

God dwells in Flesh: Decolonial Ecojustice and Planetary Ethics in the “Anthropocene”

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Abstract

This article provides a preliminary cartography of the intersections of theories, approaches and challenges associated with the “decolonisation” of ecojustice in the Anthropocene. It correlates post- and decolonial theories which for long time have remained environmentally blind with posthuman theories, and confronts the theory of the Anthropocene with its blindness towards non-Western knowledge. Decolonial theory is called upon to put its human-centred presuppositions to the test, to adopt post-anthropocentric perspectives, and to include non-human nature in its critique of epistemic violence and “Western reason.” Ecojustice is a task that links the central post-/decolonial commitment to justice and liberation with ecological challenges.

The article is embedded in the field of intercultural theology and liberation theology, which provides some “material” that highlights the challenges at hand. The post-/decolonial and intercultural-theological reflection of ecojustice stimulates an incarnational theology that starts with the enfleshment and queering of God. Overall, the article suggests a decolonial reading of the Anthropocene and an unmasking of the persistent anthropocentric as well as Euro- and North American-centric perspective it holds, which continues to marginalise other forms of knowledge.

Der Beitrag liefert eine vorläufige Kartographie der Intersektionen von Theorien, Ansätzen und Herausforderungen, die mit der "Dekolonisierung" von Umweltgerechtigkeit im Anthropozän verbunden sind. Er setzt post- und dekoloniale Theorien, die lange Zeit den Herausforderungen der Umwelt gegenüber blind geblieben sind, mit posthumanen Theorien in Beziehung und konfrontiert die Theorie des Anthropozäns mit ihrer Blindheit gegenüber nicht-westlichem Wissen. Die dekoloniale Theorie ist aufgerufen, ihre anthropozentrischen Voraussetzungen auf den Prüfstand zu stellen, post-anthropozentrische Perspektiven einzunehmen und die nicht-menschliche Natur in ihre Kritik an epistemischer Gewalt und "westlicher Vernunft" einzubeziehen. Ecojustice ist eine Aufgabe, die das zentrale post-/dekoloniale Engagement für Gerechtigkeit und Befreiung mit ökologischen Herausforderungen verbindet.

Der Artikel ist eingebettet in das Feld der interkulturellen Theologie und der Befreiungstheologie. Die post- und dekoloniale und interkulturelle theologische Reflexion von Ecojustice regt eine inkarnatorische Theologie an, die mit der Fleischwerdung und dem Queering von Gott beginnt. Insgesamt schlägt der Artikel eine dekoloniale Lesart des Anthropozäns und eine Entlarfung der anhaltenden anthropozentrischen sowie euro- und nordamerikazentrischen Perspektive vor, die andere Wissensformen weiterhin an den Rand drängt.

Keywords: Decolonial Epistemology; Indigenous Knowledge Systems; Post-human Ethics; Relational Ecojustice; Postcolonial Ecocriticism; Creative Uncertainty

Decolonial theory and the Anthropocene: tensions between humanism and posthumanism?

This article aims to provide a preliminary cartography of the intersections of theories, approaches and challenges associated with the “decolonisation” of ecojustice in the Anthropocene. It is by intention not a conclusive, but an unfinished paper. I want to raise questions and stimulate the discussion of cross-disciplinary “travelling concepts” that are crucial for further ideas concerning the decolonisation of ecological justice. As a scholar of Intercultural Theology and the Body, I hope that this interdisciplinary dialogue inspires theological narratives of the encounter with God in the fleshliness and vulnerability of the earth and in the midst of its human and more-than-human earthlings. Following James Cone, this dialogue needs to include scientists as well as theologians and ethicists, grassroots activists and politicians, and people of “all colors” because the “earth’s crisis” is a “crisis in the human family”, interconnected with other crises of culture, especially racism, and, thus affords a “radical critique of culture” (Cone 2000:42).

The starting point of the present study is the perception of a basic tension between post- and decolonial theories, on the one side, which have so far predominantly focused on human beings and, on the other side, posthuman thoughts and theories that have gained attention not least in the course of the debate about the Anthropocene. Following the legacy of Frantz Fanon, Edward Said et al., who were committed to the development of a new, critical, and revolutionary humanism, post- and decolonial theories have dealt with social, political, or epistemological challenges that affect the human. Hence, post- and decolonial attention has focused upon racial, class or gender related processes of colonial othering, epistemic violence, national and cultural differences, and dynamics of cultural hybridisation and creolisation. In contrast, questions of environment and its locally confined fauna and flora, or reflections regarding an “ethics of place” do not fit easily with research on deterritorialisation, displacement and diaspora. Dipesh Chakrabarty states bluntly: postcolonial, critical theories of the past decades on race, feminism and other cultural topics have remained “environmentally blind” (Chakrabarty 2021:17).¹ History has been perceived predominantly from “man’s” perspective as human history, leaving earth history aside (Chakrabarty 2021:17). Humanism – be it the humanism of “Western” philosophers or the revised humanism of Rabindranath Tagore² or Frantz Fanon³ – holds that human beings hold a special position vis-à-vis non-human

¹ For further discussion of the incompatibility of environmentalism and post/decolonial theory see Nixon (2005) and Trujillo (2016). The number of publications that connect environmental challenges with post- and decolonial theories is growing. A pioneer in the field is certainly Édouard Glissant (1997) who creolised ecologies.

² See the very insightful discussion of the idea of reciprocity between human beings and “the world” as well as “the landscape” in Tagore’s writings in Chakrabarty (2021:184–188).

³ See the fascinating, though contestable, re-reading of Fanon by Stephanie Clare (2013). Clare reveals close and up to now mostly ignored links to life and land in Fanon’s writings and relates them to new materialisms and new feminist materialism. Thus Fanon’s humanism does not focus only on human beings but integrates

nature. This exceptional position of the humans is upheld even in concepts that stress the reciprocal relationship and resonance between humans and non-human nature, as the latter is still regarded as “other”.

The insights of the Anthropocene theory, on the other hand, hold out the possibility that the earth, the planet, the world refuses the reciprocity imagined by humanism: earth, world, planet is not “for us” but might – on the contrary – in future even exist “without us” (Chakrabarty 2021:192). Moreover, earth is not “it itself” but “part of us”. Even our brain, the prerequisite for us to be able to think, have consciousness or reflect on the resonance between human beings and the world, is made of material and will become humus one day. The basic “discovery” of the Anthropocene that humans are a major geological and geobiological factor stresses the awareness that humans and earth are intertwined and thus puts the assertion that human beings occupy an extraordinary status to the test.

With this, I am not suggesting that the Anthropocene theory necessarily leads to a post- or more-than-human ethics. This is by no means the case, quite the opposite: the term Anthropocene already reveals, as I will further explain, an inclination to an increased focus on the *anthropos*. Furthermore, to attribute post- and more-than-human ethics to the Anthropocene discloses a Eurocentric view, as it conceptualises an eco-friendly ethics as product of Western science. This argument tends to marginalise knowledge systems, worldviews, and ethics that have a different approach to non-human nature and further a more eco-friendly and -just way of life.

“There are”, the geoscientist Jan Zalasiewicz (2019:38) observes, “many Anthropocenes out there used for different purposes along different lines of logic in different disciplines”. Nevertheless, the Anthropocene is “perhaps the only term of geological periodization that has been widely debated among humanist scholars with no formal training in stratigraphy” (Chakrabarty 2021:155). Yet, despite the interdisciplinary dialogue that the Anthropocene has evoked the humanities continue to be focused on the *anthropos* and the relationship between human beings and the earth. It is only in the last decades that new reflections on the role of humans have emerged and opened the space for posthuman thoughts.

In view of this prospect, decolonial theory is called upon to put its humancentric presuppositions to the test, to adopt post-anthropocentric perspectives, and to include non-human nature in its critique of epistemic violence and “Western reason.” Ecojustice is a task that links the central post-/decolonial commitment to justice with ecological challenges. In a creative tension, both mutually challenge each other: decolonial critique is called upon to take seriously the fundamental ecological and posthuman challenges posed not only by the Anthropocene but – far earlier – by non-Western ways of thought. At the same time ecological ethics are confronted with the demands of decolonial ethics, which are committed to liberation from injustices (Dussel 2013) and dedicated to the experience of exclusion and violence due to intersectional hegemonic (post)colonial power structures.

My deliberations are informed by post- and decolonial discourses, especially within the field of intercultural theology and liberation theology, which in the following will

the idea of a reciprocity between the human and the non-human nature. Nevertheless, it would overexpand Fanon’s thoughts – which Clare does not do – to interpret Fanon as an early pioneer of posthumanist theory.

provide some “material” that highlights the challenges at hand. In the last section, I will present postcolonial and intercultural theological reflections on the enfleshment and queering of God as models and starting points for the development of a theology that takes seriously the demands of decolonisation and ecojustice. First, however, deliberations on what decolonising means are necessary and will introduce the paper, because decolonial theory can all too quickly be turned into a nice elite theory, especially when used by a white, Western, and often privileged scholar like myself. They will be followed by reflections on the narrative of the Anthropocene that have captured scientist and humanist thought. I call for a decolonial reading of the term and an unmasking of the persistent anthropocentric as well as Euro- and North American-centric perspective it holds, which continues to marginalise other forms of knowledge.

The ambivalence of the decolonial and the need to put up with the discomfort and unfinishedness.

One crucial demand of postcolonial theories is to unlearn the hegemonic Western knowledge that has led to an epistemicide of other forms and systems of knowledge, and to recognise the epistemic polyphony. Parallel to this demand, the book market has been filled with numerous scientific and semi-scientific, even “esoteric” publications on “indigenous cosmologies”⁴. “Indigenous” researchers have started to present “indigenous knowledge” and “methodologies” and have reclaimed “indigenous voice and vision” (Battiste 2000; Ezeanya-Esiobu 2019; Hokowhitu et al. 2021; Knopf 2015; Maclean 2015; Dilip 2022). Often the knowledge and practices of “indigenous peoples” are presented as a way of life that conserves natural resources in harmony with nature and thus form an alternative to the global capitalist “culture of the West”, which is oriented towards maximising profits from resource extraction.

In African contexts in particular, “childhood stories” have emerged as a special genre of this critique: Wangari Maatai (2008), Emmanuel Anim (2019) and others present the time of their childhood as a time when people still followed the wisdom of tradition, such as belief in spirits who live in trees or rivers and, thus, protect nature, or the rules of the ancestors that prohibited an excessive exploitation of natural resources. These stories follow the literary tradition of Ngugi wa Thiong’o (1964, 1965), Chinua Achebe (1958), Tsitsi Dangarembga (1988) or Chimamanda Adichie (2003) that wrestle with the transformation of society due to the (neo)colonial encounter with (Western) modernity.

For many peoples, this alternative is an existential necessity because their livelihoods are threatened by what Leanne Betasamosake Simpson has called the logic of extraction and assimilation:

[...] colonialism and capitalism are based on extracting and assimilating [...] when people extract things, they’re running and they’re using it for just their own good (Casolo 2022). Extraction and assimilation go together. Colonialism and capitalism are based on extracting and assimilating. My land is seen as a resource. My relatives in the plant and animal worlds are seen as resources. My culture and knowledge is a resource. My body is a resource, and my children are a resource because they are

⁴ I am putting the terms “indigenous”, “native”, “indigenous people” etc. in inverted commas because they are highly contested concepts that have often been misused to confirm Western superiority.

the potential to grow, maintain, and uphold the extraction-assimilation system. The act of extraction removes all of the relationships that give whatever is being extracted meaning. Extracting is taking. Actually, extracting is stealing—it is taking without consent, without thought, care or even knowledge of the impacts that extraction has on the other living things in that environment. That’s always been a part of colonialism and conquest. Colonialism has always extracted the indigenous – extraction of indigenous knowledge, indigenous women, indigenous peoples (Klein 2013).

Publications on the cultural traditions of “indigenous people” generate certain temptations which endanger their decolonising intention and lead all too quickly to a continued colonial mastery of “other” knowledge systems. One is the romanticisation of “indigenous worldviews”, often accompanied by the enthusiastic rush to relearn a natural way of life from “indigenous peoples”.⁵ This romanticising attitude reproduces not only colonial practices of “othering” but also reduces living cultural traditions to a commodity that can be consumed for one’s own gain in life. Thus, it ignores the cultural, social, and political context and its environmental and political threats in which these traditions and practices are articulated. This romanticisation and commodification of “indigenous traditions” tends to gloss over “white privilege” and invisibilises structural inequalities and injustices. The two Indian environmental activists, Anil Agarwal and Sunita Narain from the Center for Science and Environment, were the first to point to this inequality in their study *Global Warming in an Unequal World: A Case of Environmental Colonialism*. They argued against the blaming of developing countries like India and China for global warming and have called for a fair allocation of responsibilities (Agarwal and Narain 1991). Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha have brought these inequalities to mind by differentiating the “environmentalism of the poor” from the “environmentalism of affluence” (1995:98).

Another form of continued epistemic colonial violence and of renewed colonial mastery is the exclusion of traditions, whether intentionally or not (Demos 2016:22–24). Kimberly TallBear (2017), e.g., criticises Jane Bennett (2010) because in her deliberations on “vital materialism”, she “neglects to mention that similar views can be found in the cultural traditions of many Indigenous peoples”. Bruno Latour, Rosi Braidotti and others likewise fail to cite “indigenous” thinkers.

The decolonial demand to unlearn Western knowledge and to recognise other forms and systems of knowledge is compatible with neither the romanticisation and commodification of “indigenous knowledge” nor ignorance regarding “indigenous” thought. Both are rather perpetuated – albeit sometimes disguised – forms of violence. To prevent decolonial theory from degenerating into a buzz word, strategies and attitudes that help to delimit the above-mentioned “extracting” and “assimilation”, the “running” and “using” for the own good, must be taken seriously. This applies also to practices of writing articles about “the other’s” knowledge systems in order to augment one’s own list of scholarly publications.

⁵ Criticising the romanticisation of indigenous traditions and practices must not be confused with blindness towards destructive practices of “indigenous” people toward nature that are concealed through idealisation. This topic is fiercely contested as the debate of the publication of Krech (2000) reveals, see Demos (2016:23).

Without claiming completeness, I want to briefly sketch three attitudes and methods that might assist decolonial research:⁶

Respect and response-ability for the Local and Terrestrial

As an alternative to the extraction of natural resources as well as of “indigenous knowledge”, Simpson herself advocates for “deep reciprocity”, “respect”, “relationship”, “responsibility” and the “local”. The effects of the extractions are noticeable the closer I am to the affected region and people: conversely, “the more distance and the more globalization then the more shielded I am from the negative impacts of extravist behavior” (Klein 2013).

In a similar vein, although referring more in general to an eco-just attitude in times of climate change and, as said, without mentioning the insights of “indigenous scholars”, Bruno Latour (2018:26) reflects that in the process of globalisation and modernisation the local has been abandoned. Through modern sciences of the universe, a habitus of looking “[d]own to Earth” (Latour 2018) from a seemingly objectifying distance has been established: “to know is to know from the outside. Everything has to be viewed as if from Sirius” (Latour 2018:68). This distanced perspective has obscured the Terrestrial, which “does not allow this kind of detachment” (Latour 2018:72): “We are earthbound, we are terrestrials amid terrestrials,” we are “humus” and “compost”, and depend on “many other beings”, Latour (2018:86–87) claims. It is Latour’s hope and plea that this terrestrial perspective “might put an end to the disconnect that has frozen political positions since the appearance of the climate threat and has imperilled the linking of the so-called social struggles with those we call ecological” (Latour 2018:82).

Decolonial knowledge in the context of eco-justice thus demands locality and closeness to humans and non-humans as preconditions for “deep reciprocity”, “respect” and “responsibility”.

Relationality: staying with creative uncertainty and the uncomfortable

Another way that helps to prevent extractivist research is to search for a relational attitude that overcomes the idea that the researcher is situated above the “object” researched as in a superior – heavenly – position. This attitude implies not only a spatial-terrestrial dimension as the call to an awareness for the local has revealed; it also holds a dimension of time. It demands to stay in the present and to combat escapisms into scenarios of a better past or into a better future that are furthered, e.g., by the Western “epistemology of development and progress” (Tarusarira 2017:404; Chitando/Gunda/Togarasei 2020) or by religious hopes for a better future after life. Donna Haraway (2016) calls for the need to stay with the trouble in the here and now:

[...] staying with the trouble requires learning to be truly present, not as a vanishing pivot between awful or Edenic pasts and apocalyptic or salvific futures, but as mortal critters entwined in myriad unfinished configurations of places, times, matters, meanings (Haraway 2016:1).

⁶ The literature on decolonial methodology is constantly growing, see e.g.: Abott Mihesua and Wilson (2008); Smith et al. (2019); Smith (2021); Wilson (2008); Kovach (2009).

Following this line, decolonial knowledge requires staying with “creative uncertainty” (Haraway 2016:34, quoting Stengers 2011:134) and thus also with unfinished and therefore often uncomfortable knowledge. It demands continuously bending and destabilising the mastery of knowledge, including even the mastery of critical and decolonial knowledge. Decolonising knowledge calls for the openness and “risk of relentless contingency” (Haraway 2016:34). Decolonial theory would, thus, contradict itself if it turned into a theory of a new academic elite that writes about decolonial discomfort and epistemological blindness from a safe, distant desk at a university office. As critical and engaged practice, it rather calls into relation and relationality. In particular, it demands to feel the trouble and discomfort, to be vulnerable to it, to be affected by it physically and emotionally, and maybe be transformed by it (Zembylas 2018). Thus, the question arises: how can a decolonising approach to eco-justice provoke productive discomfort – and which approach has the potential to stimulate unsettling and transforming possibilities that involve mind and body?

Birgit Meyer suggests very concrete steps how this relationality can be acknowledged, and how research can open up to new – and supposedly sometimes uncomfortable and uncertain – knowledge (Meyer 2020). It is necessary, she claims regarding the scholarly knowledge production about religion “in” Africa, to “be much more aware of the extent to which our object of research and the language we employ are conditioned by translation in that a hitherto foreign set of terms under the umbrella of ‘religion’ has been introduced to describe, value, and govern specific forms of human-spirits relations in Africa” (Meyer 2020:163). Thus, the object of research is already the product of relational entanglements between Africa and Europe, yet, with very unequal distribution of interpretative power. To reduce this inequality, Meyer advocates for “joint and collaborative efforts of Africa and Western scholars” (Meyer 2020:175). Finally, Meyer’s (2020:171) deliberations underline what many African scholars have continuously pointed to as a crucial dimension in African epistemology: relationality as an “awareness of being connected with other people, spirits, and things”:

“This grounded sense of relationality [...] and personal permeability is part of a different sense of being in the world than that stipulated by modern Western models that emphasize individualism” (Meyer 2020: 171).

This insight is not new, as said. Rather, it has been reflected by such early scholars of African cultures like John Mbiti and continues to be important in more recent reflections, e.g., of the concept of Ubuntu. Lackson Chibuye and Johan Buitendag (2020) or Teddy Sakupapa (2012) are just two examples out of a plenitude of research articles that have reflected the significance of this principle of relationality in ecological discourse in African contexts. Hence, relationality is not only a means to decolonise research and ecology but can itself be perceived as decolonial concept which has the above-mentioned potential to provoke productive discomfort and transformation – at least as long as it does not become a static concept but furthers a hermeneutic of vulnerability and a mindfulness for the vulnerability of those who still suffer from the aftermath of colonialism and racism (Gerrie Snyman 2015).

Destabilise our own stories: question epistemic politics

Decolonising the “one” story (Adichie 2009) and recognising the polyphony and “ecologies” (Sousa Santos 2006:148) of knowledge are the centrepiece of decolonial theories. So, what story has contributed to ecological injustice? What role did the sciences play in this story? Were sciences, as Jürgen Renn (2020a:21) comments, “the fire accelerators that enabled colonialism and industrial capitalism to become earth destroyers in the first place? Or were they rather the Cassandra who warned early on, but unfortunately no one listened to her advice?”

In the discussion of ecology and climate, the “Anthropocene” has become a term in which various “Grand Narratives, Metanarratives, and Meganarratives” (Conradie and Lai 2021:15) of the “one” story culminate. The debate on the Anthropocene is highly contested as the term reveals polyvalent meanings. Critical scrutiny of the term and its use becomes even more important as the discourse on the Anthropocene and its epistemological politics is in great tension to the discourse on ecojustice.

Decolonising the Anthropocene

Dealing with the discomfort: the Anthropocene as “critical term”

My reflections on what it means to decolonise ecojustice are, as any reflections, situated and embedded (Haraway 1988) in the concrete cultural, socio-political, historical, even linguistic and value context in which I have grown up, lived, worked, and conducted research. They are not objective. Nor is the term and theory I refer to objective or even universally valid: the Anthropocene. The term is traced back to the Dutch meteorologist Paul Crutzen and the US-American biologist Eugen Stoermer. Although Stoermer had used the term before, it only became famous through a joint article of the two scholars titled “The ‘Anthropocene’” (Crutzen and Stoermer 2000:17–18). Neither the term nor the theory remained unquestioned, and I certainly support critiques (Caluya 2014; Manemann 2014; Sakupapa 2022) which highlight that the Anthropocene narrative again gives centre position to – only some – Anthropoi, mainly to “Western” human beings, and a specific knowledge with a clear (economic) preference on technical knowledge about the extraction of resources (like geoengineerings). Many “other” groups of people and more-than-human beings, as well as other knowledge systems like “African ecological wisdom” (Sakupapa 2022:221), are excluded from participating in the discussion. Likewise, the Anthropocene narrative can easily be (mis)used to present the detrimental consequences of the human ecological footprint as an inevitable development without reflecting the “sociogenic” causes of this development (Malm and Hornborg 2014:66). Thus, it also conceals the unjust distribution of the negative impact of the environmental change. From a postcolonial perspective, Gilbert Caluya criticises this strategy of undifferentiated generalisation and points to the re-invention of a universal category of “the human”:

I am suspicious when just as the category of the human is reluctantly opening to incorporate non-normative genders, sexualities, and racialized (and less successfully differently-abled) people, the human is once again returned to a universal category under the rubric of climate change, global warming, and/or the Anthropocene (Caluya 2014:34).

I hold on to the term Anthropocene, yet with discomfort and by using “Anthropocene” as a “critical term”. In association with the book series of the same name by the University of Chicago Press, *Critical Terms for...*,⁷ this programmatically implies that the Anthropocene as a key term in the discourse field of climate change, environmental studies, religion and environment and other topics is not a neutral term. It rather represents a concept of knowledge that is shaped in a very special way, historically and in terms of content. Therefore, it is not enough to merely “describe” the Anthropocene and to consider it as fact. The term, its respective historical development and the authoritative discourses that have evolved around it must rather be unfolded and critically analysed. It needs, I claim, to be “counter-read” from a (self-)critical interdisciplinary and intercultural-global perspective. The interdisciplinary perspective reveals the struggle for power over interpretation between the natural sciences and the humanities. This competition touches the core of meaning of life and, thus, makes the interdisciplinary dialogue and mutual critical engagement between Earth sciences and humanities as well as a critical ethical – and (public) theological – engagement even more urgent. I emphasise Chakrabarty’s (2021:181) perception that the history of human beings and the history of the earth have become so entangled that for humanists today “contemplating the Anthropocene, questions about histories of volcanos, mountains, oceans, and plate tectonics – the history of the planet, in short – have become as routine in the life of critical thought as questions about global capital and the necessary inequities of the world that it made”. The intercultural-decolonial perspective on the other side exposes the manifold interconnections and entanglements that underlie the term Anthropocene in relation to other terms and concepts in the discourse field such as the “Chthulucene”, “Indigenous knowledge”, “greening religion” and others.

Jürgen Renn’s economy of knowledge and planetary reason, or: epistemic polyphony “still at the margins”

In the following, I will focus on the conceptualisation of the Anthropocene by the above-mentioned German mathematician and physicist Jürgen Renn, director of the newly founded Max Planck Institute of Geoanthropology in Berlin. In his emphasis on reason and in the religio-secular meaning he assigns to science, Renn obviously intends to depict the Anthropocene as compatible with the values of the Western humanism – and, indeed, his thoughts show quite some similarity to that humanism that was criticised by Fanon (1952) et al.

As director of the Max Planck Institute of Geoanthropology, Renn is a public figure and as such advocates for an interdisciplinary and intersocietal dialogue in the context of the Anthropocene: “The Anthropocene is a concept that requires a different thinking”, he states (Renn 2022). In the light of the Anthropocene, the “traditional line between nature and culture has become problematic. We are living in an ‘anthropological nature’ resulting from our own interventions” (Renn 2020b:6). Therefore, we need, Renn continues, “[c]ritical interfaces of knowledge and society” (Renn 2020b:169) and communicative “epistemic networks” (Renn 2020b:301). Renn does not tire of

⁷ <https://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/series/CRITER.html> (Accessed: 31.March 2023). For the field of religious and theological studies in the discursive field “Africa”, a similar project was carried out which resulted in the publication of Hock and Jahnel (2022). The following remarks are based on the insights of this project.

emphasising that the discussion of the future of the planet needs to go beyond natural sciences and must include the humanities, the arts, the political and the social fields, and scholars and local activists who are familiar with the repercussions of the Anthropocene in local contexts; “the Anthropocene discourse is about knowledge in action” (Renn 2022). It thus requires not only “system knowledge” about the Earth system but also “transformation knowledge” that “raises the question of how human collective action can affect [the Earth system’s] dynamics in such a way as to ensure sustainable development and ultimately the survival of the species.” Finally, the Anthropocene discourse demands “orientation knowledge” that connects the “other forms of knowledge [...] to ethics, politics, and belief systems” (Renn 2020b:385).

Renn is also a historian of knowledge and science who understands that the perpetuation of knowledge and the creation of new knowledge relies on an “economy of knowledge” (Renn 2020b:143) which includes various institutions and practices of knowledge and relies on “intrasocietal knowledge transmissions” in many forms (Renn 2020b:152). “Knowledge,” he writes, “results from experiences acquired in actions [...] that are not just performed by an individual ad hoc but that are part of societal structures, material culture, and knowledge tradition” (Renn 2020b:146).

At first glance, Renn’s claim for an interdisciplinary and intersocietal approach shows some similarities to recent post- and decolonial thought. Achille Mbembe e.g., asserts that “future knowledges” arise at the cognitive assemblages of different disciplines and exist always in the plural (Mbembe 2016). This implies that the claim for a monopoly of knowledge is to be rejected and an exclusive power of interpretation – also about ecojustice or the future of the planet – contradicts itself. A closer look, however, reveals a clear hierarchy of knowledge in Renn’s work. For it is only in the second to last chapter that Renn reflects on the “Vulnerable Power of Local Knowledge” (Renn 2020b:385) to a broader extent. Not only does this late treatment indicate that Renn perceives “indigenous knowledge” and other forms and systems of knowledge as marginal after all, the fact that this sub-chapter is followed by another sub-chapter titled “Dark Knowledge” in which Renn reflects on the “spread of biased information”, “misinformations” and “fake news” also casts a more than ambivalent light on local knowledges. Moreover, Renn leaves no doubt that the Western scientific knowledge and the “discovery” of the Anthropocene by the Natural Sciences represents universally valid knowledge. The particular value that he attributes to local knowledge traditions, on the other hand, consists in their ability to adapt to global challenges and to strengthen the capacity for cultural resilience. Thus, Renn assigns an auxiliary role to local knowledge:

The place of local knowledge in the global community was and is therefore not a niche but a matrix, a substratum of all other forms of knowledge – one that generates diversification and change. Without residual traditions, without the creative appropriation of globalized knowledge, and without new local responses to global challenges – including the adaption of new foods to traditional eating habits or the recycling of waste – survival for many would be impossible (Renn 2020b:391).

At the end of his book, Renn even goes so far as to attribute to the natural sciences an orienting role that is otherwise assumed by religions:

Traditionally, religions have offered life orientation to large communities and have even claimed to do so for all of humanity. Religions transmit basic human experiences and offer individuals participation not only in a community providing collective identity, but in a sense, also in the fate of humanity as a whole. Is it possible that science could offer such a participatory perspective on the fate of humanity as well? [...] Today, as the destiny of humanity cannot be separated from the knowledge of science and technology, we may seek out the eschatological dimensions of science itself and cultivate its role as a guide in a fragile world whose future depends on it. [...] scientists may again become collaborators in a workshop of hopes, including humanity’s hope for survival (Renn 2020b:410–411).

I resist the temptation to go into further detail and critique. This is not to say that the theory and commitment of Renn are not important for raising attention to environmental urgencies as well as for questions of ecojustice and for pressing to action. On the contrary, climate and earth science potentially have what Naomi Klein (2019:23) calls a “radicalizing power”: hence, if the research is profound, the facts well established and the results presented in convincing “univocal clarity” (Klein 2019:24), the scientific insights can capture the public mind “like nothing before” (Klein 2019:24) “A big part of that has to do with sources”, as Klein explains the success of the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC):

[...] here was a report drawing on some six thousand sources created by nearly one hundred authors and review editors, saying in no uncertain terms that if government did as little to cut emissions as they were currently pledging to do, we were headed toward consequences including sea level rise that would swallow coastal cities, the total die-off of coral reefs, and droughts that would wipe out crops in huge parts of the globe (Klein 2019:24–25).

The theory of the Anthropocene has no doubt strongly contributed to the latest wake-up calls regarding the environment, and its potential to bring different disciplines and actors into mutual critical and controversial dialogue is the reason why I tend to stick to it and to critically re-read it despite its limitations. Surveys like that of Jürgen Renn clearly reveal such a limitation as they reflect on aspects of global justice and colonial exploitation but nevertheless fail to acknowledge the epistemological polyphony, equality, and plurality of stories, and rather assume the role of the “white saviour” who tries to rescue the knowledge systems at the margins. Thus his approach contradicts crucial claims of ecojustice.

In the field of intercultural and postcolonial theology, this critique is reflected in the debate on centres and margins. In 1995, for example, the postcolonial theologian T.S. Sugirtharajah published a book titled *Voices from the Margins. Interpreting the Bible in the Third World*. (Sugirtharaja 1995) Some years later he again published a book and gave it the title: *Still at the Margins. Biblical Scholarship Fifteen Years After the Voices from the Margins* (Sugirtharajah 2008). It is arduous to make so called marginalised knowledge heard in the so-called centre, especially when the centre sees its knowledge production as universal.

In analogy to the theological critique, I claim that the de-centring and the contextualisation of the Western narrative of the Anthropocene and the demarginalisation of still so-called “alternative” knowledge is pending. Maybe this is best illustrated by the way Renn (2022) introduces the term “planetary reason”: “Human beings have become a planetary force,” he states, “but they have not yet developed a planetary reason”. Renn’s deliberations lack a critical reflection of the term “reason,” which for decades has been in the centre of post- and decolonial as well as of feminist and poststructuralist scholars. “Reason” has thus become a deeply contested term linked to colonial and patriarchal power and subordination and to a violent “black reason” (Mbembe 2017).

On the other hand, the term “planetary”, which Renn interconnects with “reason”, receives a positive reputation in the more recent post- and decolonial debate. Chakrabarty puts it directly: “The globe [...] is a humanocentric construction; the planet, or Earth system, decenters the human.” For Spivak the planet represents an alternative to globalisation – though not in the sense of a still dependent dialectical opposition. It offers an exodus out of the logic and system of a capitalist age that planishes differences and polyphony. In her chapter *Imperative to Re-imagine the Planet* Spivak states:

In that era, then, of a breakneck globalization catching up speed, I proposed the planet to overwrite the globe. Globalization is achieved by the imposition of the same system of exchange everywhere [...] The globe is on our computers. It is the logo of the World Bank. No one lives there; and we think that we can aim to control globality. The planet is in the species of alterity, belonging to another system; and yet we inhabit it, indeed are it. It is not really amenable to a neat contrast with the globe. I cannot say ‘on the other hand.’ It will not engage in a double bind (Spivak 2012:338).

The planet thus offers the possibility of escape from habitualised modes of thinking and acting that follows a human-centered and globalised capitalist logic. The “imperative to re-imagine the planet” presupposes this new and different perception and imagination of the planet as well as of human beings – not any more as “global agents” or “global entities” but as “planetary accidents” and “planetary creatures” (Spivak 2012:339). It is Spivak’s hope that with this different approach the capitalist logic might be resisted.

Using the term “planetary reason”, as Renn does, holds a contradiction: reason represents a knowledge system that has lost much of its enlightenment potential through its colonial appropriation and its anthropocentric focus, which identified the anthropos and the human with the European and later also the North American. Planetary, in contrast, embraces a perception that integrates human and the more-than-human nature and has been more recently adopted into post- and decolonial studies as a critical decolonial attitude. Hence, the term “planetary” opens the space for a decolonial approach to ecojustice. I would thus drop the term “reason” and would rather propose “planetary ethics” as key attitude that orients thought and action in the struggle for ecojustice.

From epistemological freedom to decolonising planetary ethics and ecojustice

There is, Malcom Ferdinand observes – as did James Cone (2000) more than 20 years earlier – a “divide between environmental and ecological movements, on the one hand, and postcolonial and antiracist movements, on the other where both express themselves in the streets and in the universities without speaking to each other” (Ferdinand 2022:3). Yet, this divide –, which Ferdinand calls “modernity’s colonial and environmental double fracture” (Ferdinand 2022:3), has continuously been challenged in the last two decades. The number of movements and theoretical approaches that aim at bringing together planetary ethics and decolonial justice is continuously increasing. Building on their insights, my argument is twofold: first, theories and practices of ethics and ecojustice can only be characterised as *planetary* if they take the critical decolonial demands seriously, and second, they can only be characterised as *decolonising* if they take the planetary demands and the rights and needs of the more-than-human nature into account. Otherwise, if they ignore decolonial demands, planetary ethics and ecojustice all too soon become an avatar of Western reason, claiming a de-contextualised universal validity and excluding the polyphony of ways of thought and knowledge. On the other hand, if theories of ethics and ecojustice ignore the planetary, they continue to be human-centred and fail to acknowledge the relationality and response-ability to the more-than-human nature.

I propose a planetary extension of Walter Mignolo’s and Madina Tlostanova’s (2012) decolonising call to “unlearn” dominating knowledge to become a constitutive part in a planetary decolonial ethics. Unlearning dominating knowledge would then not only mean unlearning colonial knowledge but also unlearning a predominantly human centred rationale. These processes of unlearning and new learning have already begun, and the development of a planetary ethics and the struggle for ecojustice can build on this legacy. There is, as I will delineate, first a clear shift from a decolonial to a decolonial-post-humancentric epistemology, and second a movement from environmentalism and ecocriticism to postcolonial ecocriticism.

From a decolonial to a decolonial-post-humancentric epistemology

As mentioned earlier, the Anthropocene in a critically re-read understanding has the potential to bring together different actors and discourses to join efforts and question Eurocentric humanism and its egoism that has led to the (post)colonial exploitation of the Earth and its human and more-than-human creatures, as well as to the extinction of non-Western knowledge systems and ways of life. In this respect, there are many commonalities with post- and decolonial critiques of Eurocentric humanism. Yet more radical scholars do not stop in questioning “man” – understood as “Western man” – as “universal humanistic measure of all things” (Braidotti 2017:26). They rather call for an “anthropological exodus” (Braidotti 2017:26) and a break with the perception that the anthropos is “the emblem of an exceptional species [which claims] the central position in contemporary, technologically mediated knowledge production systems” (Braidotti 2017:26). Thus, a decolonial critique that takes this move toward an extended decentring of human beings seriously is pushed to a shift in focus to also integrate the more-than-human nature that could even be called the post-human.

To illustrate this change – which is in fact a continuity in the tendency to decentre the Western anthropos and a consequential further step – I refer to a document from the

field of intercultural theology that is considered an important milestone in the effort to decolonise theologies from the Global South: the declaration of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT), which was adopted at the first EATWOT conference in Dar es Salaam in 1976. This declaration is assessed as one of the founding documents of liberation and post-/decolonial theologies, as it declares a radical break in epistemology. Theologians from Latin America, Asia and Africa came together to form this ecumenical association in the awareness that their shared life experience, as people who have been oppressed and intersectionally marginalised by Western male dominance, could also generate common themes of social, cultural and political relevance. In the final document they declared:

The theologies from Europe and North America are dominant today in our churches and represent one form of cultural domination. They must be understood to have arisen out of situations related to those countries, and therefore must not be uncritically adopted without our raising the question of their relevance in the context of our countries. Indeed, we must, in order to be faithful to the gospel and to our peoples, reflect on the realities of our own situations and interpret the word of God in relation to these realities. We reject as irrelevant an academic type of theology that is divorced from action. *We are prepared for a radical break in epistemology, which makes commitment the first act of theology and engages in critical reflection on the praxis of the reality of the Third World.*⁸

In the field of intercultural theology, this statement has achieved a certain prominence. It is marked by the commitment to an “epistemological break” and to an engaged practice. Since then, various critical approaches from the “cultural” and the “postcolonial studies” advanced this critique of Western power of interpretation.

Today, however, the commitment to an epistemological break is taken one step further. Ndlovu Gatsheni’s call for “epistemic freedom” and “cognitive justice” paradigmatically represents this new turn in the discursive field of epistemology:

Epistemic Freedom in Africa is about the struggle for African people to think, theorize, interpret the world and write from where they are located, unencumbered by Eurocentrism. The imperial denial of common humanity to some human beings meant that in turn their knowledges and experiences lost their value, their epistemic virtue. Now, in the twenty-first century, descendants of enslaved, displaced, colonized and racialized peoples have entered academies across the world, proclaiming loudly that they are human beings, their lives matter and they were born into valid and legitimate knowledge systems that are capable of helping humanity to transcend the current epistemic and systemic crises. Together, they are engaging in diverse struggles for cognitive justice” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018:3).

⁸ Quoted at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/331578588_Ecumenical_ambiguities_The_case_of_the_Ecumenical_Association_of_Third_World_Theologians (accessed 13/02/2023)

What is new in this approach as compared to the EATWOT declaration or to other claims for an epistemological break that mark anti- and decolonising studies from the 1940s to the 1990s? Applying Dilip Menon’s chronology of decolonial concepts that distinguishes between the moments of “departure”, “maneuver”, and “arrival” (Menon 2022:3–5)⁹, the innovative point in analyses like that of Ndlovu-Gatsheni is that “they start with the idea of intellection from the Global South as their premise” (Menon 2022:4):

A slew of recent work that engages with forms of thinking in Africa, Asia, South America, and the Arab world has allowed us to question the Eurocentricity of postcolonial theory and so engage with indigenous landscapes, epistemologies, and temporalities [...] There are many distinct intellectual trajectories here pointing to different futures of interpretation. What is very clear in these works is an engagement with long histories of intellection and debate in the Global South (Menon 2022:4–5).

Thus, while the anti- and postcolonial movements and thoughts from the 1940s to the 1980s – like the EATWOT conference – were characterised by an epistemological break from European tradition, followed by the next generation which adapted European critical theories for their analysis of postcoloniality, the third generation now aims at acknowledging and reassessing their “own” traditions of thought and practice. Today, there “arose,” Dilip notices, “the necessity to look back, neither with nostalgia, nor anger. Rather, it was imperative to recover from the paradigm imposed by colonial rule.” This colonial paradigm had “inculcated an amnesia toward local forms of intellection with their own long histories” (Menon 2022:1)¹⁰.

Part of these “own traditions of thought and practice” that the third generation is now starting to appreciate are “indigenous” thoughts and practices in relation to the more-than-human nature. As stated before, mainly indigenous researchers bring to the fore that “indigenous knowledge system” form an attractive alternative to Western humanism and anthropocentrism. Their call to decolonise epistemology is radicalising the call to decentre “the West”, because as non-Western knowledge systems demand equal acknowledgement, they interrogate the center piece of Western epistemology: the Western human reason as the authoritative core of knowledge. The radicality of this rupture it is easily overlooked as the term “decolonise” has become so inflammatory. Yet, to decolonise epistemology does not simply mean to add other epistemologies, so that in the end the variety of epistemologies is nicely augmented and embraces, for example, a range of different, colourful, harmoniously coexisting cosmologies to choose from for a more ecologically sound and just way of life. Rather, the call to decolonise epistemology brings to the fore a rupture in the sense of a paradigm shift. Such a paradigm shift emerges, according to Thomas Kuhn (1976), when paradigms that have so far guided the perception of the world and have set the prevailing principles, vocabulary, norms and values now fail to solve the challenges and demands of a society.

⁹ Menon adopts Chatterjee’s (1986) periodisation of the Indian nationalist discourse.

¹⁰ In the field of intercultural theologies, this rediscovery of local knowledge and practice is omnipresent. Musa Dube’s (2017) analysis of the subversive contextualisation of the Setswana Bible on the premises of local practices and knowledge, or Albert Wuaku’s (2013) explorations of the agency of Ghanaians in forming an “African Hinduism” are just two of many examples that prove this new stage of postcolonial theory.

The root cause of the new talk of epistemological decolonisation is thus dissonance and the ever more growing awareness that Western epistemology has failed. Frantz Fanon (1967, 1968), Aimé Césaire (2001), Edward Said (1978) and others have perceived Western humanism as an unfulfilled project: it has been spoiled and perverted by the violence of the colonisers, who considered themselves to be representatives of European humanism, and it has to be reformed and transformed to new humanism. In a similar vein, Michel Foucault, the “master of high antihumanism” (Braidotti 2017:22), declared the “death of Man”, thereby announcing and formalising the epistemological and political crisis of this “humancentred” epistemology (Braidotti 2017:22).

The statements and findings of Foucault, Fanon, Said, and others are now some decades old. As seen, critique of Western epistemology has developed further and demands the acknowledgement of the polyphony of knowledge systems. Likewise, affected by environmental disasters and the Anthropocene, postmodern theories experience the urgent need for a postanthropocentric, more-than-human – or even post-human – turn.

From environmentalism and ecocriticism to post/decolonial ecocriticism

The Anthropocene as critical term has the potential not only to challenge Western humanism and anthropocentrism but also to lead beyond and question the special position of human reason in general and the assumed divide between human and nature. Yet not all ecocritical theories that question human-centric approaches are necessarily decolonial. Ecocritical approaches like the “deep ecologists”, have committed themselves for the “reason of nature” and claim that nature – and often also “natural religions” – are “pure” and “authentic” and in many ways “superior” to the destructive secular anthropocentric rationality of the West. But by these rather nostalgic and only seemingly decolonial and post-anthropocentric sentiments, they tend to re-invoke Orientalist stereotypes of “the other”. Also, they tend to create a “parallelism between ‘excluded, exploited, and oppressed’ people and ‘excluded, exploited, and oppressed’ nature” (Cilano and DeLoughrey 2007:75). Both, marginalised, racialised, and/or genderised people as well as the non-human are constructed as “the other” and imagined as unable to speak for themselves. This parallelism discloses an intersectionality of overdetermined forces that are involved when it comes to environmental care and destruction. Ecojustice thus cannot seriously be pursued without taking all forms of oppression into consideration.

Decolonial ecocritical scrutiny demands an end to a discourse that imagines nature as the pure and uncorrupted “other”. Hence, the respect for the local and the place needs to be complemented by transnational aspects, as the Martinican philosopher Edouard Glissant (1997) argues. Following Glissant, Cilano and DeLoughrey (2007:78) claim that it is necessary to develop a “critical distance from the naturalizing metaphors of nature [and] to resist discourses of rootedness” that often accompany these metaphors. Distance from “pure nature”, “pure places” and from the rather identitarian mingling of self to special “natural” places is needed. What is required instead is to emphasise migration, hybridity, and plurality in order to develop a “transnational ethics” of the planet.

Decolonial ecojustice and planetary ethics are thus challenged by the twofold task to transcend the human-centred exceptionalism and end the binary division between

culture/human beings and nature on the one hand, and to avoid a romantic and homogenising naturalisation on the other hand. This raises the question that Rosi Braidotti (2017:33) has formulated very clearly: “How to combine the decline of anthropocentrism with issues of social justice?”. How can a more-than-human approach be related to human agency and responsibility? Following Braidotti (2017:33), this conflict requires an “expanded relational vision of the self” with a “relational capacity” that embraces not only human, but also more-than-human subjects – “starting from the air we breathe”. Linking breathing and the “lungs of the Earth” together without which humanity has no future, Achille Mbembe (2021:62) also asks: “Are we capable of rediscovering that each of us belongs to the same species, that we have an indivisible bond with all life? Perhaps that is the question – the very last – before we draw our last dying breath.”

Interim Summary

Up until this point, the article at hand has attempted to provide a preliminary cartography of discourses, theories, and approaches that intersect – often very controversially – in the discourse field of the decolonisation of ecojustice in the Anthropocene. These were decolonial theory itself and the question of how to hold on to the discomfort and critique it raises, discourses on Indigenous knowledge and the strive to decolonise epistemologies, debates on humanism, the post-human and the tension between both, the concept of the Anthropocene as represented by Jürgen Renn and its contradiction with a concept of ecojustice and a planetary ethics that takes the struggles, life-experiences, and world views of those seriously who are most often marginalised, including the more-than-human nature. These theories and approaches need to engage with each other, mutually and critically, because – as James Cone (2000:36) has already stated: “The fight for justice cannot be segregated but must be integrated with the fight for life in all its forms”.

My special interest was in the relation and tension between the human and the more-than-human nature. This tension leaves its marks in tensions between different approaches like between postcolonial and ecological approaches. But it also appears as a challenge within the same theory – as became obvious in Braidotti’s question of how to bring together post-humanism with social justice, or in the question how to decolonise epistemology if the subject of the marginalised epistemology is a more-than-human earthling. How can this tension be dealt with without, first, escaping to a new form of nature romance (Thomas 2021)? This nature romance is, as seen in Glissant’s deliberations, a continuation of the invention of pure “natural” places and identities and needs to be interrogated by taking transcultural and transnational perspectives into account. And second, how can the relation between the human and the more-than-human nature be reflected without falling into the other trap of moral activism? This activism represents not only a resurgent form of the radicalised “left wing of the Reformation”, as the systematic theologian Günter Thomas has stated provocatively and to some extent too simplistically (Kamann 2022); it also revives a paternalistic attitude towards the more-than-human nature and tends to perceive human knowledge as superior. The ignorance of this attitude has been brought to the fore by Alice Walker (1988:173), who writes: “It is not so much a question of whether the lion will one day lie down with the

lam, but whether human beings will ever be able to lie down with any creature or being at all.”

These questions demand theological reflections that do not fall in the mentioned traps of romanticisation or patronisation of the more-than-human nature. Borrowing from Lily Mendoza and George Zachariah (2022:1), theological reflections are to my understanding always “contextual articulations of faith” that attempt to “make sense of our faith in relation to the realities that we confront in our daily life”. The contemporary earth crisis is certainly a reality we are confronted with daily in various contexts. But how do we make sense of it?

God dwells in flesh: theological approximations to decolonial ecojustice and planetary ethics

The decolonial ecojustice theological task, term and challenge is not merely a (planetary) ethical task, because it concerns the core of God’s identity and the question who and where God is and for whom. The earth crisis, as well as the relation between the human and the more-than-human nature, is reflected in God him/herself as God is God incarnate, embodied and enfleshed in the materiality and earthliness of life.

For a quarter of a century, liberation, queer, post- and decolonial theologians have been writing against the disembodiment of theology and theologians relating precisely the symbol of the incarnation. Decolonial eco-theologians expand this thought and draw a direct connection between the disembodiment of theology and the colonisation of land. The theologian and scholar of Latinx-studies Oscar Garcia-Johnson (2020:45), e.g., observes a “corporeal disembodiment of land (Pachamama) and human dignity (humanitas) in the peoples and lands of the Americas”. This disembodiment of both, land and humanity, is due to the twofold dynamic of the colonisation of theology and the theologisation of coloniality which are “endemic” to European colonisation, Garcia-Johnson (2020:45) claims. In contrast to this disembodiment the Pacific theologian Upolu Luma Vaai (no date:14) observes strong bodily connections between earth, land and humans in the Pacific:

“There is no disconnection of earth and people. I am a walking land! A moving earth! As Fijians say, *tamata ni vanua, vanua ni tamata* (the land is the people and the people is the land) outlines this deep relationship of the people and the natural environment. [...] For Oceanic communities, anything that is body-related, that they belong to, that is part of them, they will protect and care for [...] When a faith is not fully embodied in the contextual *itulagi* [life] of the believer, the Oceanic cultures, and contexts which inform their thinking and life, the faith becomes more and more a heavenly business.”

These assertions raise questions about the “Grand Narratives, Metanarratives, and Meganarratives” that have led to the disembodiment of theology and at the same time legitimised the colonisation of land and the extensive extraction of natural resources. Western Christian theology reveals a long tradition of the devaluation of the body, which today is evaluated as form of normative violence. “[F]lesh has a bad reputation”, the religious and Latinx-studies scholar Mayra Rivera (2013:52) asserts: “Talk of flesh evokes images of sin, decay and death [...] passions and uncontrolled appetites, the

indecent. These associations, which are contiguous with Christian representation of flesh as the underlying principle or cause of sinfulness, are also implicit in representations of racialized peoples as especially carnal”. The Catholic queer theologian Gerard Loughlin states that the “Western body” is the construct of a Western dualist epistemology that transforms the body to an object and understands the mind as a sovereign agent (e.g. Loughlin 2007). The same dualist epistemology drew distinctions between the mind-less savage who is close to non-human nature in the colonies and the flesh-less cultivated and “superior” citizen in the colonising countries, and thus legitimised the colonisation of territories, the enslavement and maafa of millions of people and the exploitation of the more-than-human nature all over.

God dwells in flesh! (Rivera 2007:30). The incarnation is crucial for theological reflections that take seriously the challenges of the Anthropocene and of an ecojustice that is planetary and decolonial and thus decenters the anthropos as well as the hegemony of Western knowledge. The symbol of the incarnation – enfleshment – expands the perspective on the body to take into account also non-human bodies. In being flesh human beings are linked to more-than-human beings. “The world is a labyrinth of incarnations” (Rivera 2014). Each body is different and carries the visible marks of social relations, social norms, the injustices of racial or gender related hierarchies and violence which embody and materialise themselves in the concrete body – “in water, air, and soil as much as in flesh and blood” (Rivera 2015:156). Yet despite these differences, bodies are interrelated and share elements: “My flesh is not like that of green grass – I may tell myself. But the fabric of flesh is not simply human. Air, water, and soil nourish my flesh and constitute it accordingly, imperceptibly, without my knowledge or consent. What is flesh but earth, in so many forms?” (Rivera 2015:156–157).

With incarnation, the flesh becomes the dwelling place of God and is now – and not because of any metaphysical transformation, however imagined – divine (Althaus-Reid/Lisa Isherwood 2007). Incarnation, thus, means embracing oneself as well as all of creation as being flesh and thus being vulnerable. It means celebrating the diversity of the flesh and standing up for justice for all other living fleshly beings, especially for those who are denied a life in fullness. Expanding, as Braidotti has proposed, the relational vision of the Self to include the more-than-human beings, earth and planet furthers a mode of knowing and being with this increased awareness of the vulnerability and of the interconnectedness of the flesh that we all are.

Decolonial ecojustice and planetary ethics based on this recognition demand the development of an attitude of *creative (un)certainly*, that is: a mindset that abandons the position of interpretative power and welcomes the “frisson of uncertainty” (Schneider 2011:29), the liberating courage to prophetically decolonise hegemonic systems and forms of knowledge, the frankness to unlearn and to learn anew, and the curiosity and joy to live in fleshly and planetary conviviality and solidarity with the suffering human and more-than-human life.

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