, the “efficient” exploitation of the environment, and private property, among other things (Escobar 2014, 58). Escobar’s work thus entails a repudiation of the unrelenting avarice and wanton destruction of life through coloniality’s abettor, neo-liberal global capitalism.

A working definition of coloniality is in order at this point. As I have articulated it elsewhere,

The concept of coloniality describes the all-encompassing residual web of colonizing processes, tendencies, and practices and its ongoing manifestation, especially in present capitalist, globalizing, neoliberal systems. Decolonial scholars argue that coloniality brings together the axes of colonialism, modernity, and capitalism. They insist that “modern” history must be read from the perspective of the conquest of the Americas. Coloniality affects who we are, regulates how we understand the world, and conditions all our relations. Coloniality also unmasks the ideology of superiority in which the church, the empire, and notions of what was “civilized” were understood to be inseparable; this ideology permeated the

European and Euro North American colonial projects (Whitla 2018a, 21).

As I see it, and like other decolonial approaches, Escobar’s proposal depends upon affirming ways of being, thinking, doing, and feeling that go outside coloniality and the pervasiveness of colonizing attitudes, along the lines of my definition above. He imagines a world other-wise, a pluriverse world with many cosmovisions and a web of relations that goes beyond human paradigms of knowing to include all of creation. His proposal depends upon understanding ourselves as related to particular territories with all the attending physicality, history, culture, and cosmovision that such a territorialization entails.

A comprehensive analysis of Escobar’s proposal goes beyond the purview of this short article. I highlight, however, that its uniqueness and relevance lie in its articulation of paradigms for other ways of living (thinking, doing, being, and feeling) that build up alternatives to the present destruction of entire communities, habitats, and species, a destruction that threatens life on our planet. Yet, there are also significant gaps which, if addressed, could enrich his proposal. For the purposes of thinking about the implications of his work for liturgy, I highlight two: the lived experience of religion and self-interrogation as a scholarly tool for a praxis of *sentipensar*.

First, there are hints in Escobar’s work of the possibility of a richer engagement with people’s lived experiences of religious faith. He writes about cosmovisions, spirituality, and supernatural beings as part of what he calls a pluriversal ontological approach, but he does not spell out these concepts in this work. We know that spirituality and popular religious traditions play a role in the manner in which people interact with and make sense of their environment. By not concretizing his references to lived experiences of religion, he misses an opportunity to expand his thinking to incorporate the reality that is experienced by people on the ground. I wonder how his proposal might shift were he to allow the supernatural or spiritual/religious “world” to significantly impact his thinking about ontology. Like other post and decolonial scholars, in this proposal of *sentipensar* Escobar leaves himself vulnerable to being critiqued for displaying an allergy to people’s actual lived concrete religious traditions.³

1 The Spanish *r-existir* is different from *re-existir*. It encompasses “the historical RESISTANCE of nations and women to the patriarchal and capitalist way of life as such as the social and environmental destruction” (*Rexistir* 2018).

2 Walter Mignolo writes about these other ways of knowing as a stance of epistemic disobedience (Mignolo 2009).

3 For a discussion of the neglect of engagement of religion and Christianity in particular, see (Whitla 2019).



Second, I propose that Escobar, and several other decolonial scholars for that matter, could reflect more intentionally on the role of ethno-racial identities, including his own, as a way to concretize his proposal. I argue that scholars must also territorialize themselves by articulating who they are and where they are located, including by interrogating their own ethno-racial backgrounds and the privileges that come with them. Bodies, racialization, and ethno-cultural traditions are territorially located in scholarship as well as in communities and social movements. Self-location and interrogation as a mode of territorialization could flow naturally out of Escobar's work and deepen its applicability.⁴ I return to this self-location and self-interrogation later. For now, I simply wish to assert that it is a crucial step if power dynamics are to be unmasked. Also, I insist that worship cannot become liberating—and we cannot liberate worship—if mechanisms that leave power systems intact are unaddressed. This process must begin with ourselves.

Decolonizing liturgies

Decolonizing liturgies emphasize both a lived experience of religion and a rich process of self-location and self-interrogation. They resonate with the kind of alternative way of living Escobar is advocating, on one hand, and could enrich the notion of *sentipensar* as he articulates it, on the other. Here, I want to be cautious not to suggest a wholesale appropriation of *sentipensar*; the danger of intellectual extractivism must be heeded. To avoid extractivism, any use of *sentipensar* must honour the context and people from which the language of *sentipensar* first emerged. At the same time, other communities engaged in their own struggles against the forces of coloniality can be bolstered by the language of *sentipensar*, knowing and acknowledging that it comes

from this Afro-Colombian context. In what follows I describe some of the decolonizing characteristics of liberating liturgies, with a view to suggesting some of the ways in which they intersect with a decolonial approach.

Lived experience of the people

I contend that liturgies can be understood as tangible decolonial examples of being, doing, thinking, and feeling otherwise. I will reflect in particular on three decolonizing characteristics for a liberating praxis: how decolonizing liturgy is rooted in the concrete lived experience of the people, is community based, and is transformative. First, decolonizing liturgy is concrete. It is engaged with and in the world in the historically and geographically located and culturally conditioned lives of the people. One could say it is territorialized — to use Escobar's parlance. It draws on people's daily lived experience, what Latina scholars call *lo cotidiano*, which the people bring with them when they come together to worship.⁵ Along the lines of *sentipensar*, *lo cotidiano* can be described as a combination of "action, sentimiento (feeling, which in the Latino/a sense is a form of aesthetic reasoning), and ideals" (García-Johnson 2009, 19). Affirming the porous boundary between worship and the rest of life, everyday life is experienced "holistically and aesthetically within practices of the community, music, humor, and religious celebrations" (García-Johnson 2009, 19).

This affirmation of concrete lived reality in worship also echoes liberationist emphases on the everyday as a source for theology and thus invites human cries of pain and suffering to "co-mingle with our praise and our thanks" in embodied expressions that range from anguished lament to ecstatic joy, expressing "humanity at full stretch" (Saliers 2000, 289, 278). Indeed, we can affirm that *lo cotidiano* is not only a place for celebration but also the space where "people face the complex and messy reality of suffering, shame, brokenness, and struggle toward transformation of their world and reality," where, in liberationist terms, people make "their faith concrete and historical" (DeAnda and Medina 2009, 188). In this kind of space, our thinking, feeling, do-

4 For a discussion of two other gaps in Escobar's proposal, see Néstor Medina's chapter. Medina notes that Escobar problematically uses the verb *ser* instead of *estar* when discussing "being," bolstering the Eurocentric notion of "being" along the lines of Heidegger's *Dasein*. Similarly, Escobar's insistence on the use of the term "ontology" renders his proposal overly abstract. Medina proposes instead the use of "the cultural" to reflect the present re-configuration of the world by way of multiple cultural communities along the lines of Escobar's pluriversal approach.

5 Ada María Isasi-Díaz writes that *lo cotidiano* is "at the heart of mujerista theology and ... is important to all liberation theologies and struggles" (Isasi-Díaz 2002, 6).

ing, and being intertwine as worlds come together, especially interculturally, through the multiple human experiences that are present in worshipping spaces.

Experiences of daily life are also permeated with a variety of border experiences, to nod towards another decolonial concept. There are borders between cultures, languages, class and status, places, and geographic locations, among other things. The risky, even dangerous reality of some congregation members intertwines with the privileged reality of others because “borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy” (Anzaldúa 2007, 19). Moments of border liturgy can thus provoke the reclaiming of other ways of knowing drawn from the particular experiences of the marginalized and also promote a critical interrogation of present power structures, including what is traditionally done in worship, as well as how it is done.

Walter Mignolo articulates the interchange in such border spaces as border thinking. Resonating with *sentipensar*, he notes that subaltern reason inhabits different bodies, draws on different sensibilities and memories, is intersubjective rather than individualistic, and has what he calls an “overall different world-sensing” which draws on the “realms of the senses beyond the eyes” (Mignolo 2000, 60). Border thinking, like border liturgy, is a process which calls both for 1) building up “local histories, restoring the dignity that the Western idea of universal history took away from millions of people” and also for 2) delinking and decolonizing knowledge from European/modern/colonial/patriarchal epistemologies (Mignolo 2000, x).

Worshipping in a decolonial way requires navigating across borders and between spaces as a kind of syncopation—movements of disruption which compel us to at once inhabit and transgress border spaces and invite us to engage relationally in cross-border thinking and, I would add, cross-border being, cross-border feeling, and of course, cross-border doing, which here includes worshipping.⁶ A real move into border spaces is a dislocating and risky business; it is not about merely paying lip

service to this monumental task. “Being” in a border space is a relational move which requires nothing short of a conversion to an-other as a radical act of love to relinquish power, following Jesus, especially for those with power.

An emphasis on concrete lived experience continually challenges us to enliven our worship, our praxis of liturgy, by lifting up the whole-life experience of the people as a source and location for theology and liturgy, especially across borders and between cultures. It preferentially pays attention to the experience and concrete expressions of the most marginalized, particularly the experience of women and most of all, marginalized women, so neglected in historic religious practices.⁷

Rising out of community

Second, decolonizing liturgies rise out of community. Yet the notion of “community” is complex. In Toronto, Canada, for instance, a city reputed to be the most diverse in the world, faith communities wrestle with plurality because of multilingual, multicultural, and multiethnic realities. Often, many cultures, languages, classes, and value systems are represented in a single community. Many people in the city have been deterritorialized, often violently, and are in the process of re-territorializing, trying to root themselves in their new place, with all of the attendant challenges of discrimination, marginalization, poverty, etc. Many are also wrestling with what re-rooting means in relation to the historical-colonial violation of Indigenous peoples, lands, and cultures.⁸ In some churches in Canada, for instance, services now begin with the Indigenous practice of a land or territorial acknowledgement—a ritual expression of gratitude for the specific land on which people are situated and the first peoples who lived there. This rite, though contested because of concerns it can become an empty gesture, resonates with the territorialization of *sentipensar* among the Afro-Colombian communities, as Escobar articulates it.

Like *sentipensar*, a decolonizing approach to worship insists that all the peoples present in our faith communities must be uplifted and affirmed as we think-feel what we do. Such an affirmation in-

6 I have written about a syncopating liberating praxis. See (Whitla 2018b).

7 See Medina (2015).

8 See Medina (2017).



cludes the cosmovisions and cultures we bring with us in their pluriversality, as well as our relationship to all of life around us in creation. If taken seriously, this approach requires a commitment to relational interculturality on the ground, by which I mean a praxis that is radically inclusive; it would stand against structural approaches to exclude and privilege some people and would seek to create new alternatives for conversation among different cultural traditions and peoples. Inherited worship practices would thus be challenged when they reinforce traditional dominant culture power structures, and substantial new spaces would be opened up and protected for expressions from marginalized communities.

As I see it, taking on this responsibility is a potentially decolonizing move, a commitment to interrogate ourselves especially with regards to the kinds of social power society ascribes to us due to a number of factors. These factors include: how people are racialized, economic status, including the ownership of land/property, where we are from, where we live, the kind of passport we carry if we even have a passport, gender, age, place of employment, (dis)ability, the language(s) we speak, and the religion we practice, among other things. Relationships with other people are thus put in the context of community which are in turn part of our institutional, ethno-cultural, and even national settings. These ever-widening circles of self-reflective, intercultural relationality are essential in a liberating praxis. Such a praxis begins with a reflection on who we are and where we are, so that we can root our actions in an interrogation of ourselves with respect to the territories we inhabit, the people with whom we are in relationship, our relationships with all other sentient beings, and the imperceptible links of colonization that shape all our relations.

Transformation through decolonizing liturgies

Third, decolonizing liturgies must embody the liberationist push toward the transformation of social and ideological systems of oppression against marginalized communities, including in worship and liturgical practices. Decolonizing worship, at its best, offers an alternative to the rapacious greed of the capitalist modern-colonial world system, actualizing another way of living. It nourishes us for our transformative work in the world. It also transforms

us and our communities, already modelling a world where other worlds are possible. To be liberating, liturgies must be spaces where people are actually engaged in a communal praxis which decolonizes, as agents working to enact the liberating love which is at the heart of Christianity (Segundo 1974).

By decolonizing liturgies, a sacramental space is prepared where the divine can be encountered. The role of the agency of the people, especially the marginalized, in bringing about transformation thus must be understood as taking place in collaboration with the Divine, animated by the Holy Spirit. But enacting decolonizing liturgies, actually making them happen, is a messy and painstaking task. Glimpses of the Divine take place amidst, in, and in-between experiences of pain, death, despair, and suffering; they occur in specific contexts in which people think-feel in order to make sense of these realities. Decolonizing liturgies thus rely on a proleptic orientation which affirms that the pain and suffering of this world cannot be the last word. It insists that we all have a part to play in building the realm of God; we can already anticipate and model the eschaton, another possible world. In the diverse congregations of Toronto, decolonizing liturgies also require those from the dominant culture, like myself, to heed a clarion call to side with, enter into, and walk in solidarity with the marginalized. This accompanying requires a hermeneutics of silence with deep listening and paying attention to those voices that have been marginalized or even silenced.⁹

In this spirit, let us briefly follow one hymn's journey as a way to sample the implications of paying attention to marginalized voices. As we shall see, a hymn can be either an embodiment of coloniality or a song of liberation or even both at the same time, depending on the context. When we look more closely at some of our practices, we may discover that decolonizing has already begun, as marginalized communities reconfigure the artifacts of empire.

⁹ Latino theologian Roberto Goizueta's notion of *acompañamiento* or accompaniment helps illuminate the process. Goizueta argues that this authentic relational justice presupposes solidarity in the midst of suffering together with the poor and marginalized (and not for them) before any kind of genuine pluralism can be achieved (Goizueta 1995, 13).

“What a friend we have in Jesus” Expression of coloniality or song of liberation?

As we have seen, liturgies which seek to be in a decolonial key demand that we celebrate and affirm practices which rise out of the lived daily experience of the people, are rooted in community, and are transformational. But they also require liturgists to make a commitment to interrogate coloniality at the heart of what we do in worship; worship practices, especially in my own Anglo North American settings, need to be radically decolonized. This decolonizing is a crucial part of a broader liberating process. We know from the work of decolonial scholars that coloniality affects all aspects of human existence: who we are, how we behave, and how we understand the world and all our relations. Indeed, people continue to live with the legacy of colonialism in a lived “coloniality of being” and that includes how we worship (Maldonado-Torres 2007).

In Anglo-Canada, “coloniality” stems from the British contingent of European colonialism. Liturgists and liturgical theologians who are committed to a liberating liturgy in this context thus need to confront the many ways worship has been captivated by modern-capitalist-colonialist-rationalistic-patriarchal thinking. Unmasking coloniality helps make sense of how mechanisms of oppression—whether they be white supremacy, gender exclusion, or settler colonialism, to name a few—are still present in our practices, including, for example, our hymn singing.

Corresponding with and contributing to the ascendancy of the British Empire, British hymnody, particularly of the Victorian era, was imbued with coloniality and was exported and imposed in the Canadian context and elsewhere. Coloniality impacted the way music is understood, taught, composed, performed, and experienced, and has strongly shaped worship practices.¹⁰ Let us consider “What a Friend We Have in Jesus” in relation to these is-

sues, a hymn written at the zenith of the British Empire, in 1855 by Joseph M. Scriven.¹¹

A decolonizing stance which seeks to interrogate coloniality in this hymn text draws our attention to lines like “weak and heavy laden, cumbered with a load of care” which can lead one to describe this hymn as a sentimental and pietistic reduction of human nature to a kind of pathetic iniquitous being.¹² Emphasizing a theology of substitutionary atonement, it essentializes the singing subject as a depraved sinful being, dependent on the superior salvific nature of the Christian God. But a liberating approach to liturgy also demands that we pay attention to how worship is being lived out on the ground by the people and how it is connected to their lived every day experience, even including hymns which are part of the forces of colonialism. How then might “What a Friend We Have in Jesus” be reconfigured?

In the spring of 1987, the mother of my exiled Sotho South African boyfriend died at her home in Soweto, South Africa. In Toronto, we organized a makeshift memorial service at my parents’ house, where members of the African National Congress and the Pan African Congress — all political refugees — gathered to grieve with Neo. At a certain point, the leader of the proceedings announced that we would all join together to sing a hymn “familiar all over the world.” We began to sing verse one: “What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear! What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer!...” (Hymnary.org 2019).

In other places, I have analyzed the way oppressed communities have changed the words of traditional hymns to transform the theological meaning. In this case, the singers changed the meaning of the song *through* the very act of singing. With a liberationist hermeneutical lens, the pietistic reading of this text was disrupted as these singers flipped the song, and it became instead a song of defiance, a locus of contestation. It affirmed the real-life griefs, pain, and trial of dehumanizing cir-

¹⁰ In other work, I use “coloniality of music” to describe the multiple ways in which coloniality has pervasively infected music, music making, and discourses about music and has contributed to making Eurocentric approaches to music dominant (Whitla 2018b).

¹¹ Scriven wrote the poem to comfort his mother living in Ireland while he was in Canada. For the full text and biography of Scriven see (Hymnary.org 2019).

¹² Verse three reads: Are we weak and heavy laden, cumbered with a load of care? Precious Savior, still our refuge—take it to the Lord in prayer! Do your friends despise, forsake you? Take it to the Lord in prayer! In his arms he’ll take and shield you; Thou wilt find a solace there (Hymnary.org 2019).



cumstances—the hardship of life under the brutal rule of the Apartheid regime. Singing this song promised hope, lifted up the fundamental human-ness of the singers and became an encouragement to continue in the struggle for those whose lives had been dedicated to overthrowing the racist government. When we sang with Neo, we all bore witness to his exile and to his grief; as comrades and as allies, we embodied a theology of solidarity in the act of our singing.

Canadian Anglican Indigenous Bishop, Mark MacDonald affirms that, in contexts like this, the actual singing can be just as important as the words. He notes, for instance, the slow fervent style of hymn singing in many Indigenous communities is appreciated and evaluated for its passionate commitment and expression, for its thinking-feeling. MacDonald says that hymn singing can be a mode of resistance and it is also a way in which Indigenous language and culture was carried. Theologically speaking, MacDonald says that “underneath what we see and hear is a dynamic of life which is unveiled and released in singing” (MacDonald 2016).¹³ Hymn singing, according to MacDonald, thus enables a “different cosmovision, including an eschatology which is defiant because it is present in the here and now through singing” (Whitla 2018b). I propose that this kind of decolonial approach to hymn singing can be understood along the lines of *sentipensar*.

Susan Beaver who is the *Kanienkeha* minister at Grand River United Church on Six Nations reserve near Toronto, Canada would agree about the meaning of “What a Friend We Have in Jesus.”¹⁴ In her community, the hymn is deeply meaningful for many Indigenous people including the people at her church, because it helps those who suffer; struggle with grief; need help, especially spiritual help; or face other challenges like the temptations of addiction, among other things. She says that it is very much a cry for help from the people. “The thing is,” Beaver writes, “in the history of the church as our people see it, the visitors came and told us how we worship is wrong. So we picked up their Bible and churches and hymns and quite loved them or understood them as the norm. There is a lot of old stuff that for sure needs to be jettisoned by us. But with

the new hymns and the new hymn books the people say, ‘We worship the way they told us to worship and now they’re coming in and telling us our worship is wrong again’” (Beaver 2017).

Other examples of the singing of “What a Friend We Have in Jesus” might include its use at the funeral of eminent Cuban theologian Maestro René Castellanos, at the *Seminario Evangélico de Teología de Matanzas* in Cuba in 2012 with Castellanos’ own translation; at the Toronto Pride parade in June in celebration and affirmation of the LGBTQ+ community; or indeed among the many working class communities throughout North America where this song remains beloved for its affirmation of the experience of human suffering and its celebration of an intimate loving relationship with Jesus.

In these contexts of struggle, this traditional hymn, which one might be inclined to reject because of its “old-fashioned theology,” can actually embody a resistance to the very constructs of coloniality when it is reconfigured by the communities that sing it, as they think-feel their way to their own transformation. Along with songs and ritual practices from the Global South, such transformations offer liberating possibilities for worship practices. The daily lived experience of the people is affirmed as we transform worship in community, give up Eurocentric modes, and embrace the painstaking process of conversion which requires us to become something other than what we are. In these ways, entire communities begin to also engage in their own processes of decolonization and transformation. In recognizing our complicity with systems of coloniality and decolonizing ourselves and what we do, we seek to change ourselves and transform our world. In this space, worship is a way to do theology and to think-feel otherwise. Worship thus reflects who we are and who we want to become as active agents of a liberating praxis proclaiming what is and what ought to be as we reconfigure worship in a decolonial key.

References

- Anzaldúa, Gloria. 2007. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books.
- Beaver, Susan. 2017. Email Correspondence with the author.
- DeAnda, Neomi and Néstor Medina. 2009. “Convivencias: What Have We Learned? Toward a Latino/a Ecumenical Theology.” In *Building Bridges, Doing Justice: Constructing a Latino/a Ecumenical Theology*, edited by Orlando Espín, 185–196. New York: Orbis.

¹³ McDonald’s insights about culture and other ways of knowing illustrate that discourses using the language of “decolonial” are certainly not limited to Latin American decolonial arenas.

¹⁴ Kanienkeha is the Indigenous word for “Mohawk.”

- Escobar, Arturo. 2014. "Sentipensar con la tierra: Nuevas lecturas sobre desarrollo, territorio y diferencia." Medellín, Colombia: UNAULA.
- García-Johnson, Oscar. 2009. "The Mestizo/a Community of the Spirit: A Postmodern Latino/a Ecclesiology." Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications.
- Goizeuta, Roberto. 1995. "Caminemos con Jesús: Toward a Hispanic/Latino Theology of Accompaniment." New York: Orbis.
- Hymnary.org. 2019. "What a Friend We Have in Jesus." https://hymnary.org/text/what_a_friend_we_have_in_jesus_all_our_s.
- Isasi-Díaz, Ada María. 2002. "Lo Cotidiano: A Key Element of Mujerista Theology." *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology* 10 (1): 5–17.
- MacDonald, Mark. 2016. Personal conversation with the author.
- Maldonado-Torres, Nelson. 2007. "On the Coloniality of Being." *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2–3.
- Medina, Néstor. 2017. "On the Doctrine of Discovery." Toronto: Canadian Council of Churches.
- Medina, Néstor. 2015. "Theological Musings Towards a Latina/o Pneumatology." In *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Latino/a Theology*, edited by Orlando O. Espín, 173–189. New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.
- Mignolo, Walter D. 2000. "Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking." Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Mignolo, Walter D. 2009. "Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and Decolonial Freedom." *Theory, Culture & Society* 26, 1–23. <http://waltermignolo.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/epistemicdisobedience-2.pdf>.
- Rexistir. 2018. "Tejiendo Cuerpos Territoria Compañía." <http://www.rexistir.com/>
- Saliers, Don E. 2000. "Human Pathos and Divine Ethos." In *Primary Sources of Liturgical Theology*, edited by Dwight W. Vogel, 276–283. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press.
- Segundo, Juan Luis. 1974. "The Sacraments Today, Volume Four of a Theology for Artisans of a New Humanity." Translated by John Drury. New York: Orbis.
- Whitla, Becca. 2018a. "Coloniality in 'Glossary of Key Terms.'" In *Decoloniality and Justice: Theological Perspectives*, edited by Jean-François Roussel. São Leopoldo: Oikos.
- Whitla, Becca. 2018b. "Liberating Congregational Singing: A Critical Engagement with Hymns, Songs, and Congregational Singing Practices using Postcolonial, Decolonial, and Liberating Perspectives." PhD thesis, St. Michael's College, University of Toronto.
- Whitla, Becca. 2019. "Poison or Cure? Reading Christianity/ies as Postcoloniality's 'Other.'" *Interventions International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 22 (2): 261–281.

Developing a competency framework for ministerial formation from a postcolonial perspective: A South Africa contribution

Ian Nell

Assessment of students for ministerial practice is traditionally done through assignments and oral examinations, which often only concentrate on the knowledge component and outcomes of the program. Assessing students in this way has mimicked a view of ministerial practitioners as intellectuals preaching over the heads of the congregants and not being in touch with the pastoral and contextual needs of the members, and normally leads to a disconnect between knowledge, practice, and context. Disjuncture of this nature signals a need for a broader set of competencies, rather than simply working with and analyzing texts in theological education. Developing a set of competencies also responds to the reality that the practice of ministry takes place within a rich diversity of postcolonial settings and practices. The central research question of this study was therefore formulated as follows: What are the central ingredients for developing a competency framework for ministerial formation from a postcolonial perspective at a research-intensive university in South Africa? In answer to this question, this paper looks at the ways in which a competency framework can help to translate generic graduate attributes into a set of competencies that are specific to the field of ministerial training. Some empirical work shows evidence of a growing postcolonial awareness in the development of these competencies.

1. Introduction

The overarching question that led to this research was: How well do we prepare our graduates for the 21st century? We have to take the comment of Tencer (Tencer 2017, 2) seriously: “Eighty five percent of jobs that will exist in 2030 haven’t been invented yet.” We therefore have to prepare our students and graduates for a world for which it is essentially not possible to prepare for. In preparing our students for these professions that do not yet exist, we have the

The author is Professor of Practical Theology at the Faculty of Theology, Stellenbosch University. He teaches practical theology and ministry practice to undergraduate students, coordinates the MDiv-program as well as the Post Graduate Diploma in Christian Ministry. His research focuses inter alia on leadership development, congregational studies and homiletics.

further responsibility to assess whether they will be in the position to carry out the work competently.

Therefore, the assessment of students enjoys a high priority in higher education institutions all around the world and there are ongoing efforts to improve it by adopting new policies every year. All this is related to quality assurance and control and forms an integral part of the Higher Education

1 Paper delivered at the 14th biennale conference of the International Academy for Practical Theology with the theme “(De)coloniality and Religious Practices: Liberating Hope”, 4–8 April 2019, Faculdades EST, São Leopoldo, Brazil.

Qualification Framework in South Africa. At the Faculty of Theology at Stellenbosch University (SU), we are currently in the process of going through a new phase of policy renewal in this regard and it forces every lecturer to investigate in depth their various forms of assessment.

Assessment of theology students for ministerial practice is traditionally carried out through the completion of assignments and oral examinations, which often only concentrate on the knowledge component and outcomes of the program. This has mimicked a view of ministerial practitioners as intellectuals ‘preaching over the heads of the congregants and not in touch with the pastoral needs of the members.’ This can therefore lead to a disjuncture between knowledge and practice. This disjuncture signals a need for a broader set of competencies than simply those of working with and analyzing texts during ministerial education (Burger and Nell 2012).

This also responds in part to the reality that the practice of ministry is carried out within a rich diversity of postcolonial settings and practices (Naidoo 2012). To resolve this dilemma, a competency framework can help to translate generic graduate attributes as well as the profiles of students who finished their studies, as developed by different partner churches, into a set of competencies that is specific to the field of ministerial training that they wish to practice in.

2. The involvement of stakeholders

The need for a competency framework also flows from an initiative from the side of SU in developing four generic graduate attributes, namely that of an enquiring mind, being an engaged citizen, and being a dynamic professional and well-rounded individual. SU has begun the process of embedding these Graduate Attributes within the Curriculum as well as the Co-curriculum to ensure that students acquire these core competencies that move them towards graduate success.

The importance of a competency framework has also been recognized by different partner churches at our Faculty, for example by the Uniting Reformed Church, which states in their “Profile for Ministers of the Word in the URCSA” (Agenda of General Synod 2005, 13) the following:

1. Values/attitudes – genuine faith, a sense of calling, self-respect, character traits, reflexivity, respect for others

2. Knowledge – basic theological orientation, the Bible/hermeneutics, systematic theology, theological ethics, church history, practical theology, missiology, intercultural theology, ecumenism, church polity, and inter-disciplinary approach, willingness and ability to use insights from other sciences, global context, general knowledge
3. Skills – communication skills (proclaiming, teaching, writing), interpretation (hermeneutical) and intellectual skills, spirituality, management/leadership, pastoral care-giving, involvement in society (research, intervention, ecumenical cooperation, community issues).

Before I move on to the problem statement and the research question, it is worthwhile to get some clarity on what is meant by a postcolonial perspective, seeing that this is the context in which this research was done.

3. A postcolonial perspective

Much has been written on what is meant by ‘postcolonial,’ especially since the student protests and the #fallist movements of October 2015 onwards. A number of distinctions have to be made. Postcolonialism, according to scholars Keller, Nausner, and Rivera (Keller, Nausner and Rivera 2004) and Sharp (Sharp 2012), is primarily concerned with the time following various movements towards independence in the former colonies. In that sense, it criticizes forms of colonialism that are ongoing. Postcolonial theories analyze unequal power relations in the era after the formal end of colonialism and focus on the marginalization and subordination of populations that formerly lived in colonial contexts. When we look at the historical development of colonialism, we see that it is related to the organization of nations and people in hierarchical relationships of oppression and domination.

A postcolonial perspective could therefore be articulated as narratives that venerate inequalities and hide behind masks of colonizing patterns of relationships. A postcolonial perspective unmask the historical legacy of norms that suppress people and limit their possibility for participation. Participation here refers to the purpose of mutuality in relationships between people from structures of interpersonal relationships to institutional and ecclesial structures (Abraham 2008, 377). According to Sharp (Sharp 2012, 425), “[p]ostcolonial work aims to less-



en global oppression and increase justice, particularly in concrete lives of women and children, through recognizing the full humanity of all persons.”

4. Problem statement

There is a need to develop a competency framework that can be incorporated in the Master of Divinity Program that meaningfully takes into account the postcolonial context. This needs to go beyond simply stating the graduate attributes in general terms. There is a need to actively develop students’ competencies to function as professional practitioners within this context.

According to Ashwin (Ashwin 2012), competencies acquired in higher education are assumed to be specific to a field of study and need to be multidimensional. In this sense, these competencies distinguish themselves from intelligence and general cognitive abilities. The Fourth Industrial Revolution, however, will require transdisciplinary approaches to knowledge creation driven by a solution-oriented mindset. This is the case because there is a gradual shift away from higher education as it is traditionally known, towards transdisciplinary education.

This is of specific importance for preparing students for ministry. There is also a shift towards program evaluations based on critical competencies and skills developed and the related practices. This represents a departure from the emphasis on learning outcomes where it is knowledge and retention that are measured.

5. Research question

In the light of the argument above, the research question was formulated as follows: What are the central ingredients for developing a competency framework from a postcolonial perspective for a master’s degree in theology at a research-intensive university?

6. Aims of research

The aim was to develop, implement and evaluate a first iteration of a competency framework to facilitate the assessment of Master of Divinity students that could subsequently serve as a framework for the

assessment of students more broadly in Master of Divinity programs in the African postcolonial context. At a broader level, the aim of the project was to challenge the traditional ways of assessment that mostly concentrate on cognitive (knowledge retention) skills.

7. Review of relevant literature

At SU, we initiated a process of embedding graduate attributes in the curriculum of certain chosen programs in the ten faculties of the University, from 2015 onwards (Nell and Bosman 2017). This initiative was intended to ensure students acquired the core competencies that move them towards graduate success. In our Faculty, there is a particular need to develop a competency framework that can be incorporated into the Master of Divinity Program, in the light of the fact that this is a professional degree required by students who wish to go into full-time ministry. This initiative underscored the importance of a framework that goes beyond simply stating graduate attributes in generic terms. A survey of the literature produced the following headings.

7.1 From graduate attributes towards competencies

Research by Jacobs and Strydom (Jacobs and Strydom 2014) indicates that the development of graduate attributes is enhanced when embedded in a disciplinary framework. In their contribution titled “From ‘Matie’ to Citizen” they look at the ways in which graduate attributes as signature learning at SU can help students to become well-rounded individuals and engaged citizens. According to Jones (Jones 2013, 592), a further determinant of a well-rounded individual is the notion of teaching and learning that embrace life-wide experiences integrated into the textured and complex lives of our students. This takes place by acknowledging the valuable development that occurs in student-driven spaces beyond the classroom and formal curriculum.

7.2 Defining competencies

There is a voluminous body of literature on competencies, in which competencies are broadly defined as “a combination of cognitive, affective, motivational, volitional and social dispositions that form the basis for performance” (Shavelson 2010, 43).

Shavelson presents an approach to measuring and statistically modelling competency measurements by defining competency as a complex ability construct closely related to real-life-situated performance. The intent is to make the construct ‘competence’ amenable to measurement. Competencies can thus be seen as trait dispositions that are relatively stable over time and across situations, while changes can be induced by dynamic components. An additional consideration for developing a competency framework is Bloom’s taxonomy framework, with its emphasis on scaffolding learning. There is a need for threshold concepts to be purposefully integrated into programs and activities and to make them a part of the competency framework.

It is also important to make a distinction between learning outcomes and competencies. *Learning outcomes* are defined in terms of particular levels of knowledge, skills, and abilities that a student has attained (Adam 2008, 9). *Competencies* take this further by describing learning outcomes in terms that define not only what is to be learned, but also the specific levels of performance that students are expected to master (Mulder, Weigel and Collins 2007, 67).

7.3 Global competencies

It is interesting that when one works through the literature, one finds what is called ‘global competencies’ (Bird, Osland and Lane 2004, 57–80; Jokinen

2005, 199–216). According to the OECD PISA global competence framework (see figure 1 below), global competence “includes the acquisition of in-depth knowledge and understanding of global and intercultural issues; the ability to learn from and live with people from diverse backgrounds; and the attitudes and values necessary to interact respectfully with others. *Global competence* is the capacity to examine local, *global* and intercultural issues, to understand and appreciate the perspectives and *world* views of others, to engage in open, appropriate and effective interactions with people from different cultures, and to act for collective well-being and sustainable development.” (Ramos and Schleischer 2018, 6).

7.4 Increased demand for generic competencies

An interesting contribution is the work of Young and Chapman (Young and Chapman 2010), in which they give a description of the historical overview of the development of competency frameworks. According to them, “rapid transformations of the world economy over the last three decades have precipitated profound changes to labour markets across the globe” (Young and Chapman 2010, 2) and through globalization, a shift away from agriculture/manufacturing towards a new knowledge-base global market took place. This necessarily led to the situation that increased levels of necessity for workers able to keep up with changes that the new economy brought and also led to the development of a whole new set of broad skills or generic competencies. They provide interesting examples from all over the globe of the development of these generic competencies.

7.5 Competency-based theological education

The purpose and task of theological training are to educate and equip prospective leaders with the necessary gifts and competencies to empower other believers to participate in the mission of the Church. In this study, the point of departure is that there is a close connection between the quality of theological training and the quality of the candidate arriving for the ministry. Competency-based theological education (CBTE) takes this challenge seriously. According to the Association of Theological Schools (The Association of Theological Schools 2018, 4), CBTE “represents a paradigm shift in theological education. It offers an innovative way for seminaries



Figure 1: The dimensions of global competence
<https://www.oecd.org/education/Global-competency-for-an-inclusive-world.pdf>



and learning networks to raise a new generation of proven leaders, trained in context, in the knowledge, in the skills, and in the character traits they need to prosper in their callings.”

Compared to the content-transfer model, where the focus is on content and topics of study as the organizational principle, the competency-based model works with fluidity, providing a framework for learning and teaching in a variety of contexts. In the competency model, excellence is mainly measured by the nature of the process and not through knowledge production. The real criterion for excellence in competency-based education is the degree to which the student is ready to function effectively in ministry and show potential for continued theological training (Youngblood 1989, 29).

According to Brown (Brown 2016, 2), CBTE “is an educational model that emphasizes: (1) learning more than ‘seat time,’ (2) the mastery of professionally-oriented competencies, (3) well-planned learning activities or assessments (class-based or not, online or onsite) that students may complete at their own pace, and (4) a community of learning where regular and substantive interaction occurs between qualified faculty and students... One way to compare and contrast CBTE with more traditional educational models is that the CBTE model holds learning constant while time varies, whereas traditional models hold time constant while learning varies.”

From this it is clear that CBTE is an approach to developing academic programs where the focus is on the competencies rather than on the time spent in classrooms. Students illustrate and demonstrate their skills and knowledge by participating in learning experiences, activities, and exercises where there is an alignment with well-defined learning outcomes.

Mwangi and De Klerk (Mwangi and De Klerk 2011, 7) put it as follows: “As a curricular model, competency-based learning seeks to develop competencies in persons at different stages of their maturation journey. The competencies encompass the development of the whole person: affect understanding, character, and skills. Competency-based learning does not focus on courses and grades but on measuring competencies based on design outcomes.”

8. Research approach: Design-based approach

The research involved six sequential steps:

1. Develop a better understanding of competency frameworks for teaching and learning in higher education based on a literature review
2. Translate those generic competencies and graduate attributes identified in Step 1 to the context of ministerial education
3. Engage lecturers (and students) in terms of the need for and experience of making use of the framework
4. Design teaching and learning activities for the use of the competency framework in the Master of Divinity Program at SU based on steps 1 to 3
5. Implement the designed framework
6. Evaluate the implementation in Step 5 as the final step of a first cycle of design.

In the six sequential steps I made use of design-based research as an appropriate research approach to address the research question. The design-based research approach has been succinctly summarized by Reeves (Reeves 2006) into four phases (see Figure 2 below).

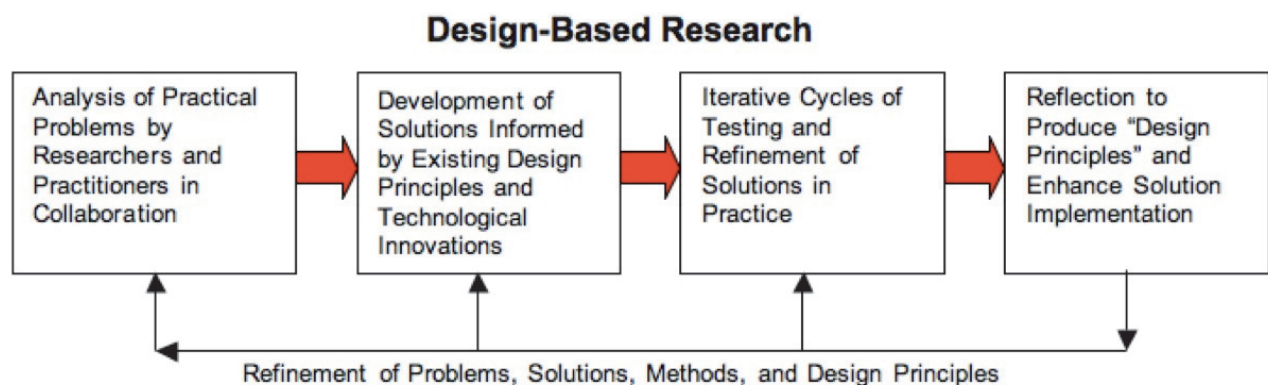


Figure 2: Design-based research



Phase 1: Analysis of practical problems by researchers and practitioners in collaboration

The first phase is focused on the analysis of a significant educational problem, which in this case is the absence of a well-developed competency framework for the Master of Divinity Program. Teachers and researchers together explore the nature of this educational problem facing students. It is also important for teachers to be involved in this phase so that the full extent of the problem is known, rather than being interpreted solely by researchers. A literature review is also conducted in this phase to refer to the work that has already been carried out in the area, or in related areas, and how similar problems could have been addressed. After this initial investigation of the problem, related literature and practitioners' ideas, it should be possible to provide draft research questions. By the end of this phase, my aim was to have a clear idea of the problem and its educational context, to have read the literature related to the area in question, and to have written preliminary research questions.

Phase 2: Development of solutions informed by existing design principles and technological innovations

In the second phase, a solution to the problem is proposed that can be implemented in the classroom or educational setting. The literature is consulted to find relevant theory that can guide thinking as well as existing design principles that may have addressed a similar problem.

Phase 3: Iterative cycles of testing and refinement of solutions in practice

Once a learning environment or intervention has been designed and developed (in Phase 2), the next phase of design-based research is the implementation and evaluation of the proposed solution in practice. Design-based research is not a methodology, but a research approach. While both qualitative and quantitative methods may be used, it is worth noting that "[d]esign researchers do not emphasize isolated variables. While design researchers do focus on specific objects and processes in specific contexts, they try to study those as integral and meaningful phenomena" (Van den Akker et al, 2006, 5).

Phase 4: Reflection to produce design principles and enhance solution implementation

Once a learning environment or intervention has been implemented, evaluated, and refined in cycles, the last phase is to produce design principles that can inform future development and implementation decisions.

There are potentially at least three outcomes of design-based research: the design principles, designed products or artefacts – the physical representations of the learning environment (e.g. website), and societal outputs, such as professional development and learning.

9. Empirical research: Methodology

The research design for the empirical research that I used works from an interpretive perspective in qualitative research, with its roots in hermeneutics as the study of the theory and practice of interpretation (Henning, Van Rensburg and Smit 2004, 19–21). The aim of this kind of empirical research is to provide contextually valid descriptions and interpretations of human actions, which are based on an insider's perspective of people and their world. The research was done by means of a semi-structured interview schedule (five questions) with five of my colleagues from the Faculty of Theology. The following interview schedule was used:

Open ended-interview schedule

1. Tell me about your field of lecturing.
2. In relation to what you do, what do competencies mean for you?
3. You know about our graduate attributes framework at the University. Do you see a relationship between competencies in our field and the graduate attributes?
4. Have you thought about the way in which your field of teaching contributes towards the competencies of the students?
5. If you look at the following competencies, which in your opinion are the most important, and how do you rank them?



10. Interpretation of the data

In an initial round and to come to a deeper understanding of what my colleagues understood concerning competencies, I only looked at the answers that my colleagues gave to questions 1 and 2. Looking at the data through these bifocal lenses of expertise in lecturing, combined with a postcolonial perspective, some interesting data came to the fore.

Concerning *the expertise* of each of the colleagues, it was interesting to see in what ways it colored their way of looking at the competencies. Some examples:

Respondent 1: *So, my field is theology and development, sometimes termed community development, but for me there is a core theological motivation for the church's engagement in issues of poverty and inequality. So, that's the key focus and a lot of my research has been focused on congregations' response to issues of poverty and inequality across denominations, across race groups.*

Respondent 2: *My fields of so-called expertise are called homiletics and liturgy. Homiletics in plain language is all about the art and the act of preaching and liturgy is all about constructing structures for worshipping God, and both of these two fields of my research [have] to do with communication. It's about the communication of the gospel. So, communication is part and parcel, I would say, actually in the heart of what I try to teach.*

Respondent 3: *I am a lecturer specifically in practical theology and more so, specialization in youth work, children and faith formation. So, with that, undergrad, I teach modules like Youth Work and Substance Dependency, Children's Ministry and Child Theology. I teach Youth Culture, Planning and Organization of Youth Work and I teach Faith Formation.*

Respondent 4: *My sub-discipline in practical theology is pastoral care and counselling. So, I have two undergraduate modules that I focus on. The first one is to give students a basic understanding of the basis or to create a basis for pastoral care and counselling, called the Introduction to Pastoral Care and Counselling, which gives them sort of an overview of what the subject matter entails. And then a specialized module in HIV/AIDS Care in the third year and then on the postgraduate level, I have the opportunity to zoom into more specific areas...*

Respondent 5: *Mine is just much more in the field of theology of religions and that means the religious plurality and the responses of churches, and therefore you get in the second year a kind of an introduction, an overview to religions in Africa and ecumenism or ecumenism and religions in Africa. But then applied or demonstrated in terms of two religions and that would be at least Christianity and African religion or Christianity and African Islam.*

From the examples above one can immediately sense that the fields of expertise will have a direct influence on the way the respondents might approach the different competencies. It cannot but color their perspectives.

Concerning *postcolonial perspectives*, I found some interesting snippets in the data, for example the following:

Respondent 1: *I think firstly they need to be able to read text and context and the interplay between them. So, for me that's key. They need to have a framework and [...] maybe some normative framework in terms of what theological perspectives relate to issues of poverty and inequality. Also, intercessions of powers are some core frameworks that they need to understand. But they also need to interpret, to do social analysis and to see how text and context relate to one another and to be able to read that changing context also and how the text relates to it.*

Respondent 2: *If you have good communication linked to real integrity or honesty whatever you want to call that, then you have a moment or moments where communication, deep communication, takes place. You could also, on the other hand, [...] have all the integrity in the world, but if you are lazy and not making use of the best modes of communication that we have also currently, you know, in terms of technology etcetera, etcetera, then you could also sabotage in a certain sense your integrity.*

Respondent 3: *I would think someone who is able to develop their own theological framework or lens. So, you've studied a degree in theology. So, at some point, I would think you are able to discern and make decisions around what you believe or don't believe based on a lens or framework you've developed while studying. I think that's what makes you different from someone studying theology and someone doing ministry without a theology degree. So, being able to make sound theological choices within ministry*



based on some form of theoretical framework or lens that you've developed.

Respondent 4: *My understanding of the competencies is to make sure that the students understand that there are smaller competencies or [that] competencies could be required after one module. But then there are life-long competencies in terms of continuous education, which should always still be part of a student's framework, even while they are busy studying, but also after completion of their studies. That needs to be a reality. The second point is that Pastoral Care and Counselling always works with the existential realities of life, which means that you train young students to deal with the complexities of trauma.*

Respondent 5: *I would say since they engage in a true realistic context [...] they have the appreciative knowledge in terms of cultural and religious diversity. I mean that is the major one. And therefore they should actually as far as the discipline is concerned even begin to map that, depending [on] whether [they are on] the second-year level or the fourth-year level, to map these are the issues that are important because only if you have that kind of knowledge [can] you begin to appreciate the theological and religious and the cultural kind of differences. So, appreciation, it's a key kind of dimension in it also.*

From the responses one can see that a large number of very different competencies surfaced in the interviews: from competencies to read the text and context, to understanding intercessions of power, to good communication linked to integrity, to developing own theological frameworks, to understanding smaller competencies, to dealing with complexities of trauma, to appreciating knowledge in terms of cultural and religious diversity. This concurs with the thoughts of Shavelson (Shavelson 2013, 43), who understands competencies as “a combination of cognitive, affective, motivational, volitional and social dispositions that form the basis for performance,” and therefore as a complex ability construct closely related to real-life-situated performances. This brings us to move in the direction of a first attempt at constructing a competency framework, taking the graduate attributes of SU as a starting point.

11. Towards a first attempt

In a first attempt, I linked the four basic SU graduate attributes to four different types of skills: an enquiring mind to personal skills, a well-rounded individual to people skills, an engaged citizen to applied knowledge skills, and a dynamic professional to

Competency framework for MDiv



Personal skills	People skills	Applied knowledge	Workplace skills
Thinking critically	Initiating transformational change	Becoming a mature disciple	Embracing Cultural Diversity – Cross-cultural competency
Research and writing	Exercising Flexibility in Ministry	Understanding Healthy Congregations	Articulating Biblical Theology
Practicing Biblical Hermeneutics	Embodying the Love of God	Applying Biblical exegesis	Utilizing Biblical Languages
Understanding the development of doctrine	Communicating God's Truth	Applying foundational Doctrines	Resolving Leadership Conflict
Articulating Personal Theology	Recognizing one's impact on other people	Embracing sanctification	Taking responsibility

Figure 3: Competency framework for the Master of Divinity



workplace skills. I further developed five different competencies under each of the skills by making use of literature on Master of Divinity programs, inter alia from the Association of Theological Schools in the USA. See the following diagram in Figure 3:

12. Assessing the competencies

Once one has identified the core competencies required for success in the targeted ministry, setting a four-step approach can be applied to help with the improvement of assessing these competencies. It is important to invest the time to write a description, performance standards, and indicators for each competency.

- The competency *description* is a concise, high-level definition of the competency. It expresses the intent and scope of the competency within the context of the program. It is a necessary element but does not provide enough detail on its own for consistent assessment.

- *Performance standards* provide more detail. They describe what mastery of the competency looks like in context; the observable components of the performance that, when combined, fully represent mastery as defined in the description. They articulate what the student is expected to know (cognitive domain), be (affective domain), and do (proficiency domain) with respect to that competency.
- *Performance indicators* describe observable, measurable behaviors, outputs, or circumstances that signal achievement of the performance standards. They quantify criteria a mentor can use to assess whether the student has demonstrated achievement of the performance standard; they describe what evidence of competency achievement might look like in a student.

An example of a competency rubric is presented in Figure 4.

Competency Rubric



Learning Behavior	NOVICE	INTERMEDIATE	ADVANCED APPLICATION	ADVANCED THEORY & APPLICATION
Taking Responsibility for one's actions	Student has significant difficulty recognizing and articulating a reasonable degree of responsibility. They may deflect much of it or accept much of it without question or critical thought.	Student has some difficulty recognizing and articulating a reasonable degree of responsibility. They may deflect some of it or accept some of it without question or critical thought.	Student has little difficulty recognizing and articulating a reasonable degree of responsibility. They do not deflect much if any and the responsibility they take is contextually reasonable and well-thought out.	Student has no difficulty recognizing and articulating a reasonable degree of responsibility. They demonstrate no deflection at all and demonstrate sound reasoning in terms of distinguishing their degree of responsibility from others.
Recognizing one's impact on others	Student has significant difficulty recognizing the impact of their behavior on others. They often attribute undue blame either upon others or themselves.	Student has some difficulty recognizing the impact of their behavior on others but can describe some impact. They often minimize or exaggerate the seriousness of that impact.	Student has little difficulty recognizing the impact of their behavior on others. They often attribute reasonable degrees of responsibility to themselves and others.	Student has no difficulty recognizing the impact of their behavior on others. They almost always attribute reasonable degrees of responsibility to themselves and others.

Figure 4: Example of a competency rubric

13. Conclusion

In this paper I worked with the basic research question: What are the central ingredients for developing a competency framework for a master's degree in theology at a research-intensive university from a postcolonial perspective? After explaining what I understand under a postcolonial perspective, I reviewed some literature on graduate attributes and competencies and also gave a short description of CBTE. I described my research approach as design-based and gave a short depiction of some of the empirical research that I conducted. The interpretation of the data showed that the participants revealed their understanding of the competencies from the background of their field of interest and they defined a number of competencies that they see relevant for theological education. Finally, a first attempt at a competency framework was undertaken, followed by some concluding remarks on the assessment of the different competencies.

References

- Abraham, S. 2008. "What Does Mumbai Have to Do with Rome? Postcolonial Perspectives on Globalization and Theology." *Theological Education* 69 (2): 376–393.
- Adam, S. 2008. *Learning Outcomes Current Developments in Europe: Update on the Issues and Applications of Learning Outcomes Associated with the Bologna Process*. Presented to the Bologna Seminar: Learning Outcomes Based Higher Education: The Scottish Experience, Edinburgh.
- Agenda General Synod of the Uniting Reformed Church in South Africa. 2005. Profile for Ministers of the Word in the URCSA. Addendum 3.
- Ashwin, P. 2012. *Analysing Teaching-learning Interactions in Higher Education: Accounting for Structure and Agency*. London: Continuum.
- Bird, A., J. S. Osland, and H. W. Lane. 2004. "Global Competencies: An Introduction." In *The Blackwell Handbook of Global Management: A Guide to Managing Complexity*, edited by H. Lane et al., 57–80. John Wiley & Sons: New Jersey.
- Brown, A. L. 1992. "Design Experiments: Theoretical and Methodological Challenges in Creating Complex Interventions in Classroom Settings." *The Journal of the Learning Sciences* 2 (2): 141–178.
- Brown, E. S. 2016. "Time for Reset" in *Theological Education: 200 Gather to Discuss Innovation at Education Models and Practices Forum*. <https://www.ats.edu/uploads/resources/publications-presentations/colloquy-online/ed-models-and-practices-forum.pdf>.
- Burger, C., and I. Nell. 2012. "Ministerial Formation in the Dutch Reformed Churches: In Search of New Paradigms." In *Between the Real and the Ideal: Ministerial Formation in South African Churches*, edited by M. Naidoo, 17–32. Pretoria: Unisa Press.
- Henning, E., W. van Rensburg, and B. Smit. 2004. *Finding Your Way in Qualitative Research*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- Jacobs, C., and S. Strydom. 2014. "From 'Matie' to Citizen: Graduate Attributes as Signature Learning at Stellenbosch University." *The Independent Journal of Teaching and Learning* 9: 63–74.
- Jokinen, T. 2005. "Global Leadership Competencies: A Review and Discussion." *Journal of European Industrial Training* 29 (3): 199–216.
- Jones, A. 2013. "There is nothing generic about graduate attributes: unpacking the scope of context" *Journal of Further and Higher Education* 37 (5): 591–605.
- Keller, C., M. Nausner, and M. Rivera (eds.). 2004. *Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire*. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press.
- Mulder, M., T. Weigel, and K. Collins. 2007. "The Concept of Competence in the Development of Vocational Education and Training in Selected EU Member States: A Critical Analysis." *Journal of Vocational Education & Training* 59 (1): 67–88.
- Mwangi, J. K., and B. J. de Klerk. 2011. "An Integrated Competency-based Training Model for Theological Training." *HTS Theological Studies* 67 (2): 1–10.
- Naidoo, M. (ed.). 2012. *Between the real and the ideal: Ministerial formation in the South African churches*. Pretoria: Unisa Press.
- Nell, I. A., and J. P. Bosman. 2017. "Integrating Graduate Attributes into a Master of Divinity Programme at a South African University." *South African Journal of Higher Education* 31 (1): 175–190.
- Ramos, G., and A. Schleicher. 2018. "Preparing out youth for and inclusive and sustainable world: The OECD PISA global competence framework." <https://www.oecd.org/education/Global-competency-for-an-inclusive-world.pdf>.
- Reeves, T. 2006. "Design research from a technology perspective." In *Educational Design Research*, edited by Jan Van den Akker, Koeno Gravemeijer, Susan McKenney, and Nienke Nieveen, 64–78. London: Routledge.
- Sharp, M. M. 2012. "Globalization, Colonialism, and Postcolonialism." In *Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, edited by B. McLemore et al., 422–431. John Wiley & Sons: New Jersey.
- Shavelson, R. J. 2010. "On the Measurement of Competency." *Empirical Research in Vocational Education and Training* 2 (1): 41–63.
- Stellenbosch University. 2013. *Strategy for Teaching and Learning (2014–2018)*. www0.sun.ac.za/ctl/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/SU-STRATEGY-FOR-TL-2014-2018.docx.
- Tencer, D. 2017. "85 % of Jobs that Will Exist in 2030 Haven't Been Invented Yet: Dell." *HuffPost*. https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2017/07/14/85-of-jobs-that-will-exist-in-2030-haven-t-been-invented-yet_d_a_23030098/.



- The Association of Theological Schools. 2018. *Home Page: Resources*. <https://www.ats.edu/>.
- Van den Akker, J., K. Gravemeijer, S. McKenney, and N. Nieveen (eds.). 2006. *Educational Design Research*. Oxford: Routledge.
- Young, J., and E. Chapman. 2010. "Generic Competency Frameworks: A Brief Historical Overview." *Education Research and Perspectives* 37 (1): 1–7.
- Youngblood, R. L. 1989. *Excellence and Renewal Goals for the Accreditation of Theological Education*. <https://phil-papers.org/rec/YOUEAR>.

The meaningful act of remembrance: creating space for memories evoked by the voices of decolonisation

Ferdi Petrus Kruger

This paper investigates the relationship between painful memories and the meaningful act of remembrance as a tool to guide people towards healing. The context is post-apartheid South Africa. The research question is: Could the act of remembrance enable people to engage with painful memories while addressing decolonization? The research followed Dingemans's (reference, date?) visualization of a research project. The approach starts by considering the present situation. This is followed by theological reflection to ask how the gospel should be heard in these circumstances to elucidate the path of Christian obedience. The reflection culminates in goals and the identification of resources. This in turn leads to action, which becomes the basis for further reflection, and so the hermeneutical cycle continues. This investigation was done from a practical-theological vantage point with due consideration of important principles gleaned from recent research on this topic. The paper closes with liturgical perspectives on how remembrance could enable people to make space to work through their memories. Remembrance can enable people to listen, to be in contemplative silence, and also to interrupt silence and create opportunities for story-telling, which can itself cultivate remembrance. Such moments can bring profound hope.

1. Introduction

South African society took a decision in 1994 to formally put an end to the dehumanisation of apartheid. A thrilling feeling of liberation was followed by sobriety tied to the question of how South African society should, and would be able to, deal with its inherited traumatic memories. Consequently, a kaleidoscope of memories has been influenced by a decision not to forget the past but rather to deal with past memories. It is also important to realize that no society can function in a meaningful manner without remembrance of their origins, their past and their history (Ehrman 2016, 4–6). As Christians, we need to remind ourselves that we also belong to a religion that remembers, that remembers to survive (Bothman 2000, 22–23).

The history of colonialism and decolonization is of course a complex matter for South Africans. It is

Ferdi Petrus Kruger is Professor in Practical Theology at the North West University: Potchefstroom Campus, South Africa lecturing in Homiletics and Liturgics. His research focus is primarily in cognition as well as the functioning of remembrance (recognition). He is the director of the Unit for Reformational Theology and the Development of South African Society.

also ubiquitous: referenced all over social media and present in the political, academic and economic spheres. Decolonisation itself is inexorably intertwined with memories of a colonial past, which transcend politics and remain in the everyday, in thinking processes and ways of being. Memories of what happened in the past are inevitably retrieved in the mere mentioning of the word decolonisation. I embark on a qualitative literature inquiry whose ultimate goal is to offer guidelines for how practical





theologians might engage with the notion of remembrance, which in itself exposes one's attitudes, using the strife over decolonization as a practical example. I highlight throughout that people are unique in how they struggle to make sense of, and/or let go of, memories of the past.

Faith communities are bound up in collective memory. Our intertwined existence necessitates an increasing awareness of people's fragile individual narratives (Tubbs-Tisdale 1997, 32). Theologizing from a public practical-theological perspective calls for a sincere, cooperative and a constructive approach (Koopman and Smit 2007, 272), mindful that decolonization is not just a critical mindset, it always contains a cry of sadness. Cilliers (Cilliers 2015, 3) describes this as the in-between space of paradox. The challenge is that some people want to forget the past, while others are still processing the memories of the past based on what they are currently experiencing, perhaps the past is still very much present.

A painful past pervaded by memories inevitably creates an obstruction to experiencing a meaningful present and the prospect of a hopeful future (Kraidy 2002, 14–16). This article argues that we should be striving to meaningfully cultivate a framework for remembrance in the South African context. Remembrance after all, enables people to reconnect things that have become dismembered and disaggregated (Arthurs 2017, 12). Given this context, the research question is formulated in the following way: *Could the act of remembrance enable people to engage with painful memories, evoked by voices of decolonisation, in a constructive manner?*

According to a typical visualization of Dingemans' (1996:23) methodological insight, this research is divided into three movements that link in a hermeneutical manner:

- analysis of the practical-theological situation;
- normative perspectives; and
- Strategies for changing the problematic praxis.

2. Analysis of the practical theological situation

2.1 Perspectives on storytelling as fertile soil for everyday decolonization

Goudzwaard (Goudzwaard 1981, 22) aptly indicates that ideologies do not emerge by chance, they need injustice or a certain kind of threat in order to take

hold. For example, he illustrates that nationalist ideologies are more influential when religion is invoked. Voices in favor of decolonization often suspect that mainline churches in South Africa are remaining silent on the injustices of the past and do not go far enough to heal painful memories. This is where storytelling can play an important role. Stories inevitably illuminate the *content* (the details of "what happened"), the *affect* (the "how it felt"), as well as the *meaning* (the sense of "why this happened") (Hermans and Dimaggio 2004, 23). Stories consequently go beyond the lived experience of each individual, towards something shared. Storytelling gives us access to the multiple meanings of experience while tentatively building an understanding or theory to explain the meaning of traumatic and difficult events (Boss et al 2003, 457).

The church is subject to criticism based on its colonial heritage within the South African context. Therefore, the church should be available to cultivate opportunities for all ethnic groups, to listen to the stories of all peoples without criticizing, judging, or correcting. This involves letting the orator tell their story without interruption, with the knowledge that the audience will believe or accept the story as a valid representation of the orator's perspective (Nwoye 2006, 12). A liturgical awareness here offers the possibility of experiencing the honour of co-remembering. This can occur when they recognise what has been occurring in other people's lives, especially when painful memories are present. People can live and work within close range to one another, but they may be unaware of what the other remembers about the past. Co-remembering by means of storytelling entails looking through the eyes of others.

Storytelling events, where members of a congregation share their own stories with one another as well as having the opportunity to share stories with those outside the community, have the potential to be truly transformational. Remembrance in this way has the potential to stir one's own memories. Perhaps the ultimate purpose of remembrance after all is to prevent a never-ending cycle of hurt and violence. Ricoeur (Ricoeur 1990, 17) helps us to understand the complexity of this process, indicating that beyond the distinction of a happy memory and an unhappy one lies the possibility of a forgetting held in reserve. However, to forgive, is not to forget. It is this idea of a gift, not as requiring or expecting a gift in return but as something received and passed on as a second gift that leads to mutual recognition and a state of peace.

2.2 The importance of remembrance

Letting bygones be bygones is an imminent danger in the context of this research. It holds several pitfalls. *Amnesia* refers to the absence of narratives about experiences (Rothermund 2014, 62). Similarly, the term '*aphasia*' (speechlessness) in its metaphorical sense refers to an inability to articulate experiences for which one cannot find adequate expressions. This may happen if there is no social framework available that permits the formation of collective memory (Rothermund 2015, 70). In the context of audible voices on decolonization, a praxis of silence as a space where nobody speaks about what everybody knows, should be avoided. Contrary to the idea of voicelessness is the idea of silence. Dauenhauer (Dauenhauer 1980, 27) describes the various manifestations of silence. Silence as an intervening act has the function of pausing between sentences or units of thought. The intervening silence binds the parts of an utterance. The meaning of the preceding thoughts and the following thoughts are captured within this communicative moment of silence. It also has the function of articulating or making sense of speech. This kind of silence by its very nature acts to interrupt, but it is can also be something that opens up new possibilities for mediating acts and new patterns of communication (Muers 2004, 44). In this regard the concept of *interrupting silence* is relevant. Faith communities should contribute to establishing creative and interpretive moments of silence to reflect on societal issues. Silence has the potential to enrich the value of encounters between people, particularly people from different cultural backgrounds and beliefs. The act of liturgy could serve as propellant in facilitating such silent and reflective spaces.

Interrupting silence can play an important role in the context of painful memories. People normally remember parts of an event but tend to forget others, and which event details they recall are influenced by their current mind-set and moulded by thoughts and experiences that have occurred since the original event (Kensinger 2009, 13). The utilization of senses in this remembering is important. People do not only listen with their ears. They hear with their eyes (vivid remembrances) and with their sense of touch as they become aware of the feelings and emotions that arise from a particular message. People also listen with their minds and with their imagination (Grant and Boprcherds 2009, 52). Memories, however, fade like ink aging on a hand-

written letter (Arthurs 2017, 14). Therefore, neuroscientists often utilize the concept of '*engramming*' to describe the process of remembering. An engram is a pathway created in the brain when people receive information or have new experiences. These pathways could be described as memory traces. During this process, the engrams of new information are harmonized with the old. Opportunities to help people to remember should be cultivated.

Language and especially listening are indispensable in this process of remembrance (Kruger 2017, 13). Language after all, enables people to recall facts and has a definite trigger effect in people's lives. Words evoke memories and could even perhaps be compared to the lines of a bar code that evoke the particular item. Casey (Casey 1987, 3) connects his insights with the German concept of *Wiedererinnerung*. This denotes the idea of remembering things again, in effect re-remembering something. The idea of re-member-ing what has been dismembered or amputated is evident (Arthurs 2017, 21). The notion of the prefix "re" as indication of putting something together again, is striking. People are more likely to notice things that fit into their schemata and will often reinterpret things to make them fit. It is important to note that people are incapable of paying attention to all the data they receive. This could explain why different people could listen to the same message, but different aspects would be remembered by each person. People also invent detail to align a memory with their current beliefs.

South Africa's history is painful to the majority of the country's citizens, especially those who were affected by the injustices. Remembrance however, does not have as its goal to restart a harmful process or to make painful memories more painful. It also does not offer analgesics to people. Rather, the voice of decolonization, for example, enables people to revisit their own memories, but this time round with a willingness and an awareness to see things differently by considering other relevant perspectives. Remembrance could offer people a hermeneutical tool with which to reach a fusion of horizons of other people's remembrances as a deeper foundation towards a hermeneutical understanding according to Habermas (cf. Flemming 2012:13). The way to reach a true understanding of people's needs and interests is to engage in a democratic debate where these needs are shared, clarified and transformed (Otto and Fourie 2009, 226). After all, the conviction that free, open, public discussion has a transformative function is central to Habermas' think-



ing and could provide a possible framework (Flemming 2012, 14).

Expecting citizens of post-atrocity societies to simply forget a period of violence and injustice is not humane. Often, those who most adamantly ask of others to forget and move on do not realize what it entailed to be the victims of dehumanizing practices in the first place (Kerry and Whigham 2017, 23). Remembrance of the past should serve to promote cohesion and hope, rather than create further division among people who are experiencing painful memories. Furthermore, memory should not be used to prevent a healing process when listening to opposing voices. People do remember events in the history differently and therefore listening could help to see things through the eyes of other people. Memory, after all, is the way in which the past influences the present and the future. We should acknowledge that what is written about the past will always be subjective and that the different narratives of people are not always captured in the documentation of history. The benefit of collective memory is that it opens up spaces for co-remembering.

3. Normative perspectives on remembrance – αναμνησις

Remembrance relates to understanding the past in such a way that the events of the past become a force in the present. It is true in more than one way that remembrance and recognition equates to participation. Therefore, igniting people's remembrances during a sermon reunites them mentally, emotionally and volitionally to the God proclaimed in the sermon. This section offers brief perspectives from the Old and New Testament as well as some perspectives on hope.

3.1 Old Testament perspectives on recognition and remembrance

The concept of remembrance is central to the Old Testament as it expands to enable a specific function in the present (Merrill 2000, 28). The verb for *zkr* for example occurs 222 times in the Old Testament. From a liturgical perspective, remembering enters the process because it is precisely the person and works of God that must be brought to mind as objects of adoration and wonder. These are recovered only as the worshiper has the capacity to recall them (Vallet 2001, 158). But, it is important to realize that

during Old Testament times and in the text itself, every event and feast became a teaching opportunity. The following two examples illustrate this idea. The importance of the Sabbath and the fact that Israel should observe (remember) the Sabbath day to keep it holy, entails the idea of devotion (Le Roux 2006, 1010). Moses, according to the Old Testament, appointed men, priests, whose main task was to see that the people never forgot what happened that night they ate the Paschal lamb. The lamb kept alive Israel's faith in God. The Lord told them that the first-born of their sons should be given to him and that they should do the same with their sheep. The first-born of the beasts were to be sacrificed and the first-born sons were to be redeemed by a lamb (Le Roux 2006, 1012).

The importance of transmitting the remembrance from one generation to another should be noted. Children (and even adults), after all, learn best when something is demonstrated in a ritual or symbolic manner. In Hebrew culture the children occupied a special place in the learning process. Adults were encouraged to learn from the questions of children (Le Roux 2006, 1014). Fundamental to Israel's faith was the recognition and recollection that Yahweh was Israel's God. In the Old Testament, people were encouraged not only to remember God's acts, but also to remember God himself (Pakpahan 2012, 33). In view of God's relationship with Israel through his covenant and the relationship between the two covenant partners, listening to God and remembrance of Him receives priority. Not only does Israel remember God, God himself actually reminds his people of his relationship with his children.

God himself makes it clear what he wants people to remember (Baxter 2010, 6). He even requests Israel (Joshua 4) to establish memorial stones, twelve of them, when they enter the Promised Land. Whenever they look at the Jordan River, they should remember the fact that it was God's gracious and almighty acts that enabled them to enter the land of Canaan. In this instance the memorial stones also provided parents with a teaching tool, they were able to instruct the next generation based on their memories. Baxter points out that the memorial stones were important so that all people could understand that the hand of God is mighty (Joshua 4: 24) (Baxter 2010, 8). At the very least, this remembering within the covenant seems to imply that the God who performed the past mighty deeds is the same God who is present with his people as they remember those deeds. He is present as the living

God, bound to them in election and covenant as He was to their ancestors in days past, for He is Yahweh, *'I am who I am.'* Concepts like 'think about', 'meditate upon', 'pay attention to' and 'recalling' are regarded as important building blocks of remembrance (Holyoak and Morrison 2005, 7). In fact, the act of remembrance is based on the assurance that God himself is a re-member-ing God.

Remembrance (recognition) of past events and of God's acts in the past creates new memories and makes encounters with him into meaningful events. People in the Old Testament are therefore also exhorted to remember God in their various feasts like Passover, the Feast of the Tabernacles and the Purim Feast (Vorster 2011, 33). With these feasts, people remembered God's acts of deliverance (cf. the exodus motive) and his providence. However, it is important to realize that the source for remembrance is always God's activity. The past subsequently becomes present in cultic rituals and therefore believers become participants in God's mighty deeds of salvation in the past (Jones 1986, 437).

3.2 New Testament perspectives on remembrance (anamnesis)

From the perspective of the New Testament, remembrance (recognition) is closely related to the significance or meaning of events and words (Pakpahan 2012, 42). Through the act of remembrance, the person or deeds that are remembered are brought to the realm of the here and now (Brouwer 2009, 27). Meaning is created in the process. From a New Testament perspective, the idea of a re-lived and re-experienced experience within a new and meaningful realm, is vivid. The concept of remembrance (anamnesis) is often utilized in the context of an encounter with God (liturgy) in the New Testament. Through remembrance, the active God of the past is remembered as active in the present. This very idea provides a dynamic hope for the future. It moves like a wheel that is able to move backwards, but also forwards.

It is evident from above that the concept of remembrance (anamnesis) is often utilized in the context of an encounter with God (liturgy) in the New Testament. Liturgical remembrance of God's action on behalf of and in relationship with humankind in history is both a *starting point* for worship and flows *from* worship. Remembering God entails seeking and obeying him in the present (Jones 1986, 435). Remembrance (recognition) should not be confused

with the idea of remembering that certain things happened once upon a time. When believers for example celebrate Holy Communion, they experience and relive the power of the crucified and resurrected Christ that freely bestowed on them the message of reconciliation. Remembrance in its functioning is not a cycle, but rather an arrow aimed at significance. Remembrance renews and replenishes people's memories, mediating any of feelings of despondency and hopelessness.

4. Strategic perspectives on changing a problematic praxis

4.1 Storytelling as a safe space for healing

One has to ask about the reason or reasons why liturgy has a seemingly limited influence on people's outlook on societal issues. Decolonization's for example agenda covers all spheres of life: social, economic, political and religious (Mashau 2018, 4920). Within this tension-field some scholars are afraid that churches themselves could again become the sites of the oppressive power of coloniality (Ndlovu-Gatshweni 2015, 486). De Klerk and Kruger (Kruger 2017, 23) indicate that people might experience liturgy as if they were mere observers rather than seeing liturgical actions as being dynamic, working powers that operate within and through participants. Liturgical acts that serve as propellants should lead participants towards the reality of life so that liturgy becomes a way of life that does not engage in an observer mentality. This mediation bridge should open eyes and provide new possibilities to change attitudes that are still embedded in colonizing thought patterns. The bridge of liturgy also offers new insight into the past, because the bridge is open. The same bridge is open to the future. Yet at the moment participants in liturgy are often like stationary vehicles that are ever so slowly trying to bridge the gap between yesterday and tomorrow (Kruger and De Klerk 2017, 21).

People in South Africa are indeed living in a post-conflict society in which gigantic sociocultural shifts have occurred. An essential part of the healing of painful memories in a post-colonial society rests on the ability to tell one's story and to have someone listen and acknowledge pain and suffering. Something should change, in our epistemological thinking of practical theology, too. People have to learn to see and describe the world they are living in



differently (Smit 2008, 22). Worship enables participants in liturgy to look in the right direction for meaningful answers. This is actually what happens in liturgy. God speaks for us to see (to perceive).

Co-remembering can take place through building relationships within daily life. This means that people from different viewpoints are obliged to learn anew to look through the eyes of others. This makes liturgy a bridging act receptive to the idea of a vision for the other. Liturgy as an encounter with God and with other people creates possibilities for meaningful social relationships. Stories help people to make sense of their experiences. Stories or creative images with words can provide a release of emotion and can help one connect to others when learning to live with a certain loss. Viewed from a practical-theological vantage point, it is important to realize that the way in which people remember the past has often been described as the impetus for renewed reproaches rather than constructive healing (Wielenga 2013, 212). Memories are part of stories that people tell themselves and each other about the past. People are constantly in the process of writing and rewriting the stories of their lives to make sense of the world around them. Their memories become part of this story and part of their sense-making efforts (Rosenwalt and Rochberg 1992, 21).

Healing and hope come not so much from the act of remembering itself, but from interpreting memories and inscribing them into a larger pattern of meaning and stitching them into the patchwork quilt of one's identity (Volf 2006, 12). It is also true that in the realm of collective memory, what a nation chooses to remember or to conceal, can have a significant impact on the identity of that nation and the direction it takes. One's memories could lead to bitterness and revenge, or to a desire to ensure a better future for oneself and others (McAdams 2006, 110). A valid question to be revisited is whose memories should be remembered, and whose version of the narrative within the voice of decolonization has to be emphasized? This kind of willingness to listen and to see differently does not allow for an attitude of 'us' against 'them'.

4.2 The fertile space of the interrupting silence of liturgy for remembrance

The acts of listening and of seeing are ingredients of a hermeneutical process of understanding, but they need fertile soil to thrive. Heitink (Heitink 1999, 17)

for example emphasizes that the relationship between theory and praxis needs mediation. Mediation in Heitink's understanding has to do with communicative aspects that mediate the gospel to private life, social establishments and to the public sector. Liturgy within this framework offers a communal and a pastoral space for participants to serve God, each other, as well as the world. In attending to this interaction, practical theology is not an occasional, problem-solving technique, but an ongoing way of doing theology and living the Christian faith (Kinast 2000, 11).

Brueggemann (Brueggemann 2018, 7) emphasizes a possible starting point in doing theology by highlighting the complexity of silence. Silence could refer to awe in front of unutterable holiness, but it can also refer to coercion where some voices are silenced in the interest of other people. Remembrance is closely interwoven with the essence of liturgy during worship services but also in daily life. The power of remembrance (anamnesis) lies in reliving the saving acts of God in such a powerful manner that it enables people to appropriate all God's promises and to embrace their responsibilities. Remembrance viewed from a liturgical angle is related to the memory of familiar aspects or of persons that form the foundation for living memories and vivid experiences. Remembrance therefore draws people into the reality of the fullness of the life in Christ. Moltmann (Moltmann 2007, 11) indicates the importance of this kind of remembrance by saying: *"without the memory of Christ's passion there is no Christian meditation on the future life and conversely, without hope for the coming of Christ and therefore the remembrance of Christ loses its power"*.

Remembrance enables participants in liturgy to link memory with significance (Atkins 2004, 19). It functions like a photograph. In seeing the photograph, it is not only the subject, but also what the subject is doing in the photo that comes to the fore. Every worship service has to be open towards society. Being blessed by liturgy also entails being a blessing to other people in daily life. Remembrance of painful memories is in itself an editing process and the emphasis is therefore not on editing people's versions of memory oneself. The community of believers should instead invite people to become part of a new way of *communitas*, a communicative, remembering community where listening and seeing are integral parts. Therefore, storytelling events, where members of a congregation have the opportunity to share their own stories with one another and



the opportunity to share stories with those outside of the community, have the potential to be truly transformational.

5. Conclusion

Memories evoked by this the voices of decolonisation could either be associated with hope or hopelessness. It is true that reflection on colonialism and on decolonisation is challenging for practical theologians as well as for faith communities. Remembrance mediated by liturgical acts in enabling people to re-remember and to co-remember should be cultivated. Liturgy that deals with remembrance in reliving the saving acts of God in such a powerful manner that it enables people to appropriate all God's promises and to embrace their responsibilities, should be facilitated meaningfully. Meaningful liturgy could enable participants to become more aware of togetherness in society and could help people to work through and reflect on painful memories, perhaps in turn providing hope for the future.

References

- Arthurs, J. D. 2017. "Preaching as Remembering." Illinois: Intervarsity Press.
- Atkins, P. 2004. "Memory and Liturgy: The Place of Memory in the Composition and Practice of Liturgy." London: Ashgate.
- Baxter, T. E. 2010. "What do these Stones Mean?" *Four lakes of Christ* 1:1–12.
- Boss, P., L. Beaulieu, E. Wieling, Turner W. and S LA Cruz. 2003. "Healing Loss, Ambiguity, and trauma: A Community-based Intervention with Families of Union Workers Missing after the 9/11 Attack in New York City." *Journal of Marital & Family Therapy* 29 (4): 455–67.
- Bothman, H. R. 2000. "To Remember and to Heal." Cape Town: Human and Rousseau.
- Brouwer, R. 2009. "Preken in Context over de Homiletische Situatie." In *Als Een Leerling Leren Preken*, edited by M. Borger Barnard, K. F. Bregman, R. Brouwer, G. van Ek, G. Immink, et al, 21–35. Zoetermeer: Uitgeverij Boeken- centrum.
- Brueggemann, W. 2018. "Interrupting Silence." Kentucky: John Knox Press.
- Casey, E. S. 1987. "Remembering: A Phenomenological Study." Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Cilliers, J. 2015. "Seeing, Sighing, Signing Contours of a Vulnerable Homiletic." Stellenbosch, Cape Town.
- Dauenhauer, B. 1980. "Silence: The Phenomenon and its Ontological Significance." Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press.
- Dingemans, G. D. J. 2013. "Practical Theology in the Academy: A Contemporary Overview." Kampen: Kok.
- Ehrman, B. D., 2016. "Jesus before the Gospels: How Christians Remembered, Changed, and Invented their Stories of the Saviour." New York: Harper Collins.
- Fanon, F. 2008. "Black Skin, White Masks." New York: Harper Collins.
- Flemming, T. 2012. "Critical Theory Today: Questions about Theory and Practice." (Paper read at Conference Pedagogika krytyczna dzis: Pytania o Teorie i praktyke at the Pedagogical Institute, University of Gdansk, Poland, May 27, 2012).
- Goudzwaard, B. 1981. "Idols of Our Time." Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press.
- Grant, T. and R. Borchers. 2009. "Communicating at Work." Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- Heitink, G. 1999. "Practical Theology." Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Hermans, H. J. M. and G. Dimaggio. 2004. "The Dialogical Self in Psychotherapy: An Introduction." In *The Dialogical Self in Psychotherapy*, edited by H. J. M. Hermans and G. Dimaggio, 13–28. New York, NY: Brunner-Routledge.
- Holyoak, K. J. and R. G. Morrison. 2005. "The Cambridge Handbook of Thinking and Reasoning." New York: Cambridge Press.
- Jones, R. C. 1986. "The Lord's Supper and the Concept of Anamnesis." *World and World* 64: 434–444.
- Kensiger, E. A. 2009. "Remembering the Details: Effects of Emotion." *Emot Rev* 1 (2): 99–113.
- Kerry, E and L. Whigham. 2017. "Remembering to Prevent: The Preventive Capacity of Public Memory." *Genocide Studies and Prevention: An International Journal* 11 (2): 53–71.
- Kinast, R. L. 2000. "What are they Saying about Theological Reflection?" New York: Paulist Press.
- Koopman N. and D. J. Smit. 2007. "Public Witness in the Economic Sphere? On Human Dignity as a Theological Perspective." In *Christian in Public: Aims, Methodologies and Issues in Public Theology*, edited by L. Hansen, 269–280. Stellenbosch: Beyers Naude Centre.
- Kraidy, M. M. 2002. "Hybridity in Cultural Globalization." Pennsylvania: Department Papers.
- Kruger, F. P. 2017. "Rekognisie as Meganisme vir die Identifisering van die Betekenis van Liturgiese Elemente in die Erediens." *Verbum et Ecclesia* 38: 1–24.
- Kruger, F. P. and B. J. De Klerk. 2017. "The Mediating Influence of Liturgy on the Way of Life – Disposing Oppressing Powers in Oneself and Appropriating of Compassion towards the Other." *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 73 (2): 1–9.
- Le Roux, M. 2006. "Celebrating the Feasts of the Old Testament in Christian Contexts." *HTS* 62 (3): 1001–1028.
- Mashau, T. D. 2018. "Unshackling the Chains of Coloniality: Reimagining Decoloniality, Africanisation and Reformation for a Non-Racial South Africa." *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 74 (3): 1–33.

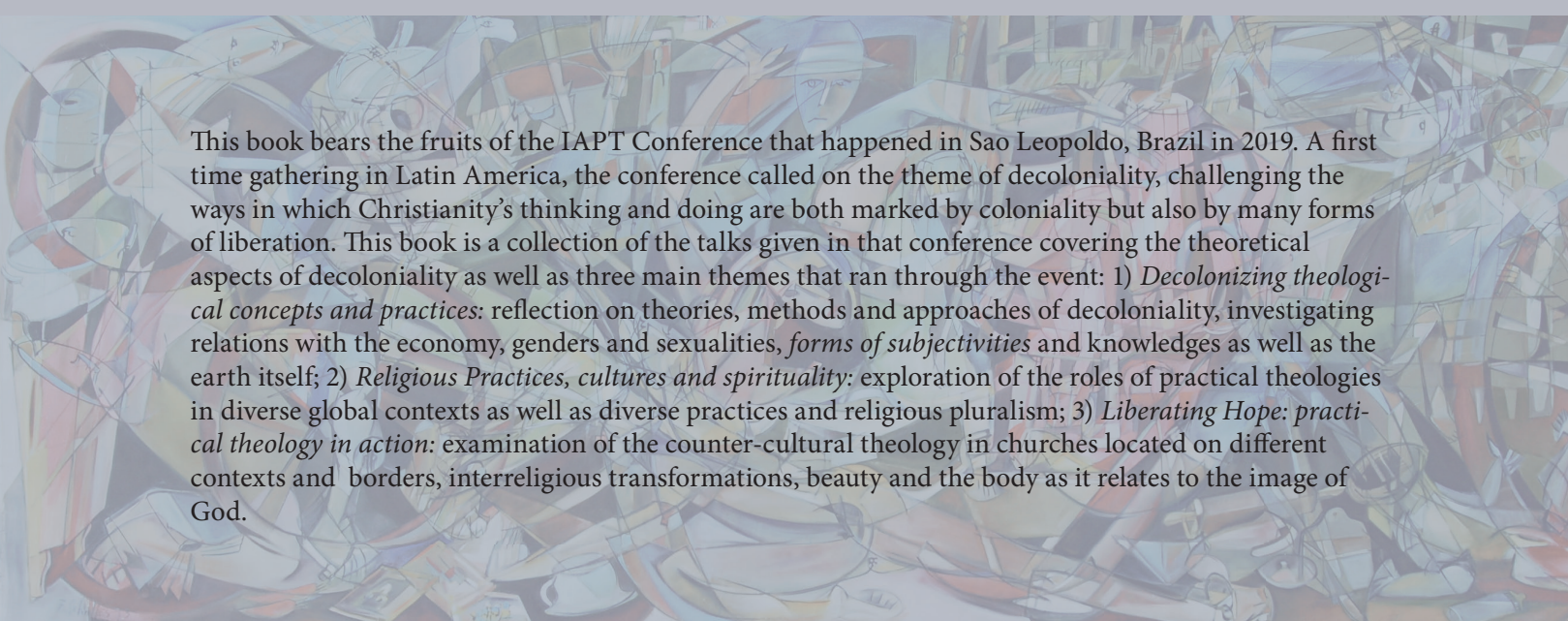


- McAdams, D. 2006. "The Problem of Narrative Coherence." *Journal of Constructivist Psychology* 19: 109–25.
- Merrill, E. H. 2000. "Remembering: A Central Theme in Biblical Worship." *JETS* 43 (1): 27–36.
- Moltman, J. 2007. *Hoffnung auf Gott- u. Zukunft des Lebens. 40 Jahre "Theologie der Hoffnung"*. Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus.
- Muers, R. 2004. "Keeping God's silence. *Towards a Theological Ethics of Communication*." Victoria: Blackwell.
- Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. J. 2015. "Decoloniality as the Future of Africa." *History Compass* 13 (10): 485–496.
- Nwoye, A. 2006. "A Narrative Approach to Child and FAMILY therapy in Africa." *Contemporary Family Therapy* 28 (1): 1–23.
- Otto, H. and L. M. Fourie. 2009. "Communicative Action: The Habermasian and Freirean Dialogical Approach to Participatory Communication for Social Change in a Post-94 South Africa." *Koers* 74 (1 and 2): 226–238.
- Pakpahan, B. J. 2012. *God Remembers. Towards a Theology of Remembrance as a Basis of Reconciliation in Communal Conflict*. Amsterdam: VU University Press.
- Ricoeur, P. 1990. *Time and Narrative*. Chicago, Chicago University Press.
- Rosenwald, G. and L. Rochberg. 1992. *Storied Lives*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Rothermund, D. 2014. "Memories of Post-imperial Nations: Silences and Concerns." *India Quarterly* 70: 59–70.
- Smit, D. J. 2008. *Geloof en Openbare Lewe*. Stellenbosch: Sun Press.
- Tubbs-Tisdale, Leonora. 1997. *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*. Minneapolis: Fortress.
- Vallet, R. E. 2001. "The Steward Living in Covenant: A New Perspective on Old Testament stories." *Scriptura* 76: 157–159.
- Volf, M. 2006. *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Vorster, J. M. 2011. *Menswaardigheid, Versoening en Vergiffenis*. Potchefstroom: Potchefstroomse Teologiese Publikasies.
- Wielenga, C. 2013. "Healing and Reconciliation after Violent Conflict: The Role of Memory in South Africa and Rwanda." *Acta Academica* 45 (1): 209–231.

Valburga Schmiedt Streck is a Professor of Practical Theology and Pastoral Counselling. She is an Associated Researcher at Faculdades EST in São Leopoldo, Brazil, and Professor of Applied Sciences at the Unisinos University. She has worked with families in slum areas for over a decade and she coordinated the graduate program of Theology and HIV/Aids in Latin America. She is also a Couples and Family Therapist.

Júlio Cézar Adam is a Doctor in Theology (University of Hamburg – 2004) and Professor of Practical Theology at Faculdades EST (São Leopoldo/RS, Brazil). He has worked and researched on the following subjects: Liturgy, Homiletics, Spirituality, Social Movements and Liberation Theology, Media, Pop Culture and Youth, Lived Religion.

Cláudio Carvalhaes is Associate Professor of Worship at Union Theological Seminary - New York City. His work and research centers on liturgy, liberation theologies, decolonial studies, performance theories, and ecologies. His upcoming book is on eco-liturgical liberation theology. His recent books are *Liturgies from Below: Prayers from People at the Ends of the World* (Abingdon Press, 2020) and *Praying With Every Heart - Orienting Our Lives to the Wholeness of the World* (Cascade Books, 2021).



This book bears the fruits of the IAPT Conference that happened in Sao Leopoldo, Brazil in 2019. A first time gathering in Latin America, the conference called on the theme of decoloniality, challenging the ways in which Christianity's thinking and doing are both marked by coloniality but also by many forms of liberation. This book is a collection of the talks given in that conference covering the theoretical aspects of decoloniality as well as three main themes that ran through the event: 1) *Decolonizing theological concepts and practices*: reflection on theories, methods and approaches of decoloniality, investigating relations with the economy, genders and sexualities, *forms of subjectivities* and knowledges as well as the earth itself; 2) *Religious Practices, cultures and spirituality*: exploration of the roles of practical theologies in diverse global contexts as well as diverse practices and religious pluralism; 3) *Liberating Hope: practical theology in action*: examination of the counter-cultural theology in churches located on different contexts and borders, interreligious transformations, beauty and the body as it relates to the image of God.



INTERNATIONAL ACADEMY
OF PRACTICAL THEOLOGY
CONFERENCE SERIES

ISSN: 2628-0000