

Migration and Justice

Postcolonial Discourses on Migration as Challenge and Partner for Theology

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The current public discourse on migrants and refugees reveals a massive revival of the colonial image of *the other*. Patrick Buchanan, for example, a »right-wing author«¹ from the United States, refers to migrants who pass the Mexican border and enter North America or who cross the Mediterranean Sea and land on the shores of Europe as »invaders«. Their intrusion endangers and destroys, in Buchanan's view, the highly developed civilizations of the global North in a similar manner to the »barbarian invasion« which had threatened the Roman Empire in former times:

»History repeats itself. After the Roman republic spread out, Rome became a polyglot city of all creeds and cultures of the empire. But these alien people brought with them no reverence for Roman gods, no respect for Roman tradition, no love of Roman culture. And so, as Rome had conquered the barbarians, the barbarians conquered Rome. In the 5th century, beginning with Alaric and the Visigoths in 410, the northern tribes, one after another, invaded and sacked the Eternal City. And the Dark Ages descended. And as Rome passed away, so, the West is passing away, from the same causes and in much the same way. What the Danube and Rhine were to Rome, the Rio Grande and Mediterranean are to America and Europe, the frontiers of a civilization no longer defended.«²

In a very similar way, Claudius Seidl identifies migrants and refugees as »barbarians«. Commenting on the massive sexual harassment of young women in the night of New Year's Eve 2015/2016 in Cologne, the journalist of the well-known German newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ) classifies the offenders as »the Arabic man« and writes: He is a »barbarian at the edge of the civilized world, not really a man. Rather he is a child that has grown up and has become

¹ THOMAS NAIL, *The Figure of the Migrant*, Stanford, CA 2015, 196.

² PATRICK BUCHANAN, *State of Emergency: The Third World Invasion and Conquest of America*, New York, NY 2006, 2.

sexually mature, infinitely cruel and uncontrolled. A man, in contrast, is defined as someone who has cultivated and educated his mind and his body. He is a human being whose claim to power starts with self-control.«³

Right wing parties all over the world perpetuate this threatening image of the migrant in order to win votes. On the occasion of the release of the »Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration«⁴ the party »Alternative für Deutschland« (AfD), for instance, announced the following comment on the semi-official internet blog »Fassadenkratzer. Blicke hinter die Oberfläche des Zeitgeschehens«:

»Wherever you look, the highly explosive aspects of this global pact are hidden behind dry, meaningless messages. Thus a permanent *mass immigration* movement, meticulously planned and promoted in a totalitarian manner and kept hidden by the local collaborators, rolls towards the essentially unsuspecting people of Europe, in which peoples with their specific superior cultures no longer play a role and finally ›the last democratic government falls.«⁵

There is no generalized migrant »as such«. Rather the opposite, migration is always bound to certain contextual developments. Nevertheless, the examples given disclose that the production of the image of migrants and refugees employs similar universalized stereotypes and thereby serves very similar ends.

This global image of »the migrant« produced in the contemporary public migration discourse brings back the colonial processes of *othering* that have been subject to the scrutiny of postcolonial critique in the past decades. Mona Singer points to this (neo-)colonial practice and technique very graphically when she calls »the migrant« today a »retro-figure of *the cultural other*«.⁶ This postcolonial – in the sense of neo-colonial – othering discourse discloses the self-entitlement of the West to cultural hegemony and superiority. Besides this, the public cultural, religious and political rhetoric conceals and hides crucial ethical and political challenges: global economic inequalities and the lack of distributive justice which constitute the main causes for migration and flight; the denial of the human right

³ CLAUDIUS SEIDL, Maskulinität in der Krise. Wo sind die echten Männer?, in: Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 1.3.2016, URL: www.faz.de (accessed: February 2019).

⁴ The »Global Compact« was prepared under the auspices of the United Nations and is expected to be the first intergovernmentally negotiated agreement on migration, see URL: <https://undocs.org/A/CONF.231/3> (accessed: February 2019).

⁵ URL: <http://www.afd-rhein-hunsrueck.de/alternative-medien-2/> (accessed: February 2019, Italics by CJ).

⁶ MONA SINGER, Retrofiguren des kulturell Anderen. Wider die kulturalistische Viktimisierung von Migrant_innen, in: Gender Initiativkolleg Wien (ed.), Gewalt und Handlungsmacht: Queer_Feministische Perspektiven, Frankfurt a. M. 2012, 181–195.

for a place to live peacefully; or equal access to education and participation in public social and political decision-making processes.

In the article at hand I will first highlight core aspects of the postcolonial discourse on migration and religion. This discourse contains various challenges for theological deliberations on migration which I will focus on in the second part of the article. They range from othering processes within theological thinking itself and ambivalent debates – for instance about Biblical narratives of migration – to self-critical calls for the need to de-center theological epistemologies and to move to the borders as places where truth and knowledge are generated. Last but not least, the postcolonial perspectives on migration call for a postcolonial theology of migration.

1. Postcolonial Perspectives on Migration and Flight

Postcolonial critique is neither a self-contained new discipline nor a theory with a coherent set of methods. It rather brings together various critical approaches that scrutinize colonial hegemonic practices then and now. Like other critical approaches after the *cultural turn*, postcolonial studies can be perceived as »response to a dramatic shift in society and in the (dis)order of the world.«⁷ This (dis)order, triggered, as Aleida Assmann states, by modernity and its accompanying developments such as the colonial expansion and imperialism of the West, activated a powerful and enduring production of colonial knowledge. The more recent migratory movements, which because of their intensity, multidirectional and global outlook lead to the definition of our time as »age of migration«,⁸ have re-stimulated these colonial dynamics including dynamics of resistance. As we will see, these latter counter-colonial discourses and subversive practices are often at the centre of critical analysis, strengthening thereby an alternative image of what migration is about.

1.1 Hybridization, Flight, Revolution: The Variety of Postcolonial Resistance

When thinking of practices of resistance in the context of postcolonial studies, what comes to mind frequently are Homi Bhabha's and others' theories and neologisms of hybridity, mimicry, interstitiality, bricolage, camouflage or hidden

⁷ ALEIDA ASSMANN, *Einführung in die Kulturwissenschaft*, Berlin 2006, 14.

⁸ STEPHEN CASTLES/MARK J. MILLER, *The Age of Migration. International Population Movements in the Modern World*, Basingstoke ⁵2012.

transcripts.⁹ The terms mark inclusive strategies, this means, strategies created by subalterns by which he or she seemingly adapts to, yet at the same time subverts the situation of oppression.

Nevertheless, for the topic of migration it is just as important to consider that postcolonial resistance also implies running away, escaping, fleeing, and exiting the situation of suffering – up to the point of using violence in order to be able to end oppression. This dynamics of refusal is rather elusive in postcolonial theory. One of the reasons is that running away carries negative connotations, it is »something for cowards«, as Gerald Raunig states: »The virtue of manfully throwing oneself with a weapon into the midst of a fight is opposed to the flight and withdrawal typical of a dishonourable attitude.«¹⁰ Another reason is the negative impact of anti-colonial violence.

Yet the right to exit has marked postcolonial theory from its very beginning, and it is more than necessary, Leela Gandhi claims, to acknowledge and remember these acts of resistance.¹¹ They prevent the colonized and oppressed from giving in to the argument that the »colonized was henceforth to be postulated as the inverse or negative image of the colonizer.«¹² This argument, as true as it is, nevertheless forms an unwilling inducement towards passive acceptance of the enduring colonial conditions. It is nevertheless present also in writings of postcolonial theorists who postulate the totality of the colonial enterprise and the fading of colonized cultures. Gandhi points for instance to Ashis Nandy who states:

»This colonialism colonizes minds in addition to bodies and it releases forces within colonized societies to alter their cultural priorities once and for all. In the process, it helps to generalize the concept of the modern West from a geographical and temporal entity to a psychological category. The West is now everywhere, within the West and outside, in structures and in minds.«¹³

⁹ See HOMI K. BHABHA, *The Location of Culture*, London 1994. The term *hidden transcripts* refers to JAMES C. SCOTT, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance. Hidden Transcripts*, New Haven, CT 1990.

¹⁰ GERALD RAUNIG, *The Heterogenesis of Fleeing*, in: STEPHEN ZEPKE/SIMON O'SULLIVAN (eds.), *Deleuze and Contemporary Art*, Edinburgh 2010, 43–62; quoted from the reprint on the internet: URL: https://marceloexposito.net/pdf/geraldraunig_heterogenesis.pdf (accessed: February 2019), 1.

¹¹ LEEA GANDHI, *Postcolonial Theory. A Critical Introduction*, New York, NY 1998.

¹² *Ibid.*, 15.

¹³ ASHIS NANDY, *The Intimate Enemy. Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism*, New York, NY 1983, xi.

This totalizing and completely dehumanizing effect of colonialism has been described in various ways by Frantz Fanon, for instance in his speech at the Congress of Black African Writers in 1959:

»This sweeping, leveling nature of colonial domination was quick to dislocate in spectacular fashion the cultural life of a conquered people. The denial of a national reality, the new legal systems imposed by the occupying power, the marginalization of the indigenous population and their customs by colonial society, expropriation, and systematic enslavement of men and women, all contributed to this cultural obliteration.«¹⁴

For the sake of keeping resistance awake, it is necessary, as Gandhi underlines by quoting the words of Gyan Prakash, »to fully recognize another history of agency and knowledge alive in the dead weight of the colonial past.«¹⁵ Comparing Mahatma Gandhi and Frantz Fanon, Leela Gandhi discloses different strategies of resistance. She states that although Fanon is committed to the »redemptive value of collective violence« while Mahatma Gandhi proclaims a »theology of non-violence«, »closely aligned elaborations of postcolonial self-recovery« can be found in both.¹⁶

Within the different dynamics and appearances of resistance, postcolonial critique does not primarily provide an explanation of oppression that leaves the status quo unchanged. Rather it creates an ethic of departure from suffering. This ethic is rooted in anti-colonial resistance movements of the past and revitalized in the last decades in the postcolonial analyses of migration that take into account the agency of the migrant.

1.2 Migrants as Agents Versus Migrants as Victims or Perpetrators

The right to exit, to flee and to depart from suffering recalls that migrants and refugees are not just victims and subject to the aid of the »white man«. In colonial times this image of »the other« as someone who needed the help – including civilization and religion – of the West found its most famous expression in the words

¹⁴ FRANTZ FANON, *The Wretched of the Earth*, New York, NY 1961, 170.

¹⁵ GANDHI, *Postcolonial Theory*, 18, quoting Gyan Prakash, Introduction: After Colonialism, in: GYAN PRAKASH (ed.), *After Colonialism: Imperial Histories and Postcolonial Displacements*, Princeton, NJ 1995, 3-17, 5.

¹⁶ GANDHI, *Postcolonial Theory*, 18.

of Rudyard Kipling's poem the »The White Man's Burden«¹⁷. Gayatri Spivak has coined another well-known dictum: »White men are saving brown women from brown men.«¹⁸

Many images of humanitarian organizations »helping« refugees recall this attitude. This does not mean that all humanitarian help in the Mediterranean Sea is wrong, not at all. Nevertheless, the images in newspapers and on the internet evoke a double image of the »other« that is well-known since colonial times and discloses a twofold strategy of othering: the refugee and migrant is either the victim or the perpetrator.¹⁹

Especially when migrants and refugees are women or children they are considered as victims. The photograph of Aylan Kurdi for instance, the Kurdish boy from Syria whose dead body was found on the shore at Bodrum in Turkey on 3 September 2015, evoked empathy worldwide.²⁰ Humanitarian aid campaigns like »Save the Children«²¹ collect the highest donations when presenting children in need. White Charity, an organization that critically analyses the portrayal of black and white people in fund-raising campaigns,²² or the more recent academic discipline of critical whiteness studies²³ state that the presentation of children furthers the idea of the helplessness, victimhood and lack of agency of refugees and migrants. Depicting migrants and refugees as pre-sexual induces an aesthetic assimilation of the vulnerable other who calls into consideration the imagination of a joint universal humanity. An impressive example of the feeling of real solidarity – and not of asymmetric help – was given by the artist Ai Weiwei who in a form of

¹⁷ RUDYARD KIPLING, *The White Man's Burden: The United States and The Philippine Islands*, originally published in: McClure's Magazine, February 1899, reprint in: Rudyard Kipling's Verse: Definitive Edition, Garden City, NY 1929.

¹⁸ GAYATRI CHACROVARTY SPIVAK, *Can the Subaltern Speak?* In: PATRICK WILLIAMS/LAURA CHRISMAN (eds.), *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, Hemel Hempstead 1983, 66–111, 93.

¹⁹ See e. g. HEIDRUN FRIESE, *Flüchtlinge: Opfer – Bedrohung – Helden. Zur politischen Imagination des Fremden*, Bielefeld 2017.

²⁰ The photo of Aylan Kurdi can be found on the internet in various locations, e. g. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Death_of_Alan_Kurdi (accessed: February 2019).

²¹ These campaigns even depend on images of migrants as victims: these images not only support the own self-esteem or prestige but also the income generation, they guarantee donations, and are thus an economic factor.

²² White Charity, URL: <http://www.whitecharity.de/de/home/> (accessed: February 2019).

²³ MAUREEN MAISHA EGGERS ET AL. (eds.), *Mythen, Masken und Subjekte. Kritische Weißseinsforschung in Deutschland*, Münster 2005.

mimicry posed his own body very similarly to how Aylan Kurdi was found. Weiwei thereby shares the child's vulnerability.²⁴

In contrast to the artist's gesture, the images presented in humanitarian aid organizations usually abrogate a symmetric relation between the migrant or refugee on the one hand and the spectator or giver of donations on the other.²⁵ The agency is rather one-sided, because it is constructed on the imagination of the vulnerability of the other side. What can be perceived clearly in the context of migration and flight is that vulnerability is a highly ambivalent phenomenon. It often downgrades the agency of the one, while at the same time it stimulates the »secure self« of the other to take moral action.²⁶ Yet the ambivalence of vulnerability is on the other hand not simply overcome when we state that we are all vulnerable and vulnerability is a core marker of human identity. This argument undermines the fact that there are, indeed, different grades of vulnerability due to one's social or economic preconditions, and in some – but not in all – aspects migrants and refugees are more vulnerable.

As said above, migrants and refugees are often portrayed as victims on the one hand but on the other they are also perceived as a threat or even as perpetrators. In her analysis of the »iconology of illegalized immigration« Francesca Falk shows that, while individual refugees are often depicted as victims, photos of boats full of refugees rather carry the connotation of immigration as invasion.²⁷ Migrants, especially in the plural, are presented as a threat.

Postcolonial critique not only challenges these portrayals but tries to get to the bottom of the asymmetric othering practices they are informed by. A focal point of postcolonial migration studies is in fact to identify the agency of migrants and to present migrants and refugees as proactively seeking for safe and just livelihood. In her analysis of the migration movement caused by the Arab upris-

²⁴ See JULIA VOSS, Ich bin Aylan Kurdi, in: Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung 3. 2. 2016. URL: <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/kritik-an-ai-weiwei-fuer-aufnahme-als-toter-fluechtling-aylan-kurdi-14048462.html> (accessed: February 2019).

²⁵ Of course one also needs to take into account that humanitarian aid has become an economic factor and a field of engagement of international companies who economically profit from supporting people in need and by the same action also win prestige. See for instance the engagement of the Swedish furniture shop IKEA in providing IKEA tents for refugees: Nicolas Autheman, Die schöneren Zelte von Ikea. Humanitäre Hilfe als Kommerz, in: Edition Le Monde diplomatique 22 (2018): Grenzgebiete. Mauern, Schmuggel, Reisefreiheit, 44–45 and 47.

²⁶ MARGRIT SHILDRICK, *Embodying the Monster: Encounters with the Vulnerable Self*, London 2002, 77.

²⁷ FRANCESCA FALK, Invasion, Infection, Invisibility: An Iconology of Illegalized Immigration, in: CHRISTINE BISCHOFF/FRANCESCA FALK/SYLVA KAFEHSY (eds.), *Images of Illegalized Immigration. Towards a Critical Iconology of Politics*, Bielefeld 2010, 83–100.

ing, Martina Tazzioli for instance speaks about »strategies of migration [...] for enacting the freedom that Tunisians won through the revolution«. ²⁸ These strategies are not »a planned set of actions, but a practice that is undertaken for finding another space to live or for doing what »authorized« mobile people ordinarily do, namely move round.« ²⁹ This unauthorized migratory »practice of freedom« »disturb[s]« and br[akes] the spatial and geopolitical stability of the Mediterranean.« ³⁰ The freedom-migrants enact new cartographies – countermaps – that shake the European political order. As reaction to these disturbing transformations, European governments try even more to »regulate« migration and to place themselves back into the ruling and ordering position.

Tazzioli's analysis shows that the dominating public portrayal of migrants and refugees as victims and the practice of undermining their agency is by no means an innocent practice but can rather be traced back to a profound political interest and fear. The migrants' and the refugees' agency is too threatening. Victimizing migrants and refugees therefore goes hand in hand with an interest in depoliticizing and de-threatening migrants. But the migrants Tazzioli depicts are making political decisions and thereby provoking political decisions by European politicians. What is proved here is the assessment of Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet: »to flee is to produce the real, to create life, to find a weapon.« ³¹ People who have fled, the philosophers add, have not only learnt how to deal with difficult situations. Often, in their new homes, they also do not just accept the conditions as they are but rather want to change and accommodate them to their lives. Deleuze's and Parnet's observation sheds light on the different strategies of resistance mentioned above, because the connection made here between flight and weapon, »undermines,« as Raunig comments, »the dichotomy of active fight and cowardly flight. Flight here means neither defense nor individualism but an inventive form of offence.« ³² Flight and migration become innovative ways to exit suffering and to promote a life in dignity.

Some organizations such as »Social Bee«, a recruitment agency that connects migrants with employers, ³³ have changed the images of migrants in the above-mentioned way and present them as agents. They emphasize and publicize the strengths that the migrants acquired, not least through troublesome migration processes whereby various skills were certified that qualify migrants as excellent employees.

²⁸ MARTINA TAZZIOLI, *Spaces of Governmentality. Autonomous Migration and the Arab Uprising*, London/New York 2014, x.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., ix.

³¹ GILLES DELEUZE/CLAIRE PARNET, *Dialogues II*, London 2002, 102.

³² RAUNIG, *The Heterogenesis of Fleeing*, 2.

³³ SOCIAL BEE, URL: <https://www.social-bee.eu/> (accessed: February 2019).

1.3 Entanglement of Migration and Religion

The threatening image of the migrant becomes most effective when religion is added into the picture, because the entanglement of religion and politics is one of the classical »social imaginaries« in the Euro-American context.³⁴ It recalls the narrative of the secular modernity that the success of the modern »West« rests on the separation of religion and politics.³⁵

Without going into details, we can state that the public discourse on migration therefore repeats the two-fold image of religion. There is on the one hand *good religion* – which does not tangle with politics and is rather rational or inward looking – and, on the other side, *bad religion* – the irrational, fundamentalist, politically involved religion.³⁶ Today the latter image is projected first and foremost on Islam. Negative sentiments with regard to Islam in the context of migration are already stimulated by the general perception that in Europe »immigration and Islam are almost the same«, as Casanova states.

»This identification appears even more pronounced in those cases when the majority of Muslim immigrants tend to come predominantly from a single region of origin, e. g., Turkey in the case of Germany, the Ma'ghreb in the case of France. This entails a superimposition of different dimensions of ›otherness‹ that exacerbates issues of boundaries, accommodation and incorporation. The immigrant, the religious, the racial, and the socio-economic disprivileged ›other‹ all tend to coincide.«³⁷

Within this already negative image of migration coinciding with Islam there is another reinforcement of otherness. Mahmood Mamdani observes a distinction between the good Muslim – e. g. disabled Muslim children, raped Muslim women – and the bad Muslim – the Muslim who supposedly engages actively in forming his or her life and thereby challenges the script that the refugee should be victim and behave like one. This binary narrative constructs Muslims as complete ›oth-

³⁴ LUCA MAVELLI/ERIN K. WILSON, The Refugee Crisis and Religion. Beyond Conceptual and Physical Boundaries, in: LUCA MAVELLI/ERIN K. WILSON (eds.), The Refugee Crisis and Religion. Secularism, Security and Hospitality in Question, London/New York 2017, 1–22.

³⁵ ARVIND-PAL S. MANDAIR/MARKUS DRESSLER, Introduction: Modernity, Religion-Making, and the Postsecular, in: ARVIND-PAL S. MANDAIR/MARKUS DRESSLER (eds.), Secularism and Religion-Making, Oxford 2011, 3–36, 11.

³⁶ See e. g. JOSÉ CASANOVA, Europas Angst vor der Religion, Berlin 2009. The text is not yet published in the English version.

³⁷ JOSÉ CASANOVA, Religion, European secular identities, and European integration, in: Eurozine (29 July 2004), URL: <https://www.eurozine.com/religion-european-secular-identities-and-european-integration/> (accessed: February 2019).

ers«, says Mahmood Mamdani, having »no history, no politics and no debates [they are] petrified into a lifeless custom [...] incapable of transforming their culture, the way they seem incapable of growing their own food. The implication is that their salvation lies as always in philanthropy in being saved from outside.«³⁸

1.4 Borders

A special focus of postcolonial critique and postcolonial theology lies on borders. This is caused not least by the fact that drawing borders was a classic colonial strategy. Then and now, this powerful strategy simultaneously produces inclusion and exclusion, even up to the point of its fatal consequences.

Borders denote on the one side geographical borders. The violent invasion of colonial powers in foreign landscapes, their trespassing over visible and invisible borders and the definition of new borders by the colonial decision-makers have caused enduring conflicts over borders and land. It is only since the 1990s that some border conflicts stemming from colonial times have been brought to the International Court of Justice in Den Haag: in 1994 border conflicts between Chad and Libya, in 1999 conflicts between Botswana and Zambia, in 2013 conflicts between Burkina Faso and Niger. Other border conflicts are still not solved.³⁹

Postcolonial studies are not only interested in geographical borders but in many that are culturally relevant: between races in anti-racism or anti-apartheid debates, between men and women in feminist and gender theories, or between West and East in the world order before 1989. The various borders between race, gender, social class, culture, religion or nation intersect, and because of this complexity borders shape how we think and act in very fundamental epistemological ways.

Gloria Anzaldúa's »Borderland/La Frontera«⁴⁰ stimulated the reflection on the various interrelated borders:⁴¹

³⁸ MAHMOOD MAMDANI, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: A Political Perspective on Culture and Terrorism*, in: *American Anthropologist* 104 (2008) 3, 766–775, 767.

³⁹ For an overview see »Grenzen vor Gericht. Postkoloniale Grenzkonflikte in Afrika«, in: *Grenzgebiete. Mauern, Schmuggel, Reisefreiheit. Edition Le Monde diplomatique* 22 (2018), 40 f.

⁴⁰ GLORIA ANZALDÚA, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, San Francisco, CA 1987.

⁴¹ For the influence that Anzaldúa's border studies had on postcolonial studies see also: AMRITJIT SINGH/PETER SCHMIDT, *On the Borders Between U.S. Studies and Postcolonial Theory*, in: AMRITJIT SINGH/PETER SCHMIDT (eds.), *Postcolonial Theory and the United States. Race, Ethnicity and Literature*, Jackson 2000, 3–72.

»The psychological borderlands, the sexual borderlands, and the spiritual borderlands [...]. In fact, the borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where the lower, middle and upper classes touch.«⁴²

Postcolonial analysis of migration therefore takes into account various intermingling borders that influence the respective context and produce stereotypes, obstacles to welcoming migrants, or political actions in either direction.

Walter Dignolo and Madina Tlostanova have developed Anzaldúa's theory further and speak about »Critical border thinking« as alternative epistemology:

»Border thinking brings to the foreground different kinds of theoretical actors and principles of knowledge that displace European modernity (which articulated the very concept of theory in the social sciences and the humanities) and empower those who have been epistemically disempowered by the theo- and ego-politics of knowledge.«⁴³

I will come back to this point and set a specific challenge for theological reflection.

2. Postcolonial Challenges for Theology

Migration phenomena and practices are at the centre of postcolonial, cultural or diaspora studies because their starting point are stories of entanglement and cultural negotiations caused by various forms of migration. Attention is mainly given to what the cultural anthropologist Mary Louise Pratt has termed the »contact zone«: the places »where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today.«⁴⁴

Insights from postcolonial and diaspora studies have started to influence theologies. Postcolonial theologies analyse issues of identity and belonging, truth and the power of interpretation, particularism and universalism, margins and borders, or ongoing colonial injustices, stereotypes and resistance to it. All these

⁴² ANZALDÚA, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, preface (no page).

⁴³ WALTER D. MIGNOLO/MADINA V. TLOSTANOVA, *Theorizing from the Borders. Shifting to Geo- and Body-Politics of Knowledge*, in: *European Journal of Social Theory* 9 (2006) 2, 205–221, 206f.

⁴⁴ MARIE LOUISE PRATT, *Imperial Eyes. Travel Writing and Transculturation*, London 1992, 4.

reflections are situated in the postcolonial context which is marked by global interdependence.⁴⁵

Since migration has become a growing challenge to the global North, its theological reflection has accelerated and topics that postcolonial studies have been struggling with for decades come to the fore. Yet postcolonial theologies of migration are still rare. In the second part of this essay I will delineate some areas in theological reflection of migration that need revisioning or even disruption and transformation if theology wants to take postcolonial perspectives on migration seriously.

2.1 Are We all Migrants? The Temptation to Harmonize Inequalities

There is a popular approach, apparently similar to postcolonial critique, in pastoral theology and church practice today which avoids the »othering« of the migrant and perceives migration as the normal case and as anthropological precondition, rather than as an exception.⁴⁶ Not only »the other« is a migrant but »we« are all migrants. Theologians and official church documents »discover« the centrality of Biblical migration narratives, starting from Abraham, the Exodus and exile, and leading to Jesus' flight to Egypt, the disciples' travels and Paul's missionary journeys. Migration, it is said, is an experience that is not only omnipresent in Biblical texts but also generates and shapes Biblical theology. One can go so far as to state that experiences of migration have impacted the Jewish-Christian spirituality and theology so thoroughly that Jewish-Christian identity can be characterized as migratory identity. The Methodist Church in Switzerland-France-Northern Africa puts this conviction in a nutshell when it states: »Our faith has a migration background.«⁴⁷

⁴⁵ See e.g. HYERAN KIM-CRAGG, *Interdependence. A Postcolonial Feminist Practical Theology*, Eugene, OR 2018.

⁴⁶ See for the German context e.g.: EVANGELISCHE KIRCHE DEUTSCHLANDS (EKD), *Gemeinsam evangelisch! Erfahrungen, theologische Orientierungen und Perspektiven für die Arbeit mit Gemeinden anderer Sprache und Herkunft*. Ad-hoc-Kommission des Rates der EKD zur Zukunft der Arbeit mit Gemeinden anderer Sprache und Herkunft, 2014.

⁴⁷ EVANGELISCH-METHODISTISCHE KIRCHE, *Unser Glaube hat einen Migrationshintergrund*, declaration accepted at the annual conference of the Evangelical-Methodist Church Switzerland-France-North Africa in Münsingen, 18.6.2016, URL: http://www.emk-schweiz.ch/uploads/media/20160618_Migrationstext_DE_rein.pdf (accessed: February 2019).

These findings resonate well with the sociological analysis that migration has become a metaphor for life in times of modernity. Life today is liquid, filled with uncertainty, with liquid fear and liquid love, as Zygmunt Baumann states.⁴⁸

Yet the often well-meant universalization of experiences of migration, although it seeks to raise sentiments of solidarity with refugees and migrants, tends to overlook the variety of forms of migration, the unequal distribution of power, economic and political asymmetries, and the intrusive and patronizing attitude that can sometimes be felt behind the words »We are all migrants«.

It is a salutary adjustment to recall – as does Regina Polak, one of the first German-speaking theologians who thought about a theology of migration, – that the Biblical texts on migration do not have an end in themselves but rather point to justice with its religious and political implications.⁴⁹ By the same token it is also more than illuminating that postcolonial theologians such as Musa Dube call for a decolonization of the Biblical migration narratives.⁵⁰ Stories like the Exodus or the migration of God's Word into the world in the prologue to John's Gospel disclose eminent colonial strategies of invading foreign land. The challenge posed here with regard to theology is to differentiate and contextualize migration and to restrain from the temptation to construct a universal de-politicized frame for a theology of migration.

2.2 Questioning Borders is not Enough

With the spatial turn and globalization processes the term »border« has come into the forefront of theological deliberations with its complex dimensions. Three examples serve to illustrate the theological use of the metaphor of the border.

Reflecting on God's giving of grace – in contrast to the unwillingness of a capitalist world to give for free – *Kathryn Tanner* from Chicago characterizes God's giving as unconditional and universal. The latter applies where borders come into play:

»God's giving indeed breaks all the usual boundaries of closed communities of concern. In creating the world, God goes outside of God to offer gifts to the

⁴⁸ ZYGMUNT BAUMANN, *Liquid Times: Living in an Age of Uncertainty*, Cambridge/Malden 2007.

⁴⁹ REGINA POLAK, *Migration als Ort der Theologie*, in: TOBIAS KESSLER (ed.), *Migration als Ort der Theologie*, Regensburg 2014, 87–114.

⁵⁰ MUSA W. DUBE, *Savior of the World but not of This World. Post-Colonial Reading of Spatial Construction in John*, in: R. S. SUGIRTHARAJAH (ed.), *The Postcolonial Bible*, Sheffield 1998, 118–135; MUSA W. DUBE, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, Saint Louis, MO 2000.

stranger, to what is not divine.«⁵¹ The »theological vision of a universally inclusive community of mutual benefit«, should be, Tanner continues, »our moral compass.«⁵²

In contrast to Tanner, Daniel Groody, also from North America, focusses on borders in the context of migration. Groody uses the border as a metaphor for the disastrous binary logic of creating human differences in societies, e. g. the difference between citizens and strangers, legal and illegal, native and foreign. The goal is to overcome the borders, thereby following God's example and instruction. Groody systematizes the borders into four groups: the inhumane-humane, the divine-human, the human-human, and the country-kingdom. Groody argues that biblical resources witness to the overcoming of all dividing borders.⁵³

The Mexican-North American scholar Leticia A. Guardiola-Sáenz⁵⁴ depicts Jesus as a model for border-crossing. Rereading John 7:53-8:11 as the story of »the Accused« – deliberately renamed from »the Adulteress« – Guardiola-Sáenz shows that Jesus crossed various borders – between private and public, political and religious, gender and moral. Border-crossing becomes a redemptive act of liberation and reconciliation.

What the three approaches have in common is not only that they convey the overcoming of borders to values and demands that are innate to Christian belief and theology. They also point to the fact that Christianity has contributed to the construction of borders and to the marginalization of »others«. Yet viewed from the view of postcolonial critique something very important is nevertheless lacking: the unauthorized agency and subjectivity of the migrant.

2.3 Thinking on Borders Calls for an Alternative Critical Epistemology

Putting it provocatively, the three approaches depicted present neatly ordered coherent theories that re-interpret Christian values in the context of migration – or, in Tanner's case, in the context of the church community – and try to do more justice to those who are excluded. But the authority of these values is not questioned – e. g. biblical texts are not, as in postcolonial hermeneutics, being chal-

⁵¹ KATHRYN TANNER, *Economy of Grace*, Minneapolis, MN 2005, 73.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 142.

⁵³ DANIEL G. GROODY, *Homeward Bound: A Theology of Migration*, in: JUDITH GRUBER/SIGRID RETTENBACHER (eds.), *Migration as a Sign of the Times. Towards a Theology of Migration*, Leiden 2015, 131-150.

⁵⁴ LETICIA A. GUARDIOLA-SÁENZ, *Border-crossing and Its Redemptive Power in John 8:1-11: A Cultural Reading of Jesus and the Accused*, in: JEFFREY L. STALEY (ed.), *The Bible and Postcolonialism*, London/New York 2002, 129-152.

lenged for their inherent colonizing contents and effects. Nor is there any intent to approach alternative epistemologies of the other as Mignolo's border thinking approach suggests. The epistemological and hermeneutical framework is not under scrutiny. There is no dwelling at the border, no listening to the knowledge of those who live at the margins, no decentralizing move.

What is at stake here is one of the core questions of postcolonial thinkers: how come the West has produced so well-defined humanitarian theories and still enters into colonial attitudes? Has this, in the words of Brian Massumi, more to do with »more of the same« than with »more to the world«, more with »mastery and control« and less with »invention«?⁵⁵ Or in the provocative words of Frantz Fanon:

»That same Europe where they were never done talking of Man, and where they never stopped proclaiming that they were only anxious for the welfare of Man: today we know with what sufferings humanity has paid for every one of their triumphs of the mind.«⁵⁶

This critique leads to the search for an alternative epistemology that overcomes Western superiority, and puts the unauthorized agency of the migrant into the centre. Jörg Rieger presents such an alternative, following Walter D. Mignolo's approach:

»Border thinking does not claim firm foundations [or] universal access to truth, or the cool objectivity of the social and natural sciences, but grows out of the perspective of those who experience the pressures of colonialism and imperialism in their own bodies [...] Border thinking – and its truth – emerge, ultimately, from the wounds of the colonial histories, memories, and experiences.«⁵⁷

The postcolonial discourse on migration challenges theology to move from the centre to the borders and to decanter the centre as *the* imagined place where truth and knowledge is generated. Border thinking means that truth is not to be controlled, manufactured, governed, fixed in thrilling theories about truth. In the words of Dipesh Chakrabarty:

⁵⁵ BRIAN MASSUMI, *Parables for the Virtual. Movement, Affect, Sensation*, Durham/London 2002, 17.

⁵⁶ FANON, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 312.

⁵⁷ JOERG RIEGER, *Liberating God-Talk. Postcolonialism and the Challenge of the Margins*, in: CATHERINE KELLER/MICHAEL NAUSNER/MAYRA RIVERA (eds.), *Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire*, St. Louis, MO 2004, 204–220, 215, quoting from WALTER D. MIGNOLO, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*, Princeton, NJ 2000, 37.

»The subaltern can teach us to give up control - which amounts to nothing less than a new way of knowing the truth: ›To go to the subaltern in order to learn to be radically ›fragmentary‹ and ›episodic‹ is to move away from the monomania of the imagination that operates within the gesture that the knowing, judging, willing subject always already knows what is good for everybody, ahead of any investigation«.⁵⁸

Truth, in this postcolonial understanding, is therefore neither the one universal truth nor is it located – exclusively – in the Cartesian »Cogito«. It is rather to be found at the margins and interstitialities, in the specific contexts of oppression, in bodily experiences of suffering. It is experienced through thoughts, deeds and sensations in the midst of the brokenness of lives and in search of liberation and reconciliation.

2.4 Taking the Migrant's Agency Seriously and *Theological Interpretations*

Postcolonial critique brings into mind the agency of the migrant. Jorge E. Castillo Guerra from Panama, who lives in the Netherlands, takes this idea further and claims that the experience and theology of migrants themselves should be the starting point for theological reflection. Migrants develop in their *theological* interpretation of their migration experiences a theology of hope and trust in the midst of despair, Guerra claims.⁵⁹ The declarations of churches and the theological statements, in contrast, are rather coined by ethical appeals as well as by hopelessness caused by the experience of powerlessness with regard to migration and flight.

Guerra's approach owes much to liberation theology. Perceiving migrants as agents, as the ones in control of their theology and spirituality, recalls the appeals by Gustavo Gutiérrez, Ignacio Ellacuría or Jon Sobrino to distinguish between a *theological* first order theology – by the oppressed themselves – and a theology of second order which is the academic theology. Of course this brings up the question of representation. In his book »The Gospel in Solentiname« Ernesto Cardenal has tried to pave the way for ordinary people to present their theology themselves in the public and academic discourse. Guerra does likewise by quoting members of groups of migrants that attend a certain Catholic congregation.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 216, quotation from DIPESH CHAKRABARTY, *Radical Histories and Question of Enlightenment Rationalism*, in: VINAYAK CHATURVERDI (ed.), *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial*, London 2000, 256–280, 275.

⁵⁹ JORGE E. CASTILLO GUERRA, *From the Faith and Life of a Migrant to a Theology of Migration and Intercultural Convivencia*, in: GRUBER/RETTEBACHER (eds.), *Migration as a Sign of the Times*, 107–130.

Nevertheless, there is a need for academic theology. In spite of its necessary and important distance, second-order theologians should seek to be close to migrants. It is only by means of listening to the migrant's own theology, Guerra claims, that dis-knowledge can be overcome. Knowledge - epistemology - in this postcolonial sense is not an issue only of the »Cogito« but rather of listening, of compassion and empathy, of vibrancy and resonance, of being affected and affecting the other. Of course this suggestion is a tremendous challenge, if not a provocation or offence towards Western academic ways of studying and knowing, the academic epoché.

3. Non-concluding Thoughts

Postcolonial discourses are always rather non-concluding because their provocations open paths for further discussion. But this is precisely one of the core challenges that accompany the phenomenon of migration today: it calls everybody, including theologians, into the »contact zone« where different yet entangled cultures and people with different yet connected experiences and vulnerabilities meet and start negotiations on identity, power of interpretation, authorized and unauthorized agency, political interests, etc.

In this context theology is challenged to listen and to (self-)critically reflect how migrants bestow *theological* meaning to migration. Theology is therefore called to enter places of resistance- and counter-discourses, of cultural and religious entanglements, of fragmentary, episodic, transforming identities, at both »ends«, the migrants' and its own.

Last but not least, the postcolonial perspectives on migration remind theology of the centrality of justice in Biblical narratives of migration. Although postcolonial critique is generally fundamentally sceptical with regard to universal truths, the commitment to justice as a universal value is high. Therefore, with regard to justice as imperative, promise and goal, postcolonial critique and theology are closely aligned.

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