



Towards a Decological Praxis¹

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Abstract in English

In this paper, I argue that social justice cannot be fully realized without affirming its intrinsic ties to environmental justice, and further that these ties point toward a ‘decological praxis.’ Decological praxis is a truncation of decolonial ecological pedagogy. It is a praxis that I am crafting and one which I propose that those concerned with justice-oriented theological education can have in common, as it offers possibilities to partake in a progressively shared intersectional decolonial theological methodology. It is decolonial because this is a practice focused in training the mind to emancipate oneself, the other and nature from long-standing hierarchical patterns of power reproducing colonial modes of relationships. I propose that we use decological praxis as the orienting principle to teach, research and learn from each other’s experiences of social and environmental injustice. I conclude by proposing that this praxis may result in a culture of decoloniality, which brings into light the need to investigate the effects of coloniality in our own, temporal and local, lived experiences and to do so via a process of deliberate self-reflexivity.

Key words: Environmental Justice, Ecofeminism, Theology, Coloniality, Decolonial Pedagogical Praxis.

Abstract in Spanish

Es este artículo, argumento que la justicia social no puede ser realizada sin una afirmación de los lazos intrínsecos con la justicia ambiental y como este núcleo apunta hacia una ‘Praxis Decológica’ La praxis Decológica, entiendo aquí, es una condensación de una pedagógica ecológica decolonial. Esta praxis que estoy construyendo y que propongo puede ser un denominador común para aquellos/as que pueden formar parte de una metodología interseccional, decolonial y teológica compartida. Este programa es decolonial porque su práctica consiste en entrenar la mente

¹ A shorter version of this article has been published in Portuguese (2019) with the title “Por uma Práxis Decológica.” In: Wanderley Pereira da Rosa and Reginaldo P. Braga Junior (eds.), *Religião, Gênero, Violências e Direitos Humanos*. Vitória, Brasil: Editora Unida, pp. 383–402.



para emanciparse a uno/a mismo/a, al/a otro/a y a la naturaleza de los patrones de poder que desde hace siglos son reproducidos por los modos coloniales de relación. Propongo aquí que usemos la praxis decológica como un principio orientador para la instrucción, la investigación y el aprendizaje de una/o del/a otro/a las experiencias de injusticia social y ambiental. Concluyo proponiendo que esta praxis podría terminar en una cultural decolonial, que trae a la luz la necesidad de investigar los efectos de la colonialidad en nuestro mismo contexto temporal y espacial, en nuestras experiencias de vida y ello puede realizarse por un proceso deliberado de autorreflexibilidad.

Key words: Justicia Ambiental, Ecofeminismo, Teología, Colonialidad, Praxis Pedagógica Decolonial.

Abstract in Portuguese

Neste trabalho, primeiro ofereço um breve panorama da intersecção entre justiça ambiental e ecofeminismo. Defendo que não há como a justiça social ser plenamente concretizada se não reconhecermos seus laços intrínsecos com a justiça ambiental, e também que tais laços apontam para uma “práxis decológica”. Práxis decológica é uma forma condensada de “pedagogia teológica ecológica decolonial”. Os princípios de aprendizado e ensino se baseiam na criação de sentidos religiosos que é de natureza decolonial e ecológica. Por isso, na segunda parte deste trabalho proponho que usemos esta práxis decológica como princípio orientador não só para nosso ensino e pesquisa, mas também para as maneiras como falamos e aprendemos com as experiências uns dos outros relacionadas a injustiças sociais e ambientais. Trata-se da construção, transmissão e circulação de conhecimento para que haja uma cultura de decolonialidade.

Palavras-Chave: justiça ambiental, ecofeminismo, teologia, pedagogia decolonial, decolonialidade.

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Introduction

This paper is about a pedagogical praxis that I propose that those concerned with justice-oriented education can have in common, as it offers possibilities to partake in a progressively shared intersectional decolonial and ecological methodology. This proposal and my own scholarship are deeply influenced by my own experiences of growing up in a rapidly changing postcolonial Brazil, and becoming a scholar and educator in a post-apartheid/colonial South Africa. To grow up in such contexts meant to experience on a daily basis the overlapping of gendered oppression, racial discrimination, and ecological rapacity in contexts of economic disparity that have been shaped by colonialism and neoliberal capitalist policies.

I have named this pedagogy decological praxis, a term that I first introduced in 2018.² ‘Decological’ is a truncation I made of the words decolonial, ecological and pedagogical while adjusting my methodology to teach on theology and ecology in my new context of the United States. In this praxis, the principles of learning and teaching are grounded on the development of religious meaning-making that is decolonial and ecological in nature. As Willis Jenkins argues, the world does not need a shared understanding of the divine in order to cooperate in confronting shared problems, such as climate change.

² I first introduced the idea for a decological praxis in the paper “Towards a Decological Praxis” presented at the *Primeira Consulta Sobre Religião, Gênero, Violências e Direitos Humanos* (First Consultation on Religion, Gender, Violence and Human Rights) in the Faculdade Unida, May 16–18, Vitória, Brazil. We were invited to reflect upon the growing violence against women, Afro-descendants, the LGBTQ community and other marginalized groups, and to raise theological reflections aimed at promoting civil and human rights in the respective contexts represented by this group of scholars: Brazil and the USA. As an ecofeminist scholar, I was invited to develop this conversation in relation to ecology, more specifically to environmental justice.



“It needs practical capacities of responsibility and cooperation” (2013: 6). I have used this type of argument to explore a pedagogical methodology that encourages my students to challenge systemic structures of power, such as patriarchy and colonialism, by promoting self-reflection regarding their own roles in perpetuating ideological formations of colonial thinking.

I divided this paper into two main parts; I first give an overview of the intersection between environmental justice and ecofeminism. I argue that social justice cannot be fully realized without affirming its intrinsic ties to environmental justice and further that these ties point toward a ‘decological praxis.’ In the second part of this paper, I propose that we use decology as the principle orienting not only our teaching and researching, but also the ways we speak and learn from each other’s experiences of social and environmental injustices. This is about construction, transmission and circulation of knowledge so that a culture of decoloniality can take place.

Environmental Justice and Ecofeminist Intersection

It should not be difficult to understand that, because humans depend and interact with the environment on a consistent basis, these interactions consequently impact quality of life, duration of healthy life lived, and health disparities (CDC, 2010). Therefore, living in close proximity to environmental hazards, such as toxic waste sites, power plants, industrial sites, high traffic roadways, truck roads, gas stations and repair shops, leads to an increased risk for adverse health outcomes (Brender et al., 2011). Yet, the dominant economic system in place is a market-oriented system. This means that the more people consume, the more the market-demand determines the proliferation of transnational corporations, toxic waste facilities, power plants, industrial sites, and so on.



Strategically searching for cheap labor and weak environmental policies, transnational corporations are growing all around the world and with them grows an increased risk for adverse health outcomes and environmental hazards, causing not only “the degradation of living conditions on the planet,” but also “the destruction of living beings, among them human beings,” showing then the intimate correlations between social justice and environmental justice (Gebara, 2016: 118). For some scholars of religion and ecology and ecological theology, rethinking our economic model and addressing people’s consumption behavior seems to be an obvious option to address social and environmental problems alike—however, for many this connection is not as feasible nor as attractive as we (ecologically concerned scholars) would like to think.³

In 1990, American ecofeminist scholar Charlene Spretnak raised the question of how to address ecological ethics in a consumerist society that is unaware of how human behavior contributes to the “ecocrisis” (Spretnak, 1990: 3). I share Spretnak’s concern. For many years, I have searched for ways to teach that would bring people to care for social and environmental justice. I have been dedicated to pedagogical methods that would develop in my students civic engagement and the advancement of human and Earth rights. However, I used to think that if people learned about environmental justice and climate change that knowledge and awareness would lead them to also work towards social transformation. I am no longer confident that this is a reliable assumption.

After I moved to the U.S. at the end of 2016, I came to realize on a different level how one of the main problems causing climate change is that everybody produces waste, but everybody does

³ For examples of theologians critically engaging the current dominant and globalized economic model and addressing people’s consumption behavior, see Moe-Lobeda, Cynthia (2013). *Resisting Structural Evil. Love as Ecological-Economic Vocation*. Minneapolis. MN: Fortress Press.



not live near waste facilities. People do not experience climate change and environmental deterioration in the same way. It is not as visible and as urgent for most people living in the U.S. For this reason, among others, we hear people saying “I don’t believe in climate change.” How did climate change become a matter of faith? “Multiple studies published in peer-reviewed scientific journals show that 97 % or more of actively publishing climate scientists agree: Climate-warming trends over the past century are extremely likely due to human activities” (NASA, n.d.).⁴ The bottom line is that in the U.S., being consciously aware of how one’s actions, history and lifestyles have environmental impact has become for many a personal choice with no moral weight. This is as simple as sitting on a sofa and contemplating the concept of gravity. People sitting on a sofa can think about gravity at their leisure or not at all. People falling from a building have no choice but to become intimately familiar with it. Many people in the U.S. living in privileged areas can choose to believe in climate change or not—the luxurious consequence of crafting local realities that ignore global concerns. However, for those who live at the expense of such luxury, that is, those that have no choice but to deal with the environment crisis locally, ignorance is not an option. For most people of color and to some extent to poor white people, climate change caused by environmental degradation has become a matter of survival, human rights and dignity. This fact extends to the same demographics of those in third world countries. I would therefore like to rephrase Spretnak’s question to: How can we as scholars and educators address social and ecological problems in societies that can afford to be oblivious of how human behavior contributes to the ecocrisis or what we now call environmental injustice?

⁴ See also Cook, J., and others (2016). «Consensus on Consensus: A Synthesis of Consensus Estimates on Human-Caused Global Warming.» *Environmental Research Letters* 11, 4, (April).



Environmental Justice Movement

Environmental justice as a movement became formally established in the early 1980s as a result of the protests against a highly toxic chemical, PCB, that was illegally dumped along 240 miles of rural highway in North Carolina, on former agricultural land in Warren County, a predominantly black part of the state. The outraged local community organized a campaign of opposition, largely based in two churches, one Baptist and the other United Church of Christ (UCC) (Bohannon and O'Brien, 2011: 177). In 1987, The UCC Commission for Racial Justice published a watershed document, *Toxic Wastes and Race*,⁵ a national survey of every registered toxic waste facility in the United States, revealing that the most statistically significant predictor of location of a hazardous waste site is a community's race. This document was updated in 1994 and again in 2007, with the updated results re-affirming that "even when socioeconomic factors are considered, race is the most statistically significant predictor in the siting of hazardous wastes" (Bohannon and O'Brien, 2011: 177). Extending from this legacy, the environmental justice movement has focused on specific environmental injustices, such as the location of toxic waste facilities and other environmental hazards, as a way to resist what Benjamin Chavis named "environmental racism" (Bullard, 2007: viii).

For Chavis, environmental racism is about exposing that racial discrimination has led governments and corporations to place polluting facilities in predominantly black and Hispanic

⁵ See United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice (1987). *Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States: A National Report on the Racial and Socio-Economic Characteristics of Communities with Hazardous Wastes Sites*. New York, NY: United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice.



communities.⁶ Chavis' work reveals that environmental issues cannot be framed simply as a matter of the outcome of polluting industries. The consequent global warming and climate change cannot only be framed as the need to clean the air that we breathe, the water that we drink and the soil we work, as most political debates on climate change are often focused. To this end, Richard Bohannon and Kevin J. O'Brien have argued, it also needs to be recognized that the environmental degradation causing climate change "is part of a deeply ingrained structure [of injustice] that affects a multiplicity of daily decisions, significantly limiting the options of the poorer, blacker neighborhood to the advantage of a wealthier, whiter population." (Bohannon and O'Brien, 2017: 221). In other words, environmental concerns also need to address the reasons why people have been put in such positions of vulnerability in the first place. For those of us working in theological education, this is about advancing theologies without complicity to evil. It is about bringing people to recognize how Christian theology is a theology that has allowed societies to develop their modes of survival at the expenses of someone else's survival.⁷

Environmental Justice and Gender

From within environmental justice has emerged scholarship specific to gender. Ecofeminist philosopher Chris Cuomo,

⁶ For more recent studies, see Bravo, Mercedes A., and others (2016). «Racial Isolation and Exposure to Airborne Particulate Matter and Ozone in Understudied US Populations: Environmental Justice Applications of Downscaled Numerical Model Output.» *Environment International* 92–93 (2016): pp. 247–255.

⁷ For more on this idea of not surviving at the expenses of someone else's survival, see Kim, Nami (2017). «Survival at No One's Expense: Forging an Intersectional Coalition (@theTable: Intersectionality & Political Action).» *Feminist Studies in Religion* (March). [Blog]. Available at: <<http://www.fsrinc.org/survival-no-ones-expense/>> [Accessed March 25, 2018].



writing on climate change and gender, demonstrated how across the globe poor women and to a greater degree, poor women of color, are the most vulnerable to climate change's negative effects, such as food shortages, drought, flooding and illness, as well as natural disasters (2012: 609–611). Research shows that women's vulnerability to climate change depends in part on gender roles and relations. For example, according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Fourth Assessment Report (2007), rural women in developing countries are among the most vulnerable groups to the consequences of climate change.⁸ Geraldine Terry (2009: 3) explains that "this is because they are often dependent on natural resources for their livelihoods, do most of the agricultural work, and are responsible for collecting water and fuel," and climate change widely affects all these areas of women's lives.

However, as both Cuomo (2012: 611) and Terry (2009: 4) pointed out, generalizations about women's vulnerability do not always tell the entire story; women's vulnerability to climate change depends on an entire range of intersecting social factors. Vandana Shiva, an Indian physicist, ecofeminist and globally recognized advocate, also noted that environmental hardships run along racial and gender lines when she highlighted the particular experiences and challenges of agrarian Indian women whose livelihoods and survival are threatened when water is privatized, food economies are globalized, and common lands are enclosed (2015: 26–54).

Against this background of environmental injustice, ecofeminist scholars have asked the question: 'What enables and sustains women's social vulnerability to environmental hazards, ills and

⁸ See Contribution of Working Group II to the Fourth Assessment Report of the IPCC (2007). «Climate Change 2007: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability.» New York, NY: Cambridge University Press. Available at: <http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar4/wg2/ar4_wg2_full_report.pdf.> [Accessed on September 15, 2018].



climate change?’ They argue that nations, gender roles, class, race and sexuality shape women’s vulnerabilities through what has been identified as “the logic of domination.” The idea of a logic of domination was first introduced by Jewish philosophers Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno (2007) writing in the midst of their experiences of fascism and World War II, “to describe what they considered a pervasive ‘European’ mindset”—meaning, the tendency of making sense of the world hierarchically and dualistically, which leads to the justification and subordination of others and creates value systems that enable the domination of the Earth (Cuomo, 2017: 293).

Ecofeminism identifies connections between hierarchy, dualism and oppression in human society with human exceptionalism and the domination of nature. In general, ecofeminist scholars explain the oppression of women and other marginalized peoples as tied to a view of nature as other and outside the human realm of reason (Eaton, 2005: 46). A critique of the separation between nature and culture or what became known as the nature-culture dualism, is central to the way ecofeminist theory and theology deal with social injustices and the destruction of the Earth in tandem. In *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, philosopher Val Plumwood (1993) argued that the reason-nature dualism first normalized and then justified the instrumentalization of nature and those categorized as nature, such as women, people of color, poor people and the colonized others. In simplified terms, the Cartesian-inspired notions that the capacity to reason separates humans from other animals has made it possible for patriarchal ideologies to disconnect men from nature, birthing a dominant economic global system that regards peoples and the Earth as objects of consumption and exploitation.

Pioneering ecofeminist theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether (1996, 1–8) explains that this connection between the exploitation of the Earth and women are made in two levels: cultural-symbolic and socio-economic. The first is an “ideological



superstructure that reflects and ratifies the second” (Ruether, 2008: 39). Dominant systems of privilege, in which patriarchal hierarchies have historically marginalized women to a shared sphere with the Earth, have resulted in ideologies that identify women as closer to nature. This has justified their exclusion to a “devalued sphere of material work” (Ruether, 2007: 77). One of the results of women doing most of the domestic and agricultural work, for example, is that this role placed them in integral relation with environmental questions about health, food safety, and water quality (Sturgeon, 2009).

Feminist liberation theologian Ivone Gebara (2003) and ecowomanist Melanie Harris (2017), dissect this process of recasting persons as nature, which unsurprisingly reveals the colonialist, sexist and racist motives. Together their works argue that in the history of the United States and Latin America, European colonizers rationalized the enslavement of African people and displacement of Latin American Indigenous people by classifying Africans and Indigenous as a lesser form of humanity and classifying them as closer to the animal. Today, bodies of work, such as the *Toxic Waste and Race*, make evident how this hierarchical and dualistic mental construction continues enabling the subordination of some people and the Earth to the benefit of others.

Plumwood (1993) referred to the master model—the hierarchical system of organization that places human beings over nature, reason over matter, men over women, white over black, master over slave and civilized over primitive, among others. As a consequence, today, we have fallen prey to the trap of an extractive economic system that expects those such as mothers, the colonized other and the Earth to continue giving without ceasing, while others continue taking without any moral affliction.

In my view, one of the greatest strengths of using ecofeminist theory in relation to environmental justice is the connection ecofeminist scholars make between multiple oppressions and



the human domination of the Earth. Ecofeminists have made increasingly visible how difficult it is to understand and even engage with social or environmental justice without some conceptualization of intersectional analysis. This calls into question any scholarly work that is not focused on dismantling the logic of domination in order to address social injustices and ecological destruction.

However, ‘where to start’ has long been a point of contention among most ecofeminists, and this is no different for justice-oriented scholars of religion and theology. Do we start with Vandana Shiva and how the depletion of the Earth overlaps with colonized women’s experiences of oppression in the Global South? Should we use the ecological issues manifesting in the experiences of women of African descent as the starting point for critical reflection or should it be the centrality of economic justice in the lives of poor women? Ecofeminist theologians such as Heather Eaton and Lois Lorentzen (2003) connect neoliberal economic paradigms to religious patriarchy, the domination of the Earth, and the oppression of marginalized communities. Should neoliberalism be our starting point?

Adopting a Decological Praxis

I agree with feminist scholars Carol Christ and Judith Plaskow (2016) when they argued that the main challenge for the feminist theological discourse is not the ways our different experiences have led to the construction of different imaginings of the divine, but in developing shared theological criteria. They argue that we need a theological criterion that is in the broadest sense rational and moral, and that judge our theological views by asking the questions: Does this theological construction make sense of the world we share? Does this view of divinity promote the flourishing of the world? I would add two more questions of equal importance in today’s world:



Do our theologies disrupt imperialistic models of human relations? Do they teach us to survive not at the expense of somebody else's survival, as Nam Kim (2017) has put?

I often explain to my M.Div. students, who are mostly preparing to become religious leaders, that we do not need a shared understanding of the divine in order to confront shared problems. We need shared "practical capacities of responsibility and cooperation" (Jenkins, 2013: 6). Therefore, I do not propose a theological perspective that I could contend we all should adopt in order to end colonial modes of relationships. Instead, I want to propose a pedagogical praxis that is decolonial and ecological (thus, decological), which I argue is one we all can and should adopt regardless of one's theological starting point. We need a shared commitment to explore pedagogical methodologies that encourage our students to challenge systemic forms of oppression by investigating their own roles in perpetuating ideological formations of colonial thinking and of how their own lifestyles enable people to survive at the expense of others' survival.

This decological praxis is informed by three interconnected historical issues that most of us can identify with and subscribe to. First, "we all share a common burden in that the planet that we share is currently suffering because of our collective inaction" (Carter 2018: 58). We must remember that it is not the climate or the Earth that distinguishes between and subsequently oppresses people of color or the poor more than other groups. The climate and effects of its change are indiscriminate in this way, and it is people and systems perpetuated by people that have put these marginalized groups in harm's way. In the end, however, no one will be immune from these consequences as they increase in number, area and lethality. Second, we need to recognize how our own behavior and lifestyle is automatically part of a system that values the Earth and its people only with respect to what can be used or consumed. Third, independently of our different historical backgrounds,



colonizer or colonized, North or South, poor or rich, black or white, we have all (consciously or unconsciously) shared in, or benefited from, the sources and practices of the logic of domination or what postcolonial scholars named *coloniality*. Nelson Maldonado-Torres explains coloniality as,

Coloniality is different from colonialism. Colonialism denotes a political and economic relation in which the sovereignty of a nation or a people rests on the power of another nation, which makes such nation an empire. Coloniality, instead, refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations. Thus, coloniality survives colonialism. It is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience. In a way, as modern subjects we breathe coloniality all the time and every day (Maldonado-Torres, 2007: 243).

According to Plumwood, the categorization of women, people of color, and the colonized other as linked to nature placed them as lacking the full measure of rationality or culture. It has justified the treatment of those “as passive, as non-agent and non-subject [. . .] as the ‘environment’ or invisible background conditions against which the ‘foreground’ achievements of reason or culture (provided typically by the white, Western, male expert or entrepreneur) take place” (1993: 4). The construction of a devalued and sharply demarcated sphere of otherness associated with the Earth forms the main basis for the logical structure of colonization. However, the critical awareness of the connection between forms of oppression alone is not sufficient to change this reality. The dominator-subordinator



dynamic, which has existed in the Western socio-organizational structures has made it possible for societies to learn and to maintain survival at the expense of the survival of others, including humans and nonhuman nature, with no ethical restraints.

It seems evident how the reason-nature divide and its hierarchical mental construction continues enabling the subordination of some people and the Earth to the benefit of others. I often explain to my American students that their lifestyle has relied on the exploitation of others and that the ability for many in the developed world to eat well has created dependence and a permanent disadvantage for the poor in developed and developing countries. Almost without exception, their reaction is of disbelief. They are largely unaware of how today's low food prices continue to rely heavily on either the proliferation of animal farming, which is mostly done through inhumane practices and contributes significantly to CO2 emissions, or through industrial practices that not only deplete the soil of nutrients, but also employ workers at starvation wages and in dangerous conditions. Those workers are forced to rely on their exploiters and tolerate abuses, lest the business be withdrawn. I then point out how our modern modes of survival and practices are not very different from the ways in which European colonizers survived on the land and knowledge of indigenous people while systematically displacing them and destroying their ecosystems.

Frankly, it is an embarrassment to our species that our dependence on exploited labor of those once categorized as animals is still an issue for today's world. Such a reality begs for decolonial strategies. Postcolonial scholar and historian of religion Gustavo Benavides (2011: 285) stated that "the need to examine knowledge production in relation to location and subject position" is an established practice within the sociology of knowledge, yet "its acceptance does not necessarily imply a critical standpoint." In this light, I insist that as important as



it is to recognize how environmental injustice issues reveal the logic of domination at work, it is equally important to recognize that we all have endured and/or benefited from coloniality. As long as we ignore this fact all of us will be perpetually susceptible to reproducing or overlooking both colonial modes of relationships and thinking. I am arguing that if we want to advance scholarship capable of addressing gender violence and climate change, promoting human and Earth rights and civic engagement, then we need to redirect our attention to redress the unchallenged imperialistic mindset that has seeped into people's imaginaries of human relations. We need a shared criterion capable of global reach. I am proposing a pedagogical praxis focused to analyze, engage, reject and provide an alternative to coloniality, subsequently dismantling the hierarchical and dualistic ways to make sense of the world that we share.

Decolonial scholar Walter D. Mignolo (2018) stresses the importance of differentiating between decoloniality and decolonization. Decolonization refers primarily to the work of nation-states, the geopolitical process, whether by diplomacy or revolution, by which a previously colonized territory is regranted its political sovereignty (2018: 123–4). Conversely, though not disconnected, decoloniality is not a matter of geopolitics, but one of ontology and epistemology, of being and of knowing, the effects of which far outreach and outlast shifts in political sovereignties (2018: 125). As such, this difference in the nature of the infliction necessitates a similar difference in the praxis of its healing. Mignolo describes as the difference between resistance and re-existing. Resistance, or dewesternization, may question who gets to be in charge—the content of the conversation while staying within the predetermined conversational structures, but re-existing questions the structural assumptions that dictate the terms or the “how” of the conversation—what being in charge, or even being “human” means altogether (2018: 130).

Furthermore, in *Out of Depths*, Gebara argued that critical knowledge of that which oppresses and marginalises specific



groups “is not enough to bring about actual change” (2002: 69). She goes on to explain that in order “to change the very conditions that produce relationships of domination, there must be a collective process of education” (ibid.). I maintain that a collective process of education is the only way to strike at the root of the problem. This proposal for a shared decological praxis is about this collective process of education. This resonates with Asian feminist scholar Nam Kim’s call for decolonization through “de-imperialization in the imperial center.” (Kim, 2017).

According to Gebara, it is by investigating how global concerns intersect with local realities of oppression that we can hold each other accountable “to base our actions on the big problems of our world in our daily life and in our local environment” (Gebara, 2009). This raises the question, “How can we act politically in our countries for the common good of all?”

Towards Decological Culture

Ecotheologian Cynthia Moe-Lobeda responds to the question above by proposing a straightforward and moral strategy. She stated, “I believe that the vast number of ‘us,’ the ‘over-consumers,’ would refuse to comply with economic and ecological exploitation if we truly recognized the pain, suffering, and damage caused by the ways that we live and if we could envision viable alternatives” (2013: 5). Moe-Lobeda aims to develop an ecological culture by developing transnational solidarity in a tradition that is unclear of how their theology fosters their anthropocentric worldview.

Yet, the Christian tradition has not only fostered an anthropocentric, but also an imperialistic worldview, which influence people’s inability to see the effects of their local actions on a global scale. In addition to the fostering of moral strategy, the possibility to break free from exploitative modes of relationships comes from our dedicated efforts to develop self and collective



responsibility and accountability for our colonial histories. One cannot work without the other. In this light, I challenge scholars of ecological theology to take responsibility for Christianity's role in constructing, sustaining and normalizing ideologies of colonization and capitalism, which continues reinforcing a view of humans as different from and above the Earth.

One path toward collective accountability is the promotion of self-reflexivity and awareness of the moral ripples of our choices. Has Christianity sufficiently grappled with the responsibilities we accept by living in a globalized world? I argue that this reality beckons a moral and practical responsibility to understand the real impact of our choices. Yet for some reason, when we see the aftermath of the exploiters' work on the vulnerable, we often do not strategize for our necessary and imminent confrontation with the exploiter, we do not frequently ask ourselves who empowered these exploiters, lest we uncover our own submission to this power through handing over cash to always be living a little better. Christianity's failure to place hard ethical restraints on the capitalist and neo-colonialist ventures has always placed it at a disadvantage when seeking to alleviate the side effects, as it were, while tolerating the disease.

A decological praxis compels theological educators to challenge our students to think about social and environmental justice holistically. This means to think about how their local realities influence global dynamics and vice-versa. This means to encourage them to make all sorts of economic and cultural connections so that they can learn about the colonization of the Earth and the colonization of others. Connections can then be made with racism and sexism on a local and global scale. This can enable the person to responsibly consider not only the impact of any action on themselves, but also to take seriously the effect that action may have on different social groups and communities of human beings and non-human beings who live together on the same planet. This has a more



realistic potential to generate religious or spiritual practices for positive social change and justice. Ultimately, what connects theological approaches to environmental justice and promotes individual commitment is the “desire to create fundamental change” (Gottlieb and Joshi, 2010: viv). However, life-giving alternatives to the dominant economic global system will only take place if the structural assumptions that dictate the terms of education also change. Similarly, the manner in which religion approaches environmental concerns sets the scope to what religious meaning-making might contribute to social and environmental justice.

I named this pedagogy decological praxis for four intertwined reasons. I see it as a praxis because decology becomes the principle orienting the practice of teaching and one’s personal learning processes. It is decolonial for two reasons. First, to think about environmental justice from a decolonial perspective means to reveal the power dynamics at play and the various positions we hold and have held in this dynamic. This is about pursuing justice based on recognition. It is about identifying and acknowledging our own roles and positions in generating and perpetuating the structural interconnections between racism, sexism and other forms of exploitations. Second, it is not sufficient to draw from the experiences of poverty, racism, sexism and colonialism to teach about justice-oriented ethics, hoping that they will promote solidarity as well as positive social and environmental change. I am arguing that to bring social critical awareness to our classrooms is no longer a sufficient strategy on its own. In the center of our philosophical concerns must be included a commitment to the emancipation of the mind from the master model. Thus, decological praxis starts with ourselves. This is a practice focused on training the mind to identify and emancipate oneself from reproducing colonial models of relationships so that we can learn how to survive not at the expense of the survival of the other and the Earth.



It is ecological because it emphasizes human dependence upon the Earth through breaking down distinctions between human beings and nonhuman nature in increasingly toxic environments. By adopting a decological praxis, our scholarship and classrooms can potentially become a space where we and our students can exercise our imagination to creatively develop new ways to interact with the nonhuman nature, with the divine mystery and humanity at large. This is a process of restoring human creativity and agency through an educational process that is focused on promoting life-giving relationships. I motivate my students to reorient themselves to the natural world by considering not only the impact of any action on oneself, but also to take seriously the effect that action may have on other social groups, thus, the Earth community. This has a more realistic potential to generate religious and spiritual practices for positive change and justice.

Lastly, independently of our different starting points, most scholars are, in one way or another, educators and as such we have at our disposal tools to collectively set in motion a culture of decoloniality. If the conscious and unconscious association of otherness with nature is part of the philosophical foundation that has allowed for so much human domination and ecological devastation so then what are we doing as educator to reverse this situation? This is a pedagogical proposal because the emancipation of the mind involves the combination of two practices, orienting at all times our teaching philosophies: 1) the need to teach and learn about religion and ecology via a process of deliberate self-reflexivity and 2) to do so via investigating the effects of coloniality in our own, temporal and local, lived experiences. As such, we must come together and listen, not just to respond, but to learn about each other's past and continuing forms of experienced oppression, revealing the ways we have voluntarily or involuntarily shared in and/or benefited from the sources and practices of imperialism operating in the frameworks of Western philosophies and



theologies. This encourages learning in solidarity as the particularities of social contexts challenges normative or universal assumptions.

Conclusion

Climate change was born in a crucible of inequality, blind desire for economic growth, and greed. For those living in privileged areas engagement in environmental issues is a choice, which is often deeply personal. However, for those who experience environmental issues directly, it is a matter of survival. To bring education about social and environmental justice through a decological praxis is counterintuitive, as it is not focused on the consequences, but on the causes for the existence of social and environmental vulnerability. On the one hand, exploring the ways how environmental injustice issues have been framed by the broader religious conversation brings insights to how people are being invited and motivated to get involved with ecological issues. On the other hand, it shows if people are contributing toward justice and how theology itself brings them to develop historical accountability. The religiously motivated desire to do good and care for the poor and the Earth, without decological praxis, fails to dismantle systems that cause suffering and maintain God-human, human-nonhuman nature, and self-other relationships that continue to support a logic of domination.

A decological praxis compels theological educators to apply their minds deliberately and systematically to develop forms of learning, constructing and transmitting knowledge that disrupts modern colonial modes of relationship. It is through envisioning strategies for social change that a decological praxis cuts across the grain of recurring domination. My final question is: At the end, who benefits if we do not make those connections—for not making environmental issues a personal, local, social, and colonizing problem?



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