1 Introduction

Feminist research experienced some delays in its development regarding the concept of gender: a notion only absorbed by feminist theology at the start of the 1990s. This was followed by an important change in theory construction. The presuppositions underpinning gender research are mostly poststructuralist, and work with the methodology of deconstruction. Gender theory is in a constant state of self-development, with ripple effects on the diverse landscape of Gender Studies and theology.

These effects have not yet been sufficiently reflected theologically. However, an expression of these developments has been seen in the increasing use of the term gender-conscious theology, which breaks away somewhat from the narrower focus of women’s perspectives but centralizes gender justice as a goal within the church, and theology more broadly. The inclusion of gender questions within scientific theology as well as within the work of the church has remained controversial. In the ecumenical context in particular, the debate has been contentious. In disputes with papal pronouncements, the issues of the ordination of women or the churches’ position on LGBTIQ* more generally are particularly at stake. There are fundamentalist backlashs in all religions and Christian denominations but also progressive developments and e.g., many of the Protestant theologies and churches are increasingly making greater efforts to become more inclusive.

My own approach stems from a feminist, postcolonial, post-secular position within Protestant Theology in Germany where I teach as a professor and where I am an ordained minister in the Protestant church in Berlin. I was a cofounder of – and work as acting president of – the International Association of the Study of Religion and Gender. This is an important organization that finds itself at the intersection of research in religion and in Gender Studies, inside as well as beyond the discipline of theology.

This article addresses some of the main developments in gender theory and their effects on the study of religion and theology. It also explores historical milestones and the nuances of the word ‘woman’ as well as looking at feminism(s) in their relation to religion. Feminist Liberation Theologies of the twentieth–twenty–first century are also acknowledged. Then, gender theory is introduced, distinguishing the terms sex and gender. Kimberlé Crenshaw’s concept of intersectionality is also elaborated upon. Then, the chapter turns to poststructuralist approaches in the analysis of gender and sexuality, exploring notions such as sexuality, biopolitics and epistemology from Michel Foucault’s oeuvre. His work remains foundational for Gender, Sexuality, Queer and Transgender Studies, including for Judith Butler who developed the concept of gender as a discursive, performative category of knowledge production.
and laid the basis for Gender Studies as we know it today. The chapter shows further advances in the discipline of Biology and the deconstruction of sex and diverse sexualities. Lastly, the text turns to Queer Studies and Religion, their theorisation but also to Queer Theology and Precarious (Postcolonial) Sexualities. It underlines the importance of Transgender Studies and Religion and elaborates particularly on Gender, Religion and Postcoloniality. Furthermore, Gender and Postsecular Theory are highlighted as fields where new developments bring about a shift in the concept of representation. Saba Mahmood’s understanding of resistance (2012) led gender, postcolonial, postsecular theory to shift from representation to the analysis of subject formation, agency, and human flourishing. The conclusion discusses the influence of the New Material turn for Gender Studies and Theologies.

2 Historical Milestones

2.1 Women – Atheism – Feminism

Like many other emancipatory movements, the feminist struggle for women’s rights in Europe has historically taken an agnostic or atheist position and can thus be seen as a secular struggle. European feminism in its beginnings was heavily influenced by the Enlightenment critique of religious dogma and clerical authority. Existentialist feminism (de Beauvoir [1949] 1989) and Marxist or socialist feminism (Davis 1981) also greatly influenced second-wave feminism. The feminist thought system was thus based on Enlightenment rational and secular argumentation, as opposed to authoritarianism and orthodoxy. Feminist politics in general combine rational arguments with political activism, towards a just society. The secularist heritage for feminism contained the idea that there needed to be separation of church from state in matters of faith and ethics. Some hold the idea of an opposition between religion as belonging to the private sphere, and political citizenship as taking place in the public domain. Agency or political subjectivity in this framing is therefore placed only in the public sphere. Furthermore, the private-public sphere divide is used to construct a gendered hierarchy of ‘female’ as belonging to tradition and ‘religion’ in the private sphere, and ‘male’ as progressive and belonging to the public sphere. In Continental Europe, anticlericalism, and a critique especially of the patriarchal heritage of main strands of the Catholic church have been brought forward by the European left, and emancipatory movements (de Beauvoir 1992).
2.2 Twentieth and Twenty-First Century Feminist Liberation Theologies

Concern about discrimination by the church and society at large, against people pertaining to particular religious minority communities, led to various resistance movements, including that of liberation theology. In the Americas, liberation theology began with the “option for the poor”, addressing issues of poverty and class in ecclesial practice itself. The African American Civil Rights Movement (1954 – 1968) stimulated Black theology first in the U.S. and then worldwide. Feminist liberation theology developed in the context of the women’s movement which demanded equal rights for women and men. However, some realised that marginalisation can be multi-dimensional and that there is no “equality” based on shared experience. Concerns therefore differed within these resistance movements. Consequently, Black-identified Womanist theology emerged, as well as Mujerista theology, focusing on the discrimination of Latin American women*. Several indigenous liberation theologies concerned with issues specific to first nations peoples were also born. The acknowledgement of diverse, heterogeneous experiences is important, but analysis must go beyond essentialized constructions of race, class, gender, sexuality, nation, and religion.

Important Christian feminist liberation theologians include Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Carter Heywood, Lisa Isherwood, Musa Dube, Kwok Pui-lan. Several generations of scholars continue to work in the AAR Feminist Liberation Theology Network, in the AAR Women’s Caucus (Elizabeth Ursic) and WATER (Mary Hunt, Bernadette Brooten). An important author in Jewish Theology and Gender is Susannah Heschel.

2.3 The Controversy over Difference

Difference feminism starts from an essentialized notion of binary gender. A difference feminist approach, particularly discussed in Europe, was developed by Italian Diotima thinkers who strove to overcome the phallocratic gender order through a feminine conceptualization of gender order. Luce Irigaray also holds to an a priori thinking of femininity and masculinity.

Equality feminism is oriented towards the political-legal idea of equality. It is accused of overlooking the construction of gender hierarchy in universalist discourses that also include law. Wendy Brown’s illustration of the paradox of rights, also discussed by Joan Scott (1996) became prominent when the rights discourse gained momentum amongst the left, feminist, Black, LGBTIQ* and other movements. According to Brown, it is paradoxical that on the one hand, the more specific rights are characterised as rights for women, the more they establish an ever more precise, essentialized definition of ‘woman’ which reinforces subordination. On the other hand, the more ‘gender neutral’ a given right is, the more it privileges men because the univer-
sal position is not neutral, but masculine. To be addressed as a legal subject ultimately reinforces essentialized marginalisations (Brown 1995, 420–434).

So-called difference feminism and equality feminism are not in themselves sufficient to dismantle epistemic violence in the context of gender and religion.

2.4 The Concept of Intersectionality: History and New Approaches

Intersectionality analyses forms of injustice connected to gender. There is a significant inconsistency between the emergence of this term in North America and in Europe. In North America, the notion of ‘multiple intersecting differences’ has been influential since the 1990s, while in Europe the discussion entered the feminist mainstream 15 years later (Essed 1991; Yuval-Davis 1997).

The term ‘intersectionality’ was coined 1989 in Kimberlé Crenshaw’s famous article Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics. Here, Crenshaw compares the discrimination of Afro-American women with a car accident at an intersection: If a Black woman is harmed because she is in the intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination (1989, 149). She states that the anti-discrimination laws in the US are useful mechanisms to oppose discrimination because of sex or race.¹ However, these mechanisms are not sufficient to cover the specific, intersectional discriminations that black women as a group experience.

Crenshaw also encourages an intersectional critique of sexism and racism in feminist theory and black movements. The intersectionality of gender, race and class has since been referred to as ‘triple oppression’. Today, the interest has shifted to the analysis of how the intersection of gender, race, class, nation, sexuality, (dis)ability, age, species etc. influences a particular object of study (Hancock 2007, 251–252).

These categories are also eminent in historical contexts, such as in Denise Kimber Buell’s study (2001) of the intersection of race and Christianity during the first Christian centuries. In my work since 2012 onwards, I have proposed an understanding of religion as a discursive, intersectional category of knowledge production, because religion had been neglected in Gender Studies. The understanding of religion as intersectional category is connected with an attempt to deessentialize and disidentify gender, religion and further intersectional categories. Overall, it is suggested to understand the categories neither in an essentialized way nor as simple social categories but as categories of knowledge production. To overcome epistemic violence connected to them it is suggested to deconstruct and to deessentialize them as well as to overcome identitarian presumptions ad therefore to disidentify the categories.

¹ Precursors of Crenshaw’s notion of intersectionality are Hull, Bell-Scott, and Smith (1993) and Anzaldúa (1987).
3 Poststructuralist Approaches in the Analysis of Gender and Sexuality

3.1 Sexuality, Biopolitics, Epistemic Order, Confessionalism – the Work of Michel Foucault

The work of Michel Foucault, specialist in the history of systems of thought, is in many respects foundational for Gender, Sexuality, Queer and Transgender Studies. For Foucault, knowledge is always a form of power. Power is not an object but rather, a network. Defining the epistemic subconscious of a period as episteme, he writes: “In any given culture and at any given moment, there is always only one episteme that defines the conditions of possibility of all knowledge” (Foucault 1970, 168).

He describes the way in which an historical period considers particular presuppositions to be immutable and true – such as the idea of identity in the 19th and 20th century – and thus how ‘epistemic violence’ is produced through the exclusion of other ideas. Foucault describes the changes in systems of thought and points out the arbitrary character of orders in ‘western’ knowledge production.

In History of Sexuality (1990, 57), he elaborates two ways of producing ‘the truth’ about human sexuality:

Historically, there have been two great procedures for producing the truth of sex. On the one hand, the societies [...] which endowed themselves with an ‘ars erotica’. In the erotic art, truth is drawn from pleasure itself, understood as a practice and accumulated as experience; pleasure is not considered in relation to an absolute law of the permitted and the forbidden, nor by reference to a criterion of utility, but first and foremost in relation to itself; it is experienced as pleasure, evaluated in terms of its intensity, its specific quality, its duration, its reverberations in the body and the soul [...]. [Western] civilisation possesses no ars erotica. In return, it is undoubtedly the only civilisation to practice a scientia sexualis; [...] to have developed over the centuries procedures for telling the truth of sex which are geared to a form of knowledge-power strictly opposed to the art of initiations and the masterful secret: I have in mind the confession.

The confession is the general standard governing the production of the ‘true’ discourse on sex. Because sexuality is not a matter of repressed essences, there can be no liberation of sexuality.

In 1984, Foucault wrote a history of the desiring subject and personal and sexual subjectivity, looking at the ‘use of pleasure’ and ‘care of the self’, in both Greek and Christian traditions.

Foucault’s lectures On the Government of the Living were partly the intended fourth volume of the History of Sexuality to appear under the title Confessions of the Flesh. Published in 2012, the lectures explain the historical foundations of the obedience of the Western subject. Foucault locates these foundations in the connections between obedience and confession within early Christianity. In his genealogy of
confession, he underlines that the ‘West’ developed a concept of confession as ‘liberation’, which does not work in other contexts. As empirical research shows, the demand and wish to ‘come out’ publicly is a typical Western construct. The problem is that in order to confess, to seek to know, and to produce ‘the truth’ concerning oneself, this amounts to a submission (Foucault 2014).

Foucault postulates a non-essentialist understanding of gender and sexuality, arguing for a more nuanced constructivist view. Furthermore, he also has a non-essentialist perception of religion. By following Foucault, one can see how religion can also be understood as discursively constructed, and how the notions of gender, sexuality and religion are intertwined.

3.2 Gender as a Discursive, Performative Category of Knowledge Production – Judith Butler

Carol Hageman-White (1984) has shown that the classification of human beings in ‘men’ and ‘women’ represents a problem as it presupposes that there are (only) two sexes and imagines sex as something natural and stable, situated beyond society. Joan W. Scott (1986) has established gender as a category of historical analysis.

With Judith Butler’s thought (1990 and 1993) the discussion shifts from ‘woman’ and a critique of the construction of social gender to a critique of any idea of gender as substance. Butler shows that both sex and gender are culturally determined. Butler applies John L. Austin’s theory of performativity to the production of gender. She argues that gender has a cultural meaning which is ascribed to the human body, but not an inherent attribute of personhood or subjectivity (Austin 1962). The meaning of gender is, in her view, inseparable from the cultural and political constructs in which it is produced and maintained. She argues, following Austin, that gendering is a repetitive, performative process through which a gender is ascribed to an individual. The performativity of gender is not related to an individual act but rather to the long, repetitive process through which discourse effectively produces the gender which it pretends to simply name that: “There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; […] identity is performatively constituted by the very expressions that are said to be its results.” (Butler 1990, 25)

Butler argues that traditional thinking including some strands of feminism which look to a natural, ‘essential’ notion of the female, or sex and gender generally, are wrong. Butler begins by questioning the categories of ‘woman’ and ‘man’ and asks who is included and who decides about the inclusion or exclusion. Butler showed how gender is a reiterated social performance rather than the expression of a preceding reality.

The intention of Butler’s deconstructivist approach is not the achievement of any kind of identity, but the undoing of gender as an essentialized, biological category. Yet gender does not only function regressively, but also productively. Thus, performativity is studied as a productive act of subject formation in relation to the category of
gender. One of the consequences of a deconstructed and deessentialized notion of gender is the denaturalisation of kinship and the emphasis on care in the description of terms such as ‘sexuality’ or ‘marriage’ (Butler 2000).

3.3 Biology and the Deconstruction of Sex – Diverse Sexuality

Since Thomas Laqueur’s study (1990) on the history of gender from Antiquity to Freud, it has also become clear that the biological opposition between ‘men’ and ‘women’ was established not before the Enlightenment. Before, the model of one gender that can take two different forms was prevalent in ‘Western’ thought. Numerous historical and contemporary empirical examples for fluid ideas of gender can be found. New insights in biology show that the human body does not conform to one of two binary genders, but rather is situated on a continuum (Maurer 2002, 87–88). The biological sex binary is questioned because, on the one hand, subjects change their gender within their lifetime and, on the other hand, because biological gender is understood as a multidimensional continuum (chromosomal, gonadal, hormonal, genital, morphological/phenotypical) that is formed in subjects in interrelation with the respective environment.

Biologist Hans-Juergen Voss underlined that the species homo sapiens did not consist of two complementary genders, but that countless genders existed (Voss 2010, 2012a, 2013; Sweetapple 2018). Voss thus ties in with the work of the historian of science Helga Satzinger as well as the biologist and gender researcher Anne Fausto-Sterling. In his volume *Intersexuality – Intersex* he comments critically on the opinion of the German Ethics Council of 2012 about the situation of intersex people in Germany. He criticized the Ethics Council for adhering to a framing of intersex as a disease, and “that central concerns of intersex activists, like surgical and hormonal intervention in early childhood to refrain, are not included in his recommendations” (Voss 2012b, x).

In Germany, in December 2018, the Federal Constitutional Court (BVerfG) extended both legally and socially recognized gender categories of ‘male’ and ‘female’ with the addition of a new category of ‘diverse’ with the Act on the Amendment of Information to be entered in the Register of Births.

4 Queer Studies and Religion

4.1 Theory

Queer critique is not an identitarian approach, but a critique of the essentialization of gender, sexuality and of heteronormativity. It implies a consequent epistemolog-
cal critique, which allows new perspectives on minority discourses. One of the central aspects of queer analysis is its potential for the deconstruction of categories. Queer concepts developed out of the poststructuralist critique of gender, especially Butler’s deconstruction of the notion of gender. Queer critique is “a point of departure for a broad critique that is calibrated to account for the social antagonism of nationality, race, gender, and class as well as sexuality” (McClintock et al. 1997, 90).

A number of ideas of queer theory can usefully be applied to theology and religious studies: a) the new focus on subject formation and agency; b) the disidentification of violent concepts of identity of which José Esteban Muñoz writes that “[d]isidentification is meant to be descriptive of the survival strategies the minority subject practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship” (Muñoz 1999, 4); c) Gilles Deleuze’s and Félix Guattari’s queer assemblage which goes beyond collectivities with their exclusions (Ferguson 2004, 4; 2005); d) the concept of ‘queer collectivity’ and its political potential which is linked to the idea of queer utopia; e) queer of color concepts (Roderick Ferguson) and queer diaspora approaches (Muñoz) with their critique of capitalism. Ferguson laments the blind spots in Marxist thinking regarding gender, sexuality, and race: “Queer of color analysis extends women of color feminism by investigating how intersecting racial, gender, and sexual practices antagonize and/or conspire with the normative investments of nation states and capital.” (Ferguson 2004, 4) Based on Adrienne Rich’s early queer of color critique, Ferguson’s approach learns from Aihwa Ong’s analysis of capital and transnationalism that “[t]he reproduction of racialized gender and sexual regulations [...] facilitate the production of global capital.” (Ferguson 2004, 136)

Not only are gender and sexuality regulated, but everybody’s life is affected by regulations through the nation state and capital. I argue for the integration of the critique of biopolitical effects and their counter-discourses into queer critique. Foucault used the concept of biopower / biopolitics to describe a competitive life-or-death rationale in the biopolitically regulated state, which claims that either “we” or the “others” (but not both) could survive. This counts for both capitalist and socialist competitive regimes (Foucault 1997). Consequently, in such a society only the body which makes profit has a value. The weak or ill body as well as dissident sexuality are enemies within the collective body. Individual and collective reproduction are intertwined. The other human body is understood as a racialized, essentialized “other”.

Under neoliberal conditions there is a shift within the nation state. Homonationalism, for example, (REF e.g., Puar 2007) describes the phenomenon that certain queer subjects – mostly financially well off – are included in the nation state granting certain rights (marriage, service in the army) on the costs of the construction of the presumed homophobic Muslim ‘other’. That counts also for the acceptance of certain queer subjects in some Christian communities. Therefore, it is important not only to grant rights but to ensure they do not merely shift exclusions (Auga and Hawthorne 2017).
4.2 Queer Theology and Precarious Postcolonial Sexualities

Queer Theology scrutinizes societal discourses to overcome heteronormativity and epistemic violence in dominant and liberation theologies and in society influenced by symbolic orders. The beginning of Queer Theology is especially connected with the late Argentinian theologian Marcella Althaus-Reid (2000, 2003). Althaus-Reid worked in the footsteps of classical theories of liberation in Latin America, combining them with queer theory. She applies Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which gives agency to marginalized people in grassroots communities in Latin America, to theology and uses this approach in marginalized contexts in Scotland. She claims that Queer Theology is an undertaking oriented toward base communities, be it in dissident medieval women’s communities or in soup kitchens in Brazilian favelas staffed by transvestites. Queer Theology analyses how throughout the history of Christianity, excluded subjects try to achieve agency and self-representation, and how they actualise the Christian narrative through that process. Althaus-Reid writes (2000, 89): “It is a fight for representativity, for a person reading theology to be able to be interpellated by the text, that is, by saying ‘it is me; I recognise myself in this situation.’”

Another important representative of Queer Theology is the Welsh theologian Lisa Isherwood. In her study *The Fat Jesus: Christianity and Body Image*, Isherwood (2008) deals with marginalized bodies: the overweight, poor, persons of color or with the body of the planet itself. She focuses on conservative Christian eschatologies and how they form alliances with neoliberal exploitation. She responds with creative resistance by re-reading forgotten theologumena such as *energeia*, *dynamis*, and *emanatio*. With Isherwood, it becomes clear again that Queer Theology has an interest in embodiment theory as well as in ecological and cosmological questions.

Also, Linn Marie Tonstad (2017) applies critical queer theory to theology. In her book *God and Difference*, she argues against difference feminisms and the subsuming of several identitarian LGBT theologies under Queer Theology.

5 Transgender Studies and Religion

Over the last twenty years Transgender Studies have increasingly come into focus (Stryker and Whittle 2006; Stryker and Aizura 2013). Melissa Wilcox (2020) offers an introduction to Queer and Transgender Studies in Religion. The international interdisciplinary research group Queering Paradigms, attached to the independent Intersectional Center for Inclusion and Social Justice, led by Bee Scherer publishes cutting-edge material. Scherer (2009–2020) focuses in particular on gender, sexuality, transgender theory and Buddhism.
6 Gender, Postcoloniality, and Religion

6.1 The History of Postcolonial Theory and Religion

In postcolonial contexts, there has been a great deal of suspicion of ‘Western’ missionaries and universalistic theologies. Concurrently, the religious practices of indigenous peoples have often been dismissed as ‘superstitions’ by the ‘Western’ canon. Many anti-colonial theories draw on Marxist ideas, set within an atheist philosophy. Nevertheless, throughout the history of resistance, there have always been alliances with theological approaches which were also resisting hegemonic imperial power structures. Until today, however, one can observe a certain sense of uncertainty or ambiguity in the relationship between postcolonial theory, feminist theory and religion.

On the one hand, this can be seen in the fact that religion often does not appear as a category of analysis in postcolonial theory. In addition, the understanding of religion is all too often based on essentialized, naturalized (fundamentalist) framings, rather than contextualized through a deconstructionist analysis. However, the relationship between religion and post-colonial theory is shifting. Religion is no longer seen as mainly a place of patriarchal violence but also more as enabling agency and human flourishing.

Today, the connection between Gender Studies and Postcolonial Studies is very close and influences the study of religion. The deciphering of epistemic violence and with it the de-essentialization of categories is a crucial task in the scholarship of Edward Said and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and a major strategy in postcolonial theory per se. Said criticizes the construction of the essentialized ‘other’ as a violent act known as ‘othering’. Essentialism reduces and ‘others’ the subject (Isherwood and Harris 2013; Quiros 2011). It presumes an (inferior) ontological subject a priori (Holiday, Kulmann, and Hyde 2010, 2). This essentialization is often connected with categories of knowledge through which ‘nation’, ‘ethnicity’, ‘race’, ‘class’, ‘gender’, ‘ability’, and ‘religion’ are characterised as homogenising descriptions of a group. Notions of group ‘identity’ are in danger of falling into the trap of ‘othering’ and becoming essentializing concepts.

Another important concept addressed in postcolonial theory is that of individual and collective representation. Spivak discusses the position of the subaltern (woman), who cannot speak and represent herself because of the epistemic violence of colonial discourse endemic in legal structures and in patriarchal formations of local traditions. However, to speak for somebody can be an act of objectification if the agency of the oppressed subject is not acknowledged.

Spivak’s critique of epistemic violence is highly relevant for theology (Moore and Rivera 2011). However, her essentialist notion of religion remains problematic (Auga 2015, 49–68).

As for research in theology, Kwok Pui-lan (1995, 40) argues that it is determined by ‘Western’, white, male perceptions of the ‘correct’ understanding of the text. The
relationship between Europe’s colonial expansion and the historical-critical method is not made transparent (Pui-lan 2006, 62). Some critics claim that the historical-critical method itself subjugated ‘local’ readings of biblical texts which are based on different understandings of history or a different relationship between politics and religion. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza argues along the same lines that the question surrounding this method is a battle about domination in an as such unjust academic system (Fiorenza 1992, 180).

In her book *Toward a Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, Musa Dube (2000, 15) highlights how the Christian biblical religion has been “unique in its imperial sponsorship”. She goes on to describe the way in which the Bible emerged in a colonial context and has been used for the purposes of subjugation up until today, but that at the same time, it also contains anti-colonial strands that go beyond its colonializing influence. Dube also discusses postcoloniality, ethics, and feminism. She shows the influence of religion and biblical interpretation on African women and their oppression. Together with indigenous religions, Christianity in many parts of Africa still supports patriarchal systems. Dube (2002, 100–120) tries to decolonize religious practices with hybrid strategies and hybrid spaces. The term hybridity is widely used in postcolonial theory. According to Homi Bhabha – who introduced the notion of hybridity to describe the margin where different cultural contexts come into contact with the aim to unsettle all stable identities that are constructed around oppositions such as inclusion or exclusion – hybridity offers a release from singular identities and essentializations around race, class, nation or gender. Bhabha underlines the value of a continuous being ‘in-between-spaces’ and hybridization of all cultural contexts (1994).

The field of systematic or dogmatic theology is criticized because as a coherent dogmatic system it often carries exclusive, universalist structures. Today, these fields are further developed as ‘constructive theology’ by theologians like Sallie McFague, Catherine Keller, Serene Jones, Stefanie Knauss, Laurel Schneider, and others (Jones and Lakeland 2005). Their focus reaches beyond truth claims about the interpretation of dogmatic sentences, looking at theological and ethical issues from an individual perspective and experience, and discussing issues such as the question of the survival of the world facing environmental problems, of love under globalized conditions, of trauma in a violated world, or the inclusion of visual arts in theological approaches in search of new open languages.

### 6.2 Postcolonial Imagination, Multitude, and the Critique of Neoliberalism

Kwok Pui-lan (2010) has been an important voice since the beginnings of postcolonial theology. She stresses the necessity of a postcolonial imagination and how this is especially relevant for theology. The questions she shares with the work of Janet Jakobsen and Teresa Forcades i Vila are: How will we, as feminist theorists, philos-
ophers, theologians, and ethicists living in a postcolonial world, deal with neoliberalism in the future? What is our vision for society?

The perception of the public sphere and resistance within it is changing in decisive ways (Chatterjee 2004; Appadurai 2013). This has influenced the emergence of the field of public theology as a further development of political and liberation theology. Here faith-based protest, as well as biopolitics and counter-discourses to empire, come to the fore.

Mayra Rivera’s work draws on Latin American Studies and poststructuralism (Rivera 2007; Keller, Nausner, and Rivera 2004). Her essay *A Labyrinth of Incarnations: The Social Materiality of Bodies* (2014) connects traditional (feminist) liberation theologies with insights from poststructuralist philosophy and postcolonial theory. Furthermore, it draws on the theoretical turns towards materiality and affect for developing a theology of corporeity beyond the ‘body’. Rivera suggests that the explorations of social-material incarnations should characterize a new phase in theologies of the body. She suggests concepts for future interpretations which could overcome the epistemic violence attached to notions of the ‘body’, which has been sexualized, racialized, and perfectionized able body in dominant societal and theological discourses.

### 7 Gender and Postsecular Theory

Contrary to mainstream research, José Casanova contradicts the assumption of an indissoluble connection between secularization and modernity as well as the prognosis of a loss of importance for churches (Casanova 1994). The idea that religion would fade turned out to be false. Rather, new ideas of the concept of religion and secularity have been generated (Jakobsen and Pellegrini 2008). In the postcolonial context it becomes particularly clear that a new discursive concept of religion and secularity is needed. In addition, the focus is on the connection between religion and agency. Within postcolonial and postsecular theory, religion and secularity can be understood as discursive categories. In addition – against previous reservations – subjective deessentialized religious experiences can be conceptualized as a contribution to the radical social imaginary and to the establishment of a society based on connections of solidarity (Auga 2020, 45–244, 314–339).

Tomoko Masuzawa (2005) shows in *The Invention of World Religions* that the concept of secularity arises in ‘Western’ thinking to defend a binary of secularity versus religion.

Saba Mahmood’s (1962–2018) study *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (2012) became a turning point in several debates on religion. In her anthropological study of grassroots piety movements in Cairo, Mahmood questions secular-liberal principles as a goal of resistance. One conclusion of her investigation is that the women in these movements receive their subject formation, agency, and human flourishing beyond ‘Western’ (feminist) values of freedom and autonomy. In this way, Mahmood expands Foucault’s notion of discourses of resistance and But-
ler’s views on performativity. She emphasizes that power to act can also be developed in the exercise of norms and not just in resistance to dominant discourses. Consequently, religion must also be understood as a practice that opens new possibilities and can enable agency. As a result of these debates within interdisciplinary feminist and postcolonial resistance, the focus has shifted from representation to subject formation, agency, and human flourishing.

Postcolonial scholars including Talal Asad and Saba Mahmood formed an alliance with deconstructivist feminist theorists including Wendy Brown and Judith Butler via a research forum at the University of Berkeley, which published some of their debates. They opposed portraying the secularized ‘West’ as being more enlightened than most of the world and all religions, and Christianity as being ‘more rational’ than Islam, and questioned the secularism of analysis, criticism, epistemology and science of the ‘Western’ academy. The answer to the question ‘Is Criticism Secular?’ given by Asad, Butler, Brown, and Mahmood was negative. Indeed, they showed how religious practices and the concept of religion can be places where new knowledge can arise (Asad, Brown, Butler, and Mahmood 2009). The epistemic subordination of the category of religion is a legacy from Marx which has been carried forward in the early theorizations of Jürgen Habermas and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Auga 2020; 2018, 92–115; Auga and Schirr 2014, 37–54).

Another possible fruitful approach is to study gender and religion as categories within the analysis of the broader concept of diversity, as theorized by Monika Salzbrunn. To understand religious and ethnic minorities in contemporary urban complexities the interdependence of gender and religion is central (Reuschke, Salzbrunn, and Schönhärl 2013).

**8 Conclusion**

In my research, I specify the epistemological positioning of religion and gender. In gender research, gender as a discursive performative category has been released from the assumption of an essentialized, natural, identitarian core. In cultural theory, the modern concepts of culture, nation, etc. were seen to have been imagined, essentialized and naturalized (Anderson 1996; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). In gender research, the construction of gender is understood as intersectionally overlapping with the categories of race, nation, class, ability. I add religion to this debate as an intersectional category and developed religion as ‘situated knowledge’ following Donna Haraway (Auga 2020, 1–32; Haraway 1988, 575–599). In my approach, gender, religion, and secularity are understood not only as social and historical categories of analysis, but also as categories of knowledge production. Thus, the epistemic violence that threatens through essentialization, naturalization, “othering” and exclusion, can be averted.

Finally, I would like to mention some new developments. Historically, some strands of theology have operated rather ‘material-phobically.’ Protestant Christian-
ity in particular has imparted upon theology a privilege of the soul over the body and belief over practice, in line with the difference between a disembodied God and the inanimate world. Like all other human, social, and natural sciences, religious studies imported these theological dualisms into a purportedly secular modernity, mapping them onto the distinction between a ‘rational’, ‘enlightened’ Europe on the one hand and an ‘emotional’, ‘traditional’ and ‘animist’ non-Europe on the other.

The New Materialisms currently flowing through cultural, feminist, political, and queer theories seek to displace human privilege by attending to the agency of matter itself. Far from being passive or inert, they show us that matter acts, creates, destroys, and transforms – and, as such, is more processual (Haraway 2016; Barad 2007; Braidotti 2013).

What is matter, how does it materialise, and what kind of universe or sorts of worlds are enacted in its varied entanglements with divinity? While both theology and religious studies have over the past few decades come to prioritise the material contexts and bodily ecologies of more-than-human life, recent debates have set forth a multi-vocal conversation between religious studies, theology, and the body of New Materialism. In response to this mutual connectedness, the growing complexity of our entanglements takes on a consistent ethical texture of urgency (Keller and Rubenstein 2017). While theorists of materialism often assume that science and religious thought are at odds, work has begun which demonstrates that a sophisticated understanding of theology and religion enriches our understanding of materiality in its full liveliness and complexity. A focus on materiality, in turn, alters and enriches theologies.

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