

Ecotheologies and Intersectionality. A Decolonial Perspective on Intersections of Life

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Abstract

Many (formerly) marginalised groups contribute their epistemologies of holistic living to the field of research on ecojustice and ecotheology. They often express a variety of intersectional entanglements of human and non-human life, as well as the intersectional human impact of the climate crisis. These connections are addressed in Christian communities and in the theologies of people who are particularly affected by the climate crisis. My concern in this article is to analyse and discuss how knowledge about non-human life can be incorporated into an intersectional perspective as an example of decolonial learning.

Keywords: Ecotheologies; Intersectionality; Decoloniality; Feminist theology; Indigenous knowledge

Introduction: intersected lives

The growing awareness of the climate crisis is leading to worldwide research in theology for sustainable narratives of the integrity of creation as well as global responsibility and justice. A central theological point is that humanity should not only manage and preserve creation, but should also view creation as a subject in its own right. This concern is an old narrative that emanates in particular from indigenous and (formerly) marginalised groups. Not only were they the first to feel the effects of climate change, but they have always practised a respectful coexistence with non-human life. These theological and religious perspectives have increasingly been taken up in the discourse on the climate crisis and climate justice.¹ Against the backdrop of the ecological crisis, knowledge traditions that have long been suppressed, invisibilised or even in large part destroyed are being (re-)discovered in discourse and becoming connectible with the dominant discourse.

The potentials and challenges in thinking about climate justice in this context are as follows:

1. The nature-based way of life of the numerous and diverse indigenous groups is highly applicable to ecological challenges. They can provide theological

¹ For example, in the Unity Statement of the 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Karlsruhe, non-human life is considered in the vision of a successful living together. It says: "We long for the kind of communion that celebrates and affirms the dignity of all people and honors the whole living earth as the work of God the Creator." (WCC, 2022) This implicitly expresses a critique of an anthropocentric understanding of creation.

- answers for a sustainable coexistence of humans, animals and nature (Mendoza/Zachariah, 2022).
2. There is criticism that indigenous knowledge is romanticised and issues of interpretive power, equitable distribution, and relationships between academic and local, scientific and traditional, and Western and non-Western knowledge systems emerge (Briggs, 2005; Kaunda, 2015).
 3. In addition, indigenous knowledge aims to provide answers to the climate crisis because it is a much older knowledge base which already existed before the colonial period (Johnsen, 2022).
 4. The underlying questions are as follows: a) Can these theologies contribute to a decolonisation of ecotheology? (Mendoza/Zachariah, 2022) b) Will that theological shift also recognise the postcolonial and decolonial implications of these theologies. Are the *other* theologies selectively and unreflectedly subsumed by the *West* and squeezed into the *Western* epistemology, or does ecotheology contribute to the decolonisation of theology and *white* Christian interpretative sovereignty?
 5. This leads to the need for a differentiated perspective on the different dimensions of experience and impact of the climate crisis. In particular, the inclusion of intersectional analyses can detail long-invisibilised multiple discriminations and their effects on the impact of the climate crisis. This means that the international and interdisciplinary complexity and that of intersectionality must be added.

Based on this, I want to explore how the focus of indigenous and marginalised groups on non-human life expands intersectionality. My thesis is that an inclusion of non-human life as part of intersectionality visualises two different relations between structurally oppressed groups of people and non-human life. It recognises climate crisis as expression of human intersectionality, a solidarity of the human and non-human past of colonisation with a focus on ecojustice *and* non-human life as subject of intersectionality. These dimensions imply approaches of decolonial learnings. Following this, I will explore the three dimensions of intersectionality by focusing on the intersecting aspects in selected ecotheologies. Then I will reflect on my observations with regard to intersectional and decolonial concepts. The yield of this analysis is to identify the extent to which the different intersectional dimensions influence ecotheological perspectives and can be understood as part of decolonial learning.

I write and argue from the perspective of an intercultural theologian from Germany. I describe myself as a person of colour with an Asian background. I grew up in the tradition of Western theological dominance and have engaged with postcolonial and decolonial perspectives from biographical and theological interests.

The climate crisis as a factor of intersectional vulnerability

Postcolonial feminist theologians in particular emphasise that women are affected by the climate crisis much more than men. This is because, for example, it is women in Africa who have to fetch water and travel ever greater distances to do so or are affected by droughts because they are responsible for family farming. In order to take into account the different ways in which women are affected by the climate crisis, it is crucial to speak

of feminist ecological theologies in the plural (Anderson, 2021). Ecofeminists in general “highlight the interplay of the oppression of women, other marginalized groups and the degradation of nature” (Chisale, 2021:9). They focus on the “twin oppressions” between women and nature (King, 2017:70). Black, Indigenous and Women of Color (BIWoC) furthermore relate the triple intersection race, class and gender with nature/non-human life (Anderson, 2021).

Historically, the relationship between feminist theology and ecology has been prominently pointed out by Rosemary Radford Ruether. The domination of certain groups, such as Jews, African people, native Americans, or homosexual people, is in relation to non-human nature because they have similar narratives of oppression. It is seen as inferior to humans. It has no rational or subjective thought and is not the image of God. She is also not a place of God’s presence. She is given to be used (Radford Ruether, 2009:368f.). Nature and women have been economically used and oppressed through patriarchal domination (Salleh, 2017). Ariell Salleh (2017:49) points out that in

the history of European colonial expansion, sexual and racialised metaphors were used interchangeably by ruling elites: just as women were described as closer to nature and unclean, so were natives; and the exotic oriental man was said to be feminine. Over the centuries, the naturalizing dualism of sex-gender ideology has justified the social marginality and economic resourcing of so-called lesser others at serious cost to all life on Earth.”

Here it becomes clear that intersectional inequality consequently leads to different levels of concern about the climate crisis. This imbalance is theologically named by ecofeminist BIWoC theologians. I would like to demonstrate this entanglement using the example of African ecofeminist and ecowomanist theology. It also becomes clear that intersectionality as a vulnerable factor is context-dependent.

The circle of concerned African women theologians

My first chosen example is the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (hereafter Circle), founded by Mercy Amber Oduyoye. The Circle published proceedings of the Circle’s fifth Pan-African Conference on “Mother Earth and Mother Africa in Theological/Religious/Cultural/Philosophical Imagination,” July 1–5, 2019. The goal of the conference has been to consider ecological sustainability in relation to gender, land, race, class, ethnicity, colonialism, and globalisation (Chisale/Bosch, 2021).

In the volume, Sinenhlanhla S. Chisale situates African women theology in ecological discourse. Ecofeminist theology developed different theologies of the relationship between women and nature, incorporating the different degradations of women and the degradation of nature. Eco-womanist theology combines social justice with ecological justice as a theological concern from the perspective of Black American women. Chisale, from her African feminist perspective, sees no fundamental separation between the two currents. The volume also uses the terms equivalently. The Circle’s perspective differs in that they do not develop their theology in a Westernised society. Therefore, first, they explicitly incorporate the knowledge of African religions and cultures as well as their practices into the theology with a focus on “Mother Earth.” Secondly, women are particularly affected by the ownership or non-ownership of land.

Third, patriarchal structures are a colonial legacy. Therefore, the difference between the categories of women and men is not emphasised as much as the necessary collaboration to overcome this unwanted heritage (Chisale, 2021:15f.). Chisale understands the relationship within creation summarily as a circle: “In a circle there are no hierarchies, all creation is weaved and interdependent on each other. For African women theologians everything is connected, the living, living dead and all creation; as a result, one cannot exist without the other.” (Chisale, 2021:14)

To summarise, Chisale does not refer to the term “intersectionality”. However, her explanation of how African women are affected refers to intersectional entanglements. The theological approach of the Circle is a dehierarchisation. This expresses an intersectionally sensitive and decolonial concern.

Ecowomanist theology (Melanie Harris)

Another example is the ecowomanist theology. Melanie Harris (2017:141–142) understands ecowomanism as follows:

Ecowomanism is critical reflection, contemplation, and praxis-oriented study of environmental justice from the perspectives of women of color and particularly women of African descent. It links a social justice agenda with ecojustice, recognizing the parallel oppressions that women of color have often survived when confronting racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, and *similar* oppressions that the earth is facing through environmental degradation.”

Harris sees the parallel oppression of women of color and the land in that during slavery in the U.S., Black women’s bodies were violated, raped, and abused by their *white* oppressors. This logic of domination was also exerted on the body of the earth. This parallel leads to a solidarisation of women of color with the earth (Harris, 2017:18).

Harris asks about dimensions of reparation. Systematic mechanisms of oppression cannot be overcome by dialogue alone but require reparation.

That is, it is *not* OK to simply dialogue our way around racism and environmental racism; at some point, if true transformation is to take place, a true apology must be offered, a change must be made, and we must acknowledge that the greed and pride that are woven into our white supremacist, overconsuming society has caused historical pain (trauma) and evidence of internalized oppressions – and, in too many instances, snuffed out the beauty of life with shots of racial and ecological violence. (Harris, 2017:143–144)

For theology, according to Harris, this means, firstly, breaking the dependence on dualism of Western thought and, secondly, recognising complexity. While African cosmologies focus on the fluid relationship of humans, the divine or spirits, and nature, Christian and Western thinking tends to be dualistic. Even in Black Christian churches, this dangerous dualism is found in the distinction between heaven and earth, spirit and body, man and woman. This leads to the logic of hierarchies and oppression of women, the earth and other groups or categories. “An African cosmology and principle of

interconnectedness counters Western, Platonist, dualistic views depicting the earth and nature as separate and apart from the human realm” (Harris, 2017:146).

It should be noted, secondly, that African cosmologies are complex. Against the backdrop of colonial ecologies, a return to African or Indigenous nature relations will not save the planet. Accordingly, the interweavings with colonial machinations must be included in the discussion of ecological reparation.

Ecological reparations construct a reparative framework that recognizes links between inequalities, the reality of globalization, the push for justice, and the urgency of climate change. Ecological reparations recognize that while nature is not concerned with the politics of environmental policy, the reality is that mainstream environmentalism often masks its implicit bias against communities of color, all the while trying to protect the earth and promote sustainability. (Harris, 2017:148)

According to Harris, ecowomanist theology reveals the intersectionality of women of color – particularly U.S. women of African descent – and nature. It manifests itself on a structural level in that they are subject to the same logic of domination, which is mostly *white*. Racism and the exploitation of nature have their commonality in the oppressive violence of interpretive dualisms. Considering, for example, African cosmologies that do not make a categorical separation between humans and their environment takes the question of the place of non-human life in intersectional analyses further. In this regard, non-human life may well be understood as affected by intersectionality and not solely as an objectified effect of intersectionality in the sense that vulnerable groups are particularly affected by the climate crisis.

Intrahuman intersectionality and ecojustice

The brief sketches of the two feminist perspectives on ecological theology and related justice issues open up further perspectives. First, they show that human intersectionality cannot be essentialised. If feminism diversifies into numerous smaller groupings, their entanglements with non-human life are equally diverse. Second, the named feminist perspectives have in common that they express their particular concern with the climate crisis. In this respect, ecological justice can only succeed if this interconnectedness is also considered. Taking into account both the eco-womanist and the Circle, Radford Ruether’s final point of a planetary vision and shared ethic is to be diversified. This request, from a decolonial perspective, cannot consist in a group or a majority determining what vision and ethics consist of. Otherwise, it would be subordinated to the thinking and the establishment of a central power of interpretation. The common can therefore only be negotiated in the concrete.

Another named dimension of intersectionality is solidarity of feminist ecotheologians with non-human life. Intersectional forms of discrimination mean that BIWoC’s can understand the situation of non-human life and show solidarity with it due to the fact that they are both exploited and objectified by the patriarchal and capitalist system.

Non-human life as subject of intersectionality

In addition to the intrahuman factors of intersectionality, a further dimension can be discussed. Indigenous groups in particular have repeatedly pointed out that the earth and

its diverse inhabitants are alive. As such, they can be understood as subjects in their own right. At this point, it should be emphasised that this epistemological approach differs from the western enlightened approach of the *erkennenden Geist* (Hegel, 2016). It is therefore based on a different understanding of the subject in this context. As I see it, the understanding of the subject is less to do with reason, logic and cognition than with the fact that non-human life also lives and is part of life on earth. This subjectivity focuses on the earth as living being. On the basis of this, it must be asked whether non-human life can also be affected by intersectionality. I would like to explore this question using the example of the theology of the Sámi People and Daniel Horan's reflections on the subjectivity of nature and animals.

Sámi ecotheology (Tore Johnsen)

The Sámi are the indigenous people of the Sápmi. The Sápmi is today located in the north of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and in the northwest of Russia. There are between 80,000 and 90,000 Sámi today. (Johnsen, 2022:9) They are an example of indigenous groups in Europe as well.

Tore Johnsen has recently published a monography on indigenous Sámi theology. He himself belongs to the largest North Sámi group in Norway and has qualitatively-empirically questioned them about their everyday Christianity from an internal perspective. Johnsen reports on an interview and subsequent incident with a North Sámi Christian woman around 60 years of age who tells of her traditional knowledge. She talks about the ritual cutting of grass for making shoes.

When arriving at the wetland where this particular grass grows, she first addresses the place telling why she has come. Then she says a Christian blessing in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Finally, she cuts a small bundle of grass and rubs her hands with it, saying: 'Please do not slit my hands.' After having done this, she is ready to start her work. (Johnsen, 2022: 2)

In this short narration, it becomes clear that nature itself is seen as a living being. The woman incorporates the grass into her relationship with God. The blessing connects human and nature. In addition, a certain subjectivity is attributed to nature as the woman speaks to the grass. This expresses a conditional agency of the grass.

In the face of global climate crisis, the Sámi people's knowledge of a nature-centered life, which was systematically discarded before, becomes of interest (Johnsen, 2022:227). The cosmocentric perspective, previously discarded and stereotyped as pagan, is able to provide theological answers to the question of eco-justice. The way in which they are adequately perceived, included and related in the discourse is not only a question of interpretive power but also of decoloniality.

According to Johnsen, the Sámi perspective is linked to the concept of *luondu*. It states that humanity, human existence, and human survival are grounded in nature, not outside of it. *Luondu* differs from the *Western* dichotomy of culture and nature. Life is understood as participation in a larger system involving human and non-human actors. This does not mean that nature is conceived as the ultimate ground and resource of reality. *Luondu* is created and preserved by God, according to the knowledge of the

everyday Christian faith of the North-Sámi. Consequently, a God-relationship exists in a multi-relational approach. (Johnsen, 2022:149–150).

From this viewpoint, an important element of believing in God seems to consist in seeing God as significant to other relationships, and to *make* God significant in these relationships. Blessing practices appear to be of particular importance to the Christian enactment of this relational worldview. (Johnsen, 2022:150)

In the North-Sámi Christian tradition, there is no hierarchy of creation. It does not know an order with mankind in the highest place followed by the animals, the plants and the dead material. The Sámi nature-centered theology is that the different groups are in an equal relationship to each other (Johnsen, 2022:228).

[C]reation represents a living community with whom human beings must develop humble and peaceful relationships (cf. *soabalašvuohta*). In comparison to the Great Chain of Being logic discussed above, this reflects a far more egalitarian intuition of the world. (Johnsen, 2022:228)

From my point of view, looking at Sámi eco-theology contributes the following aspects for an intersectional and decolonial thinking about eco-theology. Peripheralised and long-systematically marginalised groups are, first, located not only in the global South but worldwide. This shows once again that the construction of *Western* knowledge cannot be geographically located. It is the most powerful tradition of knowledge and still prevails globally today. This means, secondly, that knowledge alternating with *Western* knowledge systems is by no means new. It has been violently destroyed in parts by coloniality. The surviving knowledge has an enormous resistance over time. This is characterised not so much by the fact that traditions are rigidly preserved, but that they are constantly renegotiated through contact with their environment, which is both violent and dialogical, according to the criteria of preservation and change. Thirdly, Sámi theology is based on the fact that the relationship between humans and God is expanded by the relationship of the Creator to all of his creation in a non-hierarchical way. According to my findings, non-human life forms thus have a relationship with God and are perceived as actors in their own right. As such, non-human life can be integrated in an intersectional perspective, in that they are also affected by multiple discrimination caused by humans.

Subjectivity of animals and nature (Daniel Horan)

Daniel Horan also asks about the subjectivity of animals and nature. He draws an analogy between colonialism and the separation of humans and nature. He then asks about the subjectivity of non-human living beings (Horan, 2022).

Colonialism and the relationship between humans and nature have a similar history of objectification. Horan writes:

Like the way fellow human beings have deployed strategies of power and control against other humans *ad intra*, so too the human species writ large has similarly deployed essentializing logics against nonhuman creation *ad extra*. Just as the

historical experience of colonization reduces or seeks to erase human agency among the colonized, our anthropocentric framework for thinking about and acting toward nonhuman creation has likewise sought to eliminate the possibility of nonhuman creaturely agency, which has contributed to the justification of the destructive paradigms and practices during the anthropocene. (Horan, 2022:84)

Therefore, a decolonial option is also needed with regard to the relationship with non-human living beings.

Humans are generally distinguished from animals and living nature in that they can produce knowledge and have emotions, perceptions, and rational action. Horan refers to the biologist Uexküll and his concept of environment, which relativises this classical distinction between humans and non-humans, which has also influenced theology. “Nonhuman creatures are just as much subjects as human creatures are, and they also have worlds of their own, integrated and complex worlds in which meaning is made and in which they themselves are constructed just as we are in our own world” (Horan, 2022:91).

According to Horan, the recognition of the subjectivity of non-human life and the perception of interconnection and interdependence rather than separation within creation brings about a new decolonial epistemology in that knowledge of non-human life is perceived as such and taken seriously.

Horan’s perspective highlights the extent to which non-human life is subject to similar intersectional mechanisms and experiences of violence as certain groups of people. Objectification and the associated deprivation of a voice of their own is the defining common factor, according to Horan.

Intersectionality of non-human life

Using the example of Sámi theology, I have shown that non-human life firstly plays a role in the relationship between humans and God and can also have its own relationship with God in the sense of a circular, non-hierarchical interconnectedness of all life. Daniel Horn shows that coloniality affects not only racialised groups of people, but also nature and animals. In both cases, there is a systematic objectification.

It is the contribution of indigenous and marginalised groups to point out the subjectivity of non-human life. This expresses the decolonial concern of recognising different epistemologies – in this case in relation to the concept of the subject. In particular, it is people affected by intersectionality who are more frequently affected by the consequences of the climate crisis. Subsequently, it must be asked whether non-human life is not also affected by different intersectional entanglements.

It must of course be taken into account that the previous intersectional categories refer to people. Categories such as race, class and gender cannot be transferred one-to-one to non-human life. However, in my opinion, a modified intersectional analysis of non-human life is useful because it can also visualise the different entanglements here. Categories that apply to non-human life are, for example, the influence of capitalist and colonial thinking, and the dichotomisation of humans and nature, or the hierarchisation of non-human life.

Intersectional and decolonial reflections

The exemplary reflection on dimensions of intersectionality results in the need to broaden the understanding of intersectionality as an expression of decolonial learning.

Since Kimberlé Crenshaw described the overlaps of discrimination against Black women in the U.S. as intersectionality in 1989, the term has been taken up and expanded as a perspective of analysis, especially in gender studies and increasingly in other disciplines as well (Crenshaw 1989). According to Katharina Walgenbach (2012:81), intersectionality is understood to mean

that social categories such as gender, ethnicity, nation, or class cannot be conceptualized in isolation from one another, but must be analyzed in their ‘interweavings’ or ‘crossings’ (intersections). Additive perspectives are to be overcome by focusing on the simultaneous interaction of social inequalities. Thus, it is not only about the consideration of several social categories, but also about the analysis of their interactions.” (Walgenbach, 2012:81)²

Nina Degele and Gabriele Winker assume that there are various categories of inequality that go beyond the classic three categories of gender, race and class, which are to be analysed in relation to each other at least on the three levels of structures, symbolic representations and identity constructions. The choice of which categories are operative depends on the specific context and object of study. Such a perspective of analysis aims to avoid reductionist descriptions of inequality and to make structural complexity more visible. The novelty of intersectionality consists in working out the relations of categories and levels (Winker and Degele, 2009:15–24).

Ecology and development have received little attention as part of intersectionality. Conversely, intersectionality has only recently been taken into account in ecological debates. For example, ecological-systems theory looks at the structures that determine an individual's immediate environment. Intersectionality refers to structures that manifest multiple oppressions of individuals. From this, a central concern is to determine the effects of structural oppression in the ecological context on individual developmental possibilities (Roy, 2018:58–60). Feminist political ecology (FPE) focuses on the fact that the distribution of resources and the question of environmental justice is also a gender issue. According to Braun (2015:22), FPE considers “how environmental resources and struggles are sites for the contestation and reproduction of social differences (...) as struggles over environmental justice.” The importance of the connection between gender and race in concrete ecological issues has increasingly come into focus since the 2010s. Sharlene Mollett (2017:156) therefore includes a postcolonial intersectionality in the FPE

² Original in German: Nach Katharina Walgenbach wird unter Intersektionalität verstanden, „dass soziale Kategorien wie Gender, Ethnizität, Nation oder Klasse nicht isoliert voneinander konzeptualisiert werden können, sondern in ihren ‚Verwobenheiten‘ oder ‚Überkreuzungen‘ (*intersections*) analysiert werden müssen. Additive Perspektiven sollen überwunden werden, indem der Fokus auf das *gleichzeitige Zusammenwirken* von sozialen Ungleichheiten gelegt wird. Es geht demnach nicht allein um die Berücksichtigung mehrerer sozialer Kategorien, sondern ebenfalls um die Analyse ihrer *Wechselwirkungen*.“

“to re-theorize it in such a way that refuse to silence, elide or side-step race but instead to accommodate a more complex understanding of the entanglement of racialized and gendered power. This approach demands an acknowledgement of the postcolonial moment of development's interventions in the Global South.” (Mollet, 2017:156)

The need for intersectional differentiation in ecotheology is demonstrated by Sinenhlanhla S. Chisale, among others, who differentiates the situation of African women from that of white women and womanist considerations while maintaining connections (Chisale, 2021). The concreteness of the experienced intersectionality, which condition the generation of ecotheologies and justice, is exemplarily expressed here. The focus of the elaborated perspective is that intersectionality increases the risk and vulnerability of environmental hazards and disasters (Ergas and Mc Kinney and Bell, 2021). Because the categories of intersectionality are fundamentally related to people, ecological aspects in impacts are considered but not treated as affected subjects.

The understanding of the earth as living being offers a new perspective to understand non-human life not only as human material for use, but to perceive it in its independent life. If non-human life is understood as a multiplicity of independent subjects, then they too are affected by intersectionality, as are certain groups of humans. The consideration requires not only a rethinking, but also the clarification of some contexts and boundaries. Intersectionality has been first expressed by affected people themselves. Non-human subjects are limited by the fact that they cannot speak for themselves in human knowledge systems. Indigenous approaches to non-human life and coexistence put themselves in relation to the environment and from there describe the autonomy of their environment. Non-human subjects are in this respect dependent on agents and therefore fundamentally marginalised. Furthermore, the differences between a human and a non-human subjectivity would have to be determined more precisely as well as their relation.

These considerations are decolonial because, firstly, they tangle the dichotomy of the colonial power matrix of culture and nature respectively human and nature (Walsh and Mignolo, 2018:163). Secondly, they seek alternative epistemologies based on indigenous, subaltern, and invisibilised traditions. Third, these do not lead to romanticisation, but are expressions of decolonial interpretive negotiations in the present that seek to dismantle the colonial matrix of power. Decoloniality is understood with Catherine E. Walsh and Walter Mignolo as “a way, option, standpoint, analytic, project, practice, and praxis” (Walsh and Mignolo, 2018:5). In it, decoloniality directs the focus to the future and potential of neoconstructions through “expanding the vision of the world beyond Eurocentric Manichaeism” after the postcolonial, rather deconstructive and oppositional critique (Eze, 2018:6). With Lily Mendoza and George Zachariah (2022:4), it can be said that there is a need to decolonise ecotheology.

Decolonizing Ecotheology, therefore, seeks to reflect the Indigenous and subaltern resolve to destabilize theological legitimizations of the colonization of the commons and subsistence communities and their contemporary manifestations of settler colonialism, neo-liberal capitalism, and white supremacy. It is a constructive attempt to reflect upon the ecotheological visions, practices, ethics, resilience, and praxis of Indigenous and subaltern communities. (Mendoza and Zachariah, 2022:4)

Following on from this, an intersectional perspective on human and non-human life and the climate crisis opens up a detailed analysis of structures of injustice that are central to thinking about ecological justice. Because this draws on other epistemologies and voices, I understand the desideratum as a form of decolonial learning.

Conclusion: Rethinking intersectional dimensions in ecological theology and justice decolonial

My research question was this: how non-human life can be understood as part of intersectionality? The notion that vulnerable, intersectional groups are particularly affected by the impacts of the climate crisis is well known. The consideration of non-human life as itself a group affected by intersectionality is found rather less commonly. This perspective is strongly informed by intersectionality-affected groups and the basic understanding of the subjectivity of non-human life as found in numerous indigenous traditions and theologies. I understand this intersectional approach to thinking as decolonial learning because it not only points to existing power relations, but also breaks through existing dichotomies between humans and non-human life.

To summarise, I have pointed out three dimensions of intersectionality that need to be considered in the discourse on decolonial ecotheologies.

1. Human intersectionality leads to greater exposure to the consequences of the climate crisis, as BIWoCs in particular have emphasised.
2. The experience of marginalisation and objectification through intersectional discrimination leads to solidarity with the environment and non-human life as expressed in ecofeminist theologies.
3. A modified intersectional analysis can also be applied to non-human life by recognising their subjectivity. This requires the development of categories that are relevant in relation to non-human life. To the best of my knowledge, these categories are the influence of capitalist and colonial thinking, the dichotomisation of humans and nature or the hierarchisation of non-human life.

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