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Response

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RESPONSE

Nami Kim

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's timely essay urges feminist scholars in religion to take nationalism into account as it shapes and is shaped by the discourses of religion and gender. Although nationalism has been an important issue in so-called third-world feminist theologies, Schüssler Fiorenza is right in arguing that her third definition of nationalism—"excessive devotion to nation," or what she refers to as "American capitalist nationalism"—has not been a central issue of feminist studies in religion. The essay is significant not simply because it invites a critical conversation on nationalism into discussion but also because it seeks to explore nationalism as the "systemic kyriarchal structure that determines all of our discourses," raising crucial issues that should not be overlooked in feminist studies in religion. In my response I will address three issues that resonate with concerns in my own context.

First, Schüssler Fiorenza challenges us to critically probe an ongoing issue of "naming" theological and religious discourses in relation to one's social location. Troubled by the lack of analyses of "how . . . imperial 'Americanness' shapes our discourses, be they womanist, *mujerista*, Latina, black, or white feminist," she critically 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?" While acknowledging that this issue requires a more in-depth analysis, because it can be further discussed in terms of the problems of identity politics and the "categorical crisis," I will briefly reflect on this from my own experience.

My "outsider within" position in the United States has pressed me to face the critical question of my own location—as a "foreign visitor" who came to the United States to "study" and, at the same time, a resident alien who has become part of the "Asian American community"—in relation to a group called "Asian women" and the designation "Asia." As an outsider within, I live with disadvantages of being "neither/nor," because I am often considered too "Americanized" to have an "authentic" "Asian" and/or "Korean" voice or view, yet at the same time I am considered an "international" or a "foreigner" who can always be deported to my country of origin. Even so, I am aware that the other side of being an outsider within is often unspoken, that is, the privilege that an outsider within enjoys.

Asking, "[W]hat does it mean for Asian theorists like Trinh T. Minh-ha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak to identify [themselves] as third world cultural critics rather than as Asian Americanists?" Leslie Bow critically challenges "the politics inherent in leaving unmarked one's identification with the United States as a first world power, while at the same time benefiting from its resources." She says, "It is a seductive positioning—at once to claim an outsider's

position to lend credibility to one's first world critique, and to mark one's distance from U.S. 'colonized minorities.'"¹

This issue requires a more nuanced analysis, because defining oneself as Asian American is not simply a matter of having a U.S. citizenship or not, as the immigration history of Asian Americans has demonstrated.² Nonetheless, Bow's question compels us to think about the effects of taking "Asia" or the "third world" (often used interchangeably) as the only reference point from which one defines one's social location, while leaving out the "American" designation.

Here I am not claiming that one should include all the possible reference points in self-designation. Rather, I am attempting to highlight what Bow writes about—that is, to be critical of one's own social location, engaging in what Arif Dirlik calls the critique of "self-referentiality" in the web of power,³ and to be responsible for naming and defining one's own work; to be accountable to those to whom I speak and of whom I speak.

Furthermore, a critical reflection on one's social location helps one to avoid the risk of reinscribing the regionalization of theological and religious discourses as if they were relevant only to a certain group of wo/men, and the danger of ranking disadvantages or oppression among us, by allowing one to see the interconnectedness in the complex web of power and to realize that the goal is not to fight for a limited access to power but to struggle collectively to dismantle the dominant power structure that constantly seeks to divide and conquer us.

Second, Schüssler Fiorenza's essay challenges us to rethink the tendency of constructing identity "in terms of continents" in the discourses of feminist theology and religious studies—"Asian, African, South American, African American, or Euro-American feminist the*logy"—which runs the risk of reinscribing the nationalist discourse. For instance, it is noteworthy that the unifying category of "Asian," which is a key word that distinguishes and differentiates Asian theology, including Asian women's/feminist theology, from other theologies, came to use in the context of Japan's nationalism and colonialism, in opposition to another unifying category called "the West."⁴ The unifying

¹ Leslie Bow, "For Every Gesture of Loyalty, There Doesn't Have to Be a Betrayal": Asian American Criticism and the Politics of Locality," in *Who Can Speak? Authority and Critical Identity*, ed. Judith Roof and Robyn Wiegman (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 46.

² See Rita Nakashima Brock and Nami Kim, "Asian American Protestant Women: Roles and Contributions in Religion," in *Encyclopedia of Women and Religion in North America*, ed. Rosemary R. Ruether and Rosemary Keller (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, forthcoming).

³ See Arif Dirlik, "The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism," *Critical Inquiry* 20, no. 2 (Winter 1994): 328–56.

⁴ By "Asian theology," I indicate an already established theological corpus and movement. By "Asian theologians," I refer to those who have identified themselves as Asian theologians through

term *Asian* was employed by (anticolonial) nationalists who purposefully rendered it an oppositional identity asserting oneness or unity against the Western domination in various parts of Asia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. K. M. Panikkar, a prominent Indian historian and diplomat, insisted in his *Asia and Western Dominance* that it was the European nations' emphasis on their solidarity and their Europeanness that gave rise to a common feeling of "Asianness" in their dealing with Asian countries.⁵ Joseph Kitagawa, in *The Christian Tradition: Beyond Its European Captivity*, also points out Panikkar's observance of the emergence of "Asianness" along with political and cultural nationalism in Asia.⁶

Drawing on Panikkar, theologian Wai-Ching Angela Wong asserts that "[this] Asianness, as a collective of the growing nationalisms in various countries in Asia, was primarily produced by Asians' reaction to the 'unified aggression' of the Europeans."⁷ She maintains that this "emerging shared identity of a common 'Asianness' is a result of a general rise of nationalism in the former colonized territories in the region."⁸ In relation to theology, Wong claims that it is "the very history of colonialism which discursively gave rise to the conception of a contextual theology of a vaguely 'unifying Asia.'"⁹

What Panikkar and Wong overlooked, however, was that the rhetoric of "oneness of Asia" or "Asianness" was used by Japan's nationalists and later by Japan's colonial powers as an ideological justification for colonizing other neighboring countries in Asia from 1895 until 1945. Under the slogan of "pan-Asianism" and "the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere," Japan used the rhetoric that it should "save" and "liberate" Asia from the Western aggressors and emphasized racial and cultural affinities as "Asian" under Japan's rule.¹⁰

either their writings or their institutional affiliations, such as the East Asia Christian Conference and the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians.

⁵ K. M. Panikkar, *Asia and Western Dominance: A Survey of the Vasco da Gama Epoch of Asian History, 1498–1945* (New York: Day, 1954), 494. Panikkar was among those who attended the Bierville Congress in France in 1926 and issued the "Joint Manifesto" that called upon Europe to "[l]iberate the spirit of Asia and you will have peace, not a peace imposed by the sword, but a peace based on good will. The spirit of Asia is essentially pacific." See Roeslan Abdulgani, *The Bandung Connection: The Asia-Africa Conference in Bandung in 1955*, trans. Molly Bondan (Singapore: Gunung Agung, 1981), 11. Abdulgani deems the Bierville Congress one of the places where ideals similar to those of the Bandung Conference were expressed.

⁶ Joseph Kitagawa, *The Christian Tradition: Beyond Its European Captivity* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992), 29.

⁷ Wai-Ching Angela Wong, *The Poor Woman: A Critical Analysis of Asian Theology and Contemporary Chinese Fiction by Women* (New York: Lang, 2002), 31.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁰ It is also startling to see that many black political leaders and intellectuals in the United States in the early twentieth century hailed Japan as a role model or a great challenge to white supremacy and rejoiced with the news that Japan defeated Russia in the Russo-Japanese War of

Japan's "pan-Asianism" was used for the purpose of expanding and increasing Japan's colonial power in Asia rather than for bringing justice and peace to people and to the region that had been devastated by Western colonial exploitation. Later, Japan's use of the term *Asian* as a unifying racial, cultural, and political entity was used at the Bandung Conference, which signaled the advent of the "third world." And it was the Bandung Conference that greatly influenced theological development in Asia and the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT).

Along with the tendency of constructing identity in terms of continents in the discourses of feminist theology and religious studies, the tendency of those who use the term *Asian* primarily as a religious/cultural (e.g., non-Christian) category in theological and religious discourses should also be questioned, as this often reinscribes the nationalist rhetoric. Defining "authentic Asian" only in terms of traditional cultures and/or religions should be avoided, because it essentializes "Asian" as a static and ahistorical entity. Current transnational market economies, cultural exchanges, political interventions, and military expansions illustrate how difficult it is to retain a unifying category of "Asian." Asian American theorist Laura Hyun Yi Kang drives home the point when she casts doubt on the so-called shared Asian designation: "[T]he growing numbers of male tourists from South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, and Hong Kong attest to how the contours of transnational sex tourism unsettle any sense of their shared 'Asian' designation with the Thai and Filipina sex workers."¹¹

Third, Schüssler Fiorenza's essay opens up the floor for feminist scholars in religion to articulate critical global feminist theological and religious discourses in this era of globalization:

[W]hat seems to be called for at this moment of capitalist globalization under nationalist American hegemony is a transnational articulation and organization of feminist the*logy and studies in religion. Such a transnational approach can critically investigate the unintended imbrication of feminist studies in religion in nationalist discourses and can critically point out the contributions of kyriarchal religions to exclusivist nationalism and dangerous militarism. Such a transnational feminist ethos remains critically aware of its particular social, religious, and national location and at the same time seeks to fashion transnational discourse strategies that challenge kyriarchal globalization.

By extending her argument, I maintain that critical global feminist theological and religious discourses should not be ghettoized as if they were relevant only

1904–05. See Gerald Horne, "Tokyo Bound: African Americans and Japan Confront White Supremacy," *Souls* (Westview Press) 3 (Summer 2001): 17–29.

¹¹ Laura Hyun Yi Kang, *Compositional Subjects: Enfiguring Asian/American Women* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 185.

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