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Response

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to “their” own context, when “my” or “our” context is inextricably interconnected with “other” contexts under global capitalism and the military hegemony that underpins it.

Critical global feminist theological and religious discourses need to continue to emphasize that our lives are closely connected with one another across geographical boundaries by construing “context” not just locally but as historically situated in a particular social arrangement, without forfeiting its connection to the larger social structures. Understanding context in terms of interaction between the local and the global helps us see how wo/men’s lives in and from various parts of the world are interconnected with one another, given that the current economic, political, military, and cultural globalization affects and shapes people’s lives beyond the national borders.

Along with awareness of the conflicting aspects of globalization, critical global feminist theological and religious discourses should make a commitment to global resistance, which is multiple and creative. In the face of increasing global violence against wo/men and other marginalized people caused by voluntary or involuntary labor migration under the transnational market economy, military fights, ethnic and racial conflicts, and religious clashes, critical global feminist theological and religious discourses seek to engage in multiple ways of resisting various forms of violence through the ongoing critique of social practices of violence as well as of religious/theological discourses that reinscribe and even justify violence in the name of the divine, scripture, tradition, and nation or community. As forms of violence are multiple and dynamic, struggle must be pluralized and contextualized in ways that account for the multiplicative aspects and intersections of oppressions and resistance. Schüssler Fiorenza’s critical essay, I am convinced, serves as an alarming call for developing critical global feminist theological and religious discourses that can challenge “kyriarchal globalization,” which engenders nationalism and religious exclusivism upheld by ruthless militarism.

RESPONSE

Gemma Tulud Cruz

Reading Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza’s lead essay brought to mind certain experiences, a few issues back home (in the Philippines), and one or two questions. I will share some of these resonances and express as well certain dissonances from the perspective of a Filipina, albeit a migrant one, as I am also a “resident alien” in the Netherlands.

I was in the United States this past fall, and I can very well agree with Schüssler Fiorenza that there is something unnerving about the patriotism

sweeping the USA, especially (I think) rural America, today. Traveling from Illinois to a conference on migration at the University of Notre Dame, in Indiana, I drove the long route, through Iowa and Wisconsin, to see a little more of my home country's former (and, to a large extent, current) colonizer. Cruising the streets of Chicago alone on the day I arrived in the United States, I saw a number of vehicles with American flag stickers. I found that already discomfoting. But the "Support Our Troops" stickers pasted on countless vehicles and the huge American flags planted in front of a significant number of houses all over Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin, and Indiana, especially in the rural areas, raised goose bumps on my skin.

As much as I sympathize with the soldiers' families, I have never believed in wars, much less America's war in Iraq. Wars are men's games, with women and children often ending up as the worst victims. One can see this in how the U.S.-led war in Iraq is actually a Bush, Cheney, Powell, Rumsfeld, and masculinized(?) Rice game and in how it has already left countless widows and orphans, not to mention a superpower inching its way to self-destruction as it slowly kills and divides its own population, wastes its resources for war expenses and worse, and drags down Iraq and other countries in the process. Indeed, although Schüssler Fiorenza did not elaborate on it, I believe she identified a very good context for unpacking American nationalism as it is played out in its global dimensions by pointing to the U.S. war on Iraq. She quotes Madeleine Albright's 1988 statement: "If we have to use force, it is because we are America. We are the indispensable nation." But even if it is the only superpower in the modern world, hasn't America gone overboard this time by playing the role of an unwanted messiah? And with its own Patriot Act, as well as the Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo Bay controversies, aren't we witnessing the fallacy of American democracy? Isn't "the American dream a nightmare for many"?¹

Truly, Schüssler Fiorenza is right in pointing out historians' view that the United States is and has always been an empire whose military might has enabled it to spread its political, cultural, and, most especially, economic tentacles around the world, creating and setting into motion an elitist economic globalization that is bringing wider economic division, with women being pushed even further down to the bottom. She is nearly correct as well when she writes, "In many respects wo/men are suffering not only from the globalization of market capitalism but also from their sexual exploitation instigated by it." I do know what she means with her use of the term "wo/men," and I do recognize that there are men who suffer the negative effects of globalization. But

¹ See Edmund Chia, "The American Dream Is a Nightmare for Many," *National Catholic Reporter* 1, no. 45 (February 19, 2004), <http://www.nationalcatholicreporter.org/globalpers/gp021304.htm> (accessed January 13, 2005).

I say “nearly” because I would rather be *gender-specific* (i.e., it is really women who get the worst bargain) and *class-specific* (i.e., it is poor and poorer women, particularly from the third-world countries, who profit the least).

For third-world women, global economic integration means that they have to cope with the global way of living by working more, risking more, and suffering more. Let me share with you the case of the Philippines, which I believe mirrors the plight of many other third-world countries. Filipino women suffer because of the SAPs, or structural-adjustment programs, which multilateral institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank impose in exchange for new loans to my country, which is already mired in debt. SAP component policies, such as trade liberalization, cutbacks on government spending and government subsidies, privatization, price controls (which give rise to new taxes), higher public utility rates, wage freezes, and credit squeezes, take a heavier toll on their quality of life. They suffer most from budget cuts for social services such as education, health, family planning, and child care, which are often targeted to reduce government spending. The minuscule budgets also increase the likelihood that they will be laid off if they are teachers and health personnel (jobs which are often women-dominated); that they will have less access to these services; and that they will have to work longer and harder to provide these basic services that the government cannot take care of (e.g., caring for the sick and the elderly as well as educating their children).

As peasants, either these women have to do more unpaid work on their farms to save on labor expenses or they lose their farm “jobs” or the farms altogether because of the flood of cheap agricultural products brought about by SAP-related import liberalization. As indigenous women, they get displaced by dam construction and mining. Even as professional women, they are compelled to take on additional jobs for sufficient or extra income; to help relatives and friends in financial distress; and to juggle with their homes, families, careers, and (sometimes) volunteer work in cause-oriented organizations.

As cheap laborers in trade or export-processing zones (read garment and electronics industries), Filipino women are also often subjected to exploitation and deplorable working conditions. For instance, as children and pregnancy are considered job hazards, single women are preferred as laborers. Some companies even conduct pregnancy tests. Some women also end up victims of sexual harassment, having to make what the women workers themselves call a choice between “lay-down” (parlance for sexual harassment or abuse) and “lay-off” (parlance for termination).

Then there is the case of informal workers. Job subcontracting (also known in the United States as outsourcing) to small shops and home-based workers of women-dominated work (e.g., garments and toys) is an established pattern among profit-driven transnational corporations. Because they do not have

much choice and because it means staying at home or closer to home, more and more women engage in this work. But the wages and working conditions for job subcontracting are also appalling. In terms of wages, a baby dress that is sold for fifteen dollars in an American department store, for example, is made by a village woman who gets paid less than ten cents. In terms of working conditions, the sweatshop for a famous line of American baby clothes where the women were drugged so as not to fall asleep (for as long as three straight days) in order to meet the quota is a famous case.

As migrant workers, many Filipino women often end up in gender-specific “SALEP” (shunned by all nationals except the poor) or “3D” (dirty, dangerous, and disdained) jobs, such as domestic work, care work, and even sex work, in which they are highly vulnerable to abuses. In 1997, for example, all of the 251 Filipino migrant workers who came home physically ill were women.

Globalization, with American militarized global capitalism as its icon, has also globalized women's exploitation. Even Filipino women domestic workers have not been spared. In Quebec, Canada, for example, Filipina domestics were at one time auctioned along with lacquered cabinets, reclining chairs, and car washes on the Web site <http://auctionmart.canada.com/>. The ad for the auction, placed by Diva International Agency and presented by Canwest Global Companies, ran in the *Montreal Gazette* in the last week of March 2003. The ad offered three Filipina domestic nannies with a retail value of eight hundred dollars, even labeling them “Item 639964.” Trafficking women for prostitution is also on the rise across the globe. In Central Asia, especially Uzbekistan, up to ten thousand young women are forced into the sex trade annually by international crime syndicates. This multi-billion-dollar industry also accounts for the trafficking of Filipinas and Russian women in U.S. military bases in South Korea; the illegal movement of 400 Bangladeshi women monthly to Pakistan; and the undocumented entry of 300 Thai women annually to Australia. All in all, the classic scenario remains: the situation is worse for women than it is for men. More specifically, the situation is worse for third-world (e.g., Filipino) women than it is for first-world (e.g., American) women.

Schüssler Fiorenza also laments how “feminist discourses in religion have for the most part not yet critically problematized American capitalist nationalism as a structure of domination”—and rightly so. She is also right on target when, in the next moment, she challenges American (e.g., womanist, white, *mujerista*, Latina) feminists to critically theologize on their “Americanness” or, more concretely, on how their Americanness shapes their discourses. She asks: “Is it sufficient to name and reflect critically on our racial, sexual, gender, and class social-religious locations while at the same time leaving out our nationalist determinedness?”

I share Schüssler Fiorenza's position that it's about time nationality became an analytical category for feminist studies in religion, just as I echo her

observation that “[w]hether they are politically conservative or emancipatory, many nationalist discourses [even those of women who call themselves feminists] use ‘religion’ and ‘woman’ as both identity and boundary markers.” I remember how, at one point in the turbulent Marcos dictatorship of the 1970s and early 1980s, the feminist movement in the Philippines got entangled in the nationalist discourse so much that it got swallowed up in the national interest and the Filipino feminist dictum became “towards a nationalist feminism.” Not surprisingly, as was the case in Germany when the feminist ethic was undermined by nationalist rhetoric, the consciousness that prevailed in regard to the ideal Filipino woman was motherhood and femininity. Even what were peddled as “feminist” attributes, such as being *ilaw ng tahanan* (“the light of the house”) and “the household manager,” were actually reproductions of the same nationalist vision of the Filipino woman.

But these figurations of the Filipino female are also a throwback to the configuration of the Filipino woman through religion, specifically the emphasis on the Virgin Mary of the Annunciation, by the Spaniards, who colonized the Philippines for more than three hundred years. Interestingly, as Nira Yuval-Davis (whom Schüssler Fiorenza quotes) posits, this religious configuration of the Filipino woman is also implicated in the Spaniards’ nationalist discourses, for it can be traced to the attributes of Maria Clara—the Filipino version of the *doncella* (the image of the perfect woman of the Iberian Peninsula in the fifteenth century), which the Spaniards used to subjugate and domesticate the Filipina.

Indeed, I find this angle of Schüssler Fiorenza’s critique interesting and relevant not just in making sense of the present or mapping the future but also in reimagining the past. Applying now this notion of the complex imbrication (which it would probably be best to call co-optation) of religion by/with nationalism, and vice versa, in a critique of the concepts of the theology of struggle—a theology of liberation in the Philippines that emerged and was strong in the 1970s and 1980s—I can more clearly see why the gender perspective is lacking or is not as pronounced as it should be in this Filipino contextual theology.

I have reservations, however, about Schüssler Fiorenza’s lumping of class together with the rest of the classic feminist analytical categories to somehow emphasize the need for including nationalist determinedness. For one, I am of the opinion that any gendered problematization of globalization or American capitalist nationalism, even on American soil, inevitably entails a class discourse, as not all women (including American women) have the same experience and understanding of privilege, particularly economic privilege. There are also “third-world” (read poor) women in first-world countries such as the United States. With their fellow women (and their race) also experiencing political and economic marginalization under a historical, and persistent, con-

struction of the United States as a “white” and “white-privileged” nation, the womanists, for instance, will probably have the same reaction. As a Filipina, and based on Filipino women’s experience of globalization, I reckon, feminist studies in religion in between nationalism and globalization will be incomplete without emphasizing the class dimension.

Schüssler Fiorenza also argues for a “critical consideration of nationalism,” insofar as discourses of feminist theology and religious studies “tend to define and construct identity in terms of continents—Asian, African, South American, African American, or Euro-American feminist the*logy— . . . [and] tend to reinscribe nationalistic tendencies.” She asserts that she “cannot adopt a feminist discourse that remains oblivious to the fact that ‘special nature or culture’ theories are always functioning as antidemocratic ‘othering’ discourses that can be used to legitimate nationalism and war.” She does make a very valid point, but I would not be quick to buy her argument hook, line, and sinker. I suggest that we be cognizant as well of the homogenizing tendencies of such a position. Most feminist theologians will agree that there is indeed no such thing as “special nature or culture.” But I believe most will insist that there is such a thing as *different* culture(s) that considerably shape(s) our discourses. Any feminist studies in religion in between nationalism and globalization that dismisses the fact that there are cultural differences is retrogressive and runs the risk of ending up hegemonic. This, for me, becomes more urgent in the context of multicultural societies such as the United States and many other nations, especially in Europe, where we are seeing the rise of nationalist discourses as a response to the question of difference that migration brings.

Hence, I suggest that we do not just gloss over cultural differences in our discourse on national location or nationalist determinedness, in the same way that we need to be mindful of the intercultural dynamics in our transnational articulation and organization of feminist theology and studies in religion that Schüssler Fiorenza suggests as the appropriate approach in scrutinizing capitalist globalization under nationalist American hegemony. Not only will a cultural and/or intercultural approach give a more nuanced and more critical investigation of the imbrication of feminist studies in religion in nationalist discourses, it will also recognize the tremendous diversity and heterogeneity even within the feminist movement.

Deborah Stienstra bolsters this position in her observations on two decades of transnational women’s movements. She affirms that transnational organizing is indeed one of the possible sites of resistance against the destructive effects of globalization. But she also cautions that it is riddled with complexities, as “women’s responses reflect cultural and religious diversities,” and that “even within those groups that would consider themselves emancipatory, there is considerable variation about what their goals are, whether they consider themselves feminist, and how their own cultures, class[es] and ethnicities

shape their activities.”² This reality came home to me more strongly in a conference on women and globalization in Germany held December 2–5, 2004. At one point the possibilities and impossibilities of globalizing women’s liberation movements preoccupied attendees’ imagination. One of the suggestions that came up was to articulate feminist theology and organize the movement from an intercultural perspective. Although most knew that it would be a formidable task, we agreed to focus not on the difficulty it would pose but on the promise it offered. The important thing, we concurred, was that the question had been asked and possibilities opened for us.

It is with this same attitude that I regard the challenge that Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza puts forward in her essay. It sure looks tricky, as I feel it means negotiating again the classic tension between particularity and universality,³ and at the same time daunting, as we are faced with two burning issues of the day that are fraught with complexity. But I am glad that she asked the question and presented us with an incisive discussion that explores all the possibilities that exist, even if it challenges the things we have come to know as basic to our being feminists. I am excited as well at the prospect that feminist theologians and feminist studies in religion will finally deal with and reflect on the problems spawned by nationalism and globalization.

RESPONSE

Kathleen McPhillips

Without doubt, religion and gender are deeply implicated in the machinations of nationalism and patriotism, as Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza clearly indicates in the opening essay. I welcome a discussion that addresses the vexing question of why the discourse of nationalism has been largely silent in feminist religionist discourse. However, just as we can speak of multiple modernities, so we should also speak of multiple nationalisms. I believe feminist studies in religion needs to commit to the task of analyzing in particular the current pernicious forms of nationalisms that have arisen post–September 11. Feminist religionists must ask, What are our particular responsibilities in the face of such recent powerful expressions of patriotic nationalism and global capitalist imperialism? The response I wish to make to Schüssler Fiorenza’s concerns is to

² Deborah Stienstra, “Dancing Resistance from Rio to Beijing: Transnational Women’s Organizing and United Nations Conferences, 1992–6,” in *Gender and Global Restructuring: Sightings, Sites, and Resistances*, ed. Marianne H. Marchand and Anne Sisson Runyan, RIPE Series in Global Political Economy (London: Routledge, 2000), 212.

³ Douglas John Hall, “Globalism, Nationalism, and the Reign of God,” in *God and the Nations*, by Douglas John Hall and Rosemary Radford Ruether (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 28.