Response

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Feminists in religion have experience deconstructing racist and sexist language and imagery that can be applied to the deconstruction of nationalism as Schüssler Fiorenza suggests. We also have scars to prove that the claim, "It is just words" is false. In this deconstruction of nationalism, and in the reconstruction that is the logical next step in the process, I propose that we train our feminist attention on the nationality of the Divine just as we did on her gender and race, proving that she has none finally. Then we can begin to consider global citizenship, the impact of living in particular national situations, and ways that feminist theology can foster transnational struggle and solidarity. Until then we are left to denounce the false claims that undergird the false promises that result in destruction of all that is not red, white, and blue.

Response

Sharon D. Welch

As citizens of the United States, it is extremely important that we critically and creatively evaluate, in Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's words, the "political and cultural impact of Americanness and U.S. nationalism." Many, and quite possibly all, of the readers of the *JFSR* are well aware of the costs in the past and present of U.S. imperialism. We know the horrors of the genocide of Native American peoples, as well as the continued treaty violations and the despoliation and theft of their land. We are equally aware of the terrible cost of an economic system based on slavery and on the exploitation of millions of workers all over the world. Many of us have protested U.S. militarism in the past, and we tried, along with millions of people throughout the world, to prevent the U.S. invasion of Iraq.

It is extremely important that we address the dangers of U.S. nationalism, predicated as it is on a conviction of absolute superiority to other nations, unabashed certainty in being the bearer of a divine mandate, and a resolute inability to see the negative consequences of our actions. As we take up this task, there is much to be gained if we follow Schüssler Fiorenza's challenge and undertake this work from a transnational perspective. From such a perspective we can find alternatives to our form of national identity, see more clearly the global impact of that identity, and, most important, learn other processes of identity formation and social critique and engagement.[1]

What is most needed in our current situation, however, is not simply further critiques and analyses of U.S. nationalism. What is most needed is some-

[1] I take up this task in my recent book, *After Empire: The Art and Ethos of Enduring Peace* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004).

thing quite different, a prolegomenon to radical critique and a creative, constructive response to critique. First, what enables people to hear fundamental critiques of U.S. nationalism and foreign policy? Second, what are alternative forms of national identity and global order and responsibility?

In taking up this first task, we should not underestimate the efficacy of existing forms of critique for millions of people. The work of the progressive press (the *Nation, Sojourners, Tikkun,* and Z, among others), film, and direct political action has clearly helped many see the horrors of the torture of prisoners by U.S. personnel in Guantánamo, Afghanistan, and Iraq. The liberal and progressive media have informed us of the devastating costs of the U.S. invasion of Iraq. More than one hundred thousand Iraqis have died as a result of the war, and more than one thousand U.S. soldiers have been killed in a war that is illegal, immoral, and politically counterproductive.[2]

There is, however, a significant proportion of people in the United States who are not reached by these media and these strategies. John Tierney's report on the resistance of many college students to liberal and progressive political analysis and critique is instructive. He cites a Berkeley undergraduate, Kelly Coyne, who makes a telling statement: "I'm glad to get the liberal perspective, but it would be nice to get the other side, too. . . . I don't want to spend another semester listening to lectures about victims of American oppression."[3]

For many people, lectures about U.S. oppression are revealing and empowering. Many of us have students who are energized and exhilarated by honest critiques, finding in them a confirmation of their own experience or a challenge to work, in concert with others, for justice. Others, however, either do not believe the critiques or feel paralyzed by them.

I teach at a conservative state university in the Midwest. My colleagues and I find that most of our students do not respond positively to professorial critiques of American injustice at home or abroad. How do we work with such students, and with a voting population, who see liberal and progressive political and social critiques as biased and unbelievable? How do we account for their defensiveness and rejection of our cogent, heartfelt political analyses? When a critique energizes some and is rejected by others, it may be plausible to dismiss the negative reaction as due to factors outside our control. We may even decide that such rejection is due to ignorance, bigotry, or arrogance. My

[2] "An estimated 100,000 civilians have died in Iraq as a direct or indirect consequence of the March 2003 United States–led invasion, according to a new study by a research team at the Bloomberg School of Public Health at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore" (Elisabeth Rosenthal, "Study Puts Iraqi Deaths of Civilians at 100,000," *New York Times*, October 20, 2004). According to the December 29, 2004, *New York Times* ("Names of the Dead"), the Department of Defense reported that 1,319 American soldiers had died in the war in Iraq.

[3] John Tierney, "Republicans Outnumbered in Academia, Studies Find," *New York Times*, November 18, 2004.

comfort with such dismissals has been shaken, however, by the work of Carol Lee Sanchez, Jace Weaver, Leslie Marmon Silko, Theophus Smith, Sulak Sivaraksa, and Thich Nhat Hanh. Studying these writers has led me to try to broach this problem in a different way, seeking to understand what appears to be defensive rejection of radical political analyses and trying to find other forms of communication and analysis.[4] In the work of Sanchez and Weaver, in particular, we find not only a sharp critique of U.S. nationalism and the genocide of indigenous nations but also a different grammar of critique, one that begins with a focus on beauty and community and incorporates a resilient, ironic awareness of our own continued proclivity to exploitation, cruelty, excess, and deadly indifference to the ramifications of our actions.

Sanchez and Weaver do not begin their work with critiques of U.S. genocide and in fact argue against doing so. They emphasize, rather, the grounding that is required before such wrenching critiques can be heard and integrated. Sanchez and Weaver begin their work with an affirmation of our embeddedness in networks of beauty and interdependence.[5] Sanchez extols the wisdom of the Navajo Beauty Way and invites us to ground ourselves in daily practices of gratitude for the natural forces that surround us and sustain us. The basis for our work for justice and peace can be love for the world, awe, and respect for the wonder that surrounds us. This stance is sharply different from that of the prophetic outsider, the one who bases his or her political work on denunciation and critique. Sanchez tells us that such continual denunciation poisons our relation to the world around us. Focusing on injustice to the exclusion of other forms of attention prevents us from seeing and receiving all that is healing and isolates us from "all our relations"—human, animal, and natural. Sanchez encourages us to base our activism on gratitude for all that is beautiful and precious.[6]

As we are "grounded in Beauty," we may then have the strength to see and grapple with the consequences of our careless and cruel actions. Sanchez argues, for example, that the oft-noted ecological sensibility of many Native

[4] Carol Lee Sanchez, "Animal, Vegetable, and Mineral: The Sacred Connection," in *Ecofeminism and the Sacred*, ed. Carol J. Adams (New York: Continuum, 1992); Jace Weaver, *Other Words: American Indian Literature, Law, and Culture* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001); Leslie Marmon Silko, "Landscapes, History, and the Pueblo Imagination," in *The Woman That I Am: The Literature and Culture of Contemporary Women of Color*, ed. D. Soynini Madison (New York: St. Martin's, 1994); Theophus Smith, *Conjuring Culture: Biblical Formations of Black America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Sulak Sivaraksa, *Seeds of Peace: A Buddhist Vision for Renewing Society*, ed. Tom Ginsberg (Berkeley: Parallax, 1992); Thich Nhat Hanh, *Peace Is Every Step: The Path of Mindfulness in Everyday Life*, ed. Arnold Kotler (New York: Bantam, 1991); Thich Nhat Hanh, *Being Peace*, ed. Arnold Kotler (Berkeley: Parallax, 1987); *Thich Nhat Hanh: Essential Writings*, ed. Robert Ellsberg (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2001).

[5] Sanchez, "Animal, Vegetable, and Mineral," 226–27; Weaver, *Other Words*, xii.

[6] Sanchez, "Animal, Vegetable, and Mineral," 226.

American peoples is not based on a natural affinity with the wider world. On the contrary, such affinity is the hard-won lesson of generations of ecological abuses—an affinity learned through devastating error and sustained by ceremonial practices that remind us of our connections and our proclivity to ignore those connections in particular self-serving, and ultimately self-defeating, ways:

> Detailed explanations of the ecological disasters that were brought about by the Meso-American pyramid and apartment builders have been preserved in the oral histories of various Tribal groups that descended from them. Many of these stories tell us that the people began to deviate from their Sacred Ways and became greedy and quarrelsome. Some of the recorded Pueblo stories tell how the men gambled all night and slept all day; how they violated the women and ceased performing their sacred duties. The stories speak of the women neglecting the children and gossiping with each other for hours instead of performing their sacred duties. They tell of a time the people took more than they really needed from their creature relatives and Earth Mother. . . . They became more and more disconnected and continued to commit acts of violence against each other and the things in their environment. As a direct result, the plants, the creatures, and the elements *abandoned* the people.[7]

From the work of Silko, we can learn a logic of group identity that incorporates into a sense of community not a pretense of superiority but a recognition of responsibility and of the potential for grave error. Silko describes a process of communal storytelling in which failures are recounted as often as successes:

> The effect of these inter-family or inter-clan exchanges is the reassurance for each person that she or he will never be separated or apart from the clan, no matter what might happen. Neither the worst blunders of disasters nor the greatest financial prosperity and joy will ever be permitted to isolate anyone from the rest of the group. . . . You are never the first to suffer a grave loss or profound humiliation. You are never the first, and you understand that you will probably not be the last to commit or be victimized by a repugnant act.[8]

[7] Ibid., 215–16. Although there are many things that Sanchez teaches those of us who are not Pueblo, there are many things that she does not share. She teaches principles of attention and patterns of reciprocity but not the specific ceremonies, stories, and prayers that belong to the Pueblo people: "Euro-Americans can adopt many of the life-preserving concepts practiced by the original American cultures and apply them to ordinary daily life. . . . What I suggest here has nothing to do with 'stealing Native American spiritual practices,' or dances, or songs, or social customs. . . . It has to do with acknowledging and utilizing a way of thinking that pervades the daily lives of Tribal people. It is a way of thinking that has sustained the first Americans for thousands of years and kept them, if you will, from totally destroying resources they depended on for survival" (214).

[8] Silko, "Landscapes," 506.

Other peoples have incorporated a nondualistic sense of good and evil into their understanding of communal vitality and identity. Theophus Smith, for example, describes an African and African American understanding of political, aesthetic, and spiritual power as conjure—a power to transform collective and individual realities, a power that can both heal and harm.[9] This is a logic of acknowledging and checking tendencies to abuse and exploit that remain part of who we are, both as individuals and as a nation. The tendencies that led to slavery are still within us, and the tendencies to violence against women in war and in peace, to environmental degradation, and to torture in the name of national security will remain. We will not be able to either defeat or eradicate these tendencies, in others or in ourselves, but we may become skilled in checking them and in making ourselves aware of new forms of exploitation and abuse. We can develop a sense of national pride based not on our superior virtue but on our skill in holding ourselves to high ideals, able to honestly acknowledge when we, and not just others, fail to meet those ideals of justice, freedom, and equality. We can develop a sense of national pride in being resolutely self-critical and creative in forging individual and institutional responses to injustice and in creating institutions that embody a measure of justice and remain open to continued evaluation and critique.

How, though, can we learn to see our own abuses of power? How can we develop our own ceremonies of gratitude and insight? And, after acknowledging such abuses, how can we conjure other forms of national identity? In meeting this challenge we can learn from the practice of "skillful means," as interpreted by Thich Nhat Hanh and Sulak Sivaraksa. These proponents of engaged Buddhism urge us to move from mere denunciation to practices that enable others to see processes that are destructive. The form of critique that brings us to critical awareness will not open the doors of insight for all people, in every situation. Sivaraksa and Nhat Hanh challenge us to forge multiple forms of engagement rather than repeat the same strategy, the same forms of public action and witness. They, like Smith, challenge us to become artists, skilled at conjuring different ways of seeing the world.[10]

For the past ten years I have been involved in work and research with faculty trying to find effective means of helping students see the costs of injustice and imagine creative responses to injustice. Our focus has been on injustice within the United States: sexism, racism, homophobia, class exploitation, and discrimination against people with disabilities. I have worked with an interdisciplinary team of faculty examining how we develop power literacy among professionals—not only an awareness of systemic power imbalances but also the

[9] Smith, *Conjuring Culture*.

[10] Sivaraksa, *Seeds of Peace*; Nhat Hanh, *Peace Is Every Step*; Nhat Hanh, *Being Peace*; Nhat Hanh, *Essential Writings*.

acquisition of the skills required to redress those imbalances at the institutional and individual levels. We are just beginning a research project that is explicitly geared to seeing self-deluding justifications for war and imagining alternatives to armed conflict and alternative forms of national identity, pride, and global responsibility. Although this latter work is in its infancy, we are postulating a set of hypotheses, applying to national identity and international relations what we have learned about helping people see injustice within the United States. We are exploring the efficacy of three pedagogical principles: internal affirmation, active learning, and imaginative construction or reform of institutions to embody core social values.

In our work on power literacy, we have found that the best strategy is not to lecture on either the history of oppression or present forms of injustice, but to assign research projects and workshop activities that enable students to discover for themselves the costs and extent of injustice and oppression within the United States. We have found that students are far more likely to believe the critiques that they discover than the ones we present. Furthermore, they are more likely to believe such self-generated discoveries when we begin with an affirmation of what they value in their own families and what they see as the strengths of the United States as a nation.[11]

Many people interpret critiques of American policies as an invalidation of any positive aspect of American identity. A critique of Schüssler Fiorenza's third type of nationalism, one based on a conviction of superiority, is experienced as an assault on any type of patriotism or pride in national identity.

For many of us, and for some of our students, the logic of critique and national affirmation is far different. We criticize United States polices because of what we value in our history, political structure, and national identity. Critique is, for us, a form of patriotism and an affirmation of a complex identity as national and global citizens. We find, however, that for many students this logic is not immediately tangible and needs to be elicited and modeled. The means of such modeling are simple, and the results often transformative. In our work on power literacy, for example, we ask people to begin by describing what they are proud of in their culture and community. It is these same strengths that are later brought to bear on the many forms of injustice that we uncover together.

[11] The results of this research are described in the following essays: Suzanne Burgoyne, Karen Cockrell, Helen Neville, Peggy Placier, Sharon Welch, Meghan Davidson, Tamara Share, and Brock Fisher, "Theatre of the Oppressed as an Instructional Practice: A Collaboration between Theatre and Education," in *International Conference on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Proceedings, 2001 and 2002*, ed. David Gosling and Vaneeta D'Andrea (London: Educational Development Centre, City University, 2003), 122–26; Sharon D. Welch, "Ceremonies of Gratitude, Awakening, and Accountability: The Theory and Practice of Multicultural Education," in *Disrupting White Supremacy from Within: White People on What We Need to Do*, ed. Jennifer Harvey, Karin A. Case, and Robin Hawley Gorsline (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim, 2004).

One student, for example, proud of her family's stubbornness, found that she could call on that persistence to challenge the racism of her family and community.

Can such an approach lead students to a positive, vital, yet self-critical view of their national identity as citizens of the United States, and as global citizens? The pedagogical principle of internal affirmation—helping students find their own values that support human dignity, equality, and justice—can serve as a powerful tool for rigorous self-critique. The pedagogical principle of active learning is most important when challenging fundamental assumptions about the justice of American society. The most effective critiques are genuinely ones of self-critique, providing the exercises and assignments in which students do the work of evaluating the ramifications of particular policies and forms of national identity. The critiques they believe and own are those which emerge from their work, from the critical application of their own values.

There is yet another barrier to radical critique: paralyzing shame and guilt. The insights may be immediate or hard-won, but the results are all too common: a self-loathing and paralyzing fear of acting in ways that perpetuate oppression. Reina Lewis and Sara Mills, in *Feminist Postcolonial Theory,* describe this response: " '[W]hite guilt' has developed as a term to describe white inertia in the face of the problematic of race. Many white feminists assumed that it was so easy to 'get it wrong' in relation to the discussion of race, that it was more prudent simply to work on other issues or ignore race altogether." Such paralyzing guilt also emerges as people become aware of the extent and cost of Western imperialism. This response, though common, "is one of the least productive responses to this history."[12]

How, though, may paralyzing shame and guilt be avoided or healed? How do we gain the emotional, spiritual, and ethical resilience to bear the pain of suffering, and also to realize that such suffering is not easily healed and that even our best efforts against injustice may do as much harm as good? Here we need aesthetic and spiritual practices that can enable us to think and feel fully and honestly in the face of such ambiguity and pain.

As we gain such resilience of heart and mind, we will be able to take up the second task I have identified: developing other models of national identity and global citizenship. These models will not be perfect and will have their own dangers and flaws. Nevertheless, we can propose, develop, and refine alternative forms of national identity and global responsibility. Rather than being the primary guarantor of world order through military and economic might, we may see ourselves as part of a global community, accepting the challenge so cogently expressed by William Schulz, executive director of Amnesty Interna-

[12] Reina Lewis and Sara Mills, introduction to *Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A Reader,* ed. Reina Lewis and Sara Mills (New York: Routledge, 2003), 7–8.

tional USA. Schulz offers a pragmatic rationale for cooperating in the institutionalization of the international rule of law, shaping that law, and willingly subjecting ourselves to it:

> The United States is a mighty power, but it is not omnipotent. If history is any guide, it will not remain even a mighty power forever. Wouldn't it be wiser, then, while we have the power, to enter wholeheartedly into the creation of international norms, be they legal or behavioral, that best reflect our values and then respect those norms and their attendant procedures even when we may be found in violation?[13]

Such initiatives are now being developed. There are international efforts to create regional conflict-prevention centers and a standing center for conflict mediation and prevention at the United Nations. Nations throughout the world are supporting the work of the International Criminal Court and are formulating proposals for international emergency peacekeeping services under the auspices of the UN. Although the Bush administration has rejected such efforts, there are many nongovernmental organizations and faith organizations that embrace them as the finest expression of who we are as citizens of the United States and as members of an international community.[14] Can we learn to communicate this vision of national identity to others? Can we listen honestly and openly to critiques of our views, just as we urge others to hear our critiques? Developing a self-critical national identity will require the best of all that we are and know: the most profound ceremonies of openness and gratitude, the deepest political analyses, and the most creative aesthetic and strategic initiatives.

Response

María Pilar Aquino

A response to Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's essay on feminism and nationalism was initially difficult for me to articulate. My difficulty was not due to its pertinence but rather to its density and its multiple points for entry into conversation. It is clear to me, on the one hand, that her essay bears epistemic pertinence in that it calls for a critical reflection on the historical conditions

[13] William F. Schulz, *In Our Own Best Interests: How Defending Human Rights Benefits Us All* (Boston: Beacon, 2001), 190–91.

[14] See, for example, the work being done by Global Action to Prevent War (http://www.globalactionpw.org/) and by the Friends Committee on National Legislation (http://www.fcnl.org/), including the booklet *Peaceful Prevention of Deadly Conflict* (Washington, DC: FCNL Education Fund, n.d.), http://www.fcnl.org/pdfs/ppdc_booklet.pdf.