

Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology

Kwok Pui-lan

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In loving memory of my mother,

Cheung Mei-fong

Postcolonial Imagination

Historical, Dialogical, and Diasporic

What postcolonialism signifies is that the future is open and the past unstable and constantly changing.

*R. S. Sugirtharajah*¹

I had to change my intellectual and aesthetic beliefs about the world and about what I was doing in it, and I had to keep on changing them as the world changed—and I changed in it—forever.

*Nancy Mairs*²

I have been reflecting on my long intellectual journey to “struggle to know.” Why is knowing a struggle? It is a struggle because you have to spend years learning what others told you is important to know, before you acquire the credentials and qualifications to say something about yourself. It is a struggle because you have to affirm first that you have something important to say and that your experience counts. As Leila Ahmed, a professor in women’s studies in religion, reminisces about her graduate training at Cambridge University:

Many of us from the Third World arrived having lived through political upheavals that traumatically affected our lives—for this quite simply has been the legacy of imperialism for most of our countries. But it was not those histories that we had lived that were at the center of our studies, nor was it the perspectives arising from those histories

1. R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2003), 8.

2. Nancy Mairs, *Voice Lessons: On Becoming a (Woman) Writer* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 21.

that defined the intellectual agenda and preoccupations of our academic environment.³

Women's articulation of their experiences of colonization is so new; these women have been much represented, but until fairly recently have not been allowed the opportunities to represent themselves. Even if they have "spoken," their speech acts are expressed not only in words but also in forms (storytelling, songs, poems, dances, and quilting, etc.) that the academic and cultural establishments either could not understand or deemed insignificant. These knowledges have been ruled out as nondata: too fragmented, or insufficiently documented for serious inquiry.

How do we come to know what we know? How do postcolonial intellectuals begin the process of decolonization of the mind and the soul? What are the steps we need to take and what kind of mind-set will steer us away from Eurocentrism, on the one hand, and a nostalgic romanticizing of one's heritage or tradition, on the other? In this chapter, I attempt to trace the itinerary of how the mind "imagines," for without the power of imagination we cannot envision a different past, present, and future. Without interrogating the mind's "I/eye," we are left without alternative perspectives to see reality and to chart where we may be going. For what we cannot imagine, we cannot live into and struggle for.

What is imagination? How does the postcolonial's mind work? I have written that to imagine means to discern that something is not fitting, to search for new images, and to arrive at new patterns of meaning and interpretation.⁴ But I have become aware that the process of imagining is more complex, especially when we do not want to construe the imagining subject as the "transcendental I" within the liberal project, who has the power to shape the world and to conjure meanings. In other words, I have attached more importance to the cracks, the fissures, and the openings, which refuse to be shaped into any framework, and which are often consigned to the periphery. These disparate elements that staunchly refuse to follow the set pattern, the established episteme, the overall design that the mind so powerfully wants to shape, interest me because they have the potential to point to another path, to signal radically new possibilities.

As I reflect on my own thinking process as an Asian postcolonial feminist theologian, I discern three critical movements, which are not linear but over-

3. Leila Ahmed, *A Border Passage: from Cairo to America—a Woman's Journey* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999), 211.

4. Kwok Pui-lan, "Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World," *Semeia* 47 (1989): 25–42, reprinted in idem, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1995), 8–19, here 13.

lapped and interwoven in intricate ways. They are more like motifs in a sonata, sometimes recurrent, sometimes disjointed, with one motif dominating at one moment, and another resurfacing at another point. I would like to reflect on these three movements—historical, dialogical, and diasporic imagination—to indicate how my mind has changed or remained the same.

HISTORICAL IMAGINATION

History is best figured not as an accurate record or transcript of the past but as a perspectival discourse that seeks to articulate a living memory for the present and the future.

*Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza*⁵

How do you trace where you have come from? How do women create a heritage of our own? When women's history emerged on the scene, feminist scholars argued that one could not simply add women and stir, but had to question the so-called historical data, periodization, historiography, and in fact, the whole writing of history, as if women counted. The project is to accord or restore to women the status of a "historical subject." But how do we track the scent of women who were multiply marginalized, shuttled between tradition and modernity, and mostly illiterate, and who therefore left no trail that could be easily detected? Hispanic journalist Richard Rodriguez uses the metaphor "hunger of memory" to describe this passionate and relentless quest for one's own historical and cultural past.⁶

Why did Chinese women, who were mostly poor and illiterate, become Christians when Protestant missions began to spread inland in China in the 1860s? Since most of them had adhered to Chinese folk religious practices, what did they find in Christianity that would have been appealing to them? What would it be like for them to worship with men in the Christian churches, when social propriety at the time prescribed the segregation of the sexes? Did they enjoy reading the Bible and singing hymns? What kind of roles did these Chinese Christian women play in the church and society when China was semicolonized?

I wish they had left behind books, diaries, documentaries, interviews, poetry, or their own interpretation of the events. Since these materials are either nonexistent or not readily available, I spent much time collecting and

5. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, 10th ann. ed. (New York: Crossroad, 1994), xxii.

6. Richard Rodriguez, *Hunger for Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez* (Boston: David E. Godine Publisher, 1981).

piecing their stories from information scattered in church yearbooks, college bulletins, pamphlets, obituaries, missionary reports, and religious journals. The process is much like "quilt-making," as Schüssler Fiorenza has described: "The quilt-maker carefully stitches material fragments and pieces into an overall design that gives meaning to the individual scraps of material."⁷

The writing of history in China has always been embroiled in political power. Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, there has been a massive attempt to rewrite Chinese history, following the Marxist-Leninist-Maoist party line. Until the liberalization of Chinese policies in the late 1970s, the Christian missionary movement was seen as the "running dog of imperialism." Churches were closed during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), and Christians were scorned, harassed, put in prison, sent to the countryside, and looked at with suspicion. It would have been taboo to mention the contributions of the Christian churches and the life and ministry of Chinese Christians. In recent years, a more balanced assessment of Christianity's roles in modern Chinese history began to emerge, when historians are no longer coerced to adhere to the Marxist interpretation.

On the other hand, Western missionaries have written voluminous memoirs, histories, reports, letters, and books on their contributions to what they have called the "uplifting" of China. Some of these missionaries subsequently became "China experts" in higher education in Europe and the United States, and have interpreted Chinese history according to a "Western impact and Chinese response" model.⁸ Such a model looks at world history as an extension of Western history and overemphasizes the influences of Western powers on the cultures and histories of other peoples. The historical agency of the Chinese people was downplayed, as they became not the actors but the acted upon in the unfolding historical drama of Western expansion and colonization.

Since the 1970s, some male Chinese scholars have challenged the Marxist reductionist method, the missionary approach, and the "Western impact" model by recovering the history of Chinese Christians. They have, however, focused exclusively on the lives and thoughts of male Christians, as if women were not an integral part of the encounter between China and Christianity. To write a history of Christianity in China as if women matter requires a different historical imagination and what Foucault has termed the "insurrection of subjugated knowledge." In my first book, *Chinese Women and Christianity*,

7. Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*; xxii.

8. For an analysis of such a model, see Paul A. Cohen, *Discovering History in China: American Historical Writing on the Recent Chinese Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).

1860–1927, I painstakingly reconstructed Chinese women as actors, writers, and social reformers in the unfolding drama of the Christian movement at the turn of the twentieth century.⁹ As I look back at my work, I wish I had had more exchanges with non-Western scholars who were probing the houses of memory of their foremothers, for I have learned much from Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham's work on the women's movement in the Black Baptist Church and Leila Ahmed's book on women and gender in Islam.¹⁰ I would also have benefited from the scholarship by historians and anthropologists who investigated the relationship among race, gender, and imperial power.¹¹ While I focused on the Chinese archives, Chung Hyun Kyung documented the emergence of Asian feminist theology as a grassroots movement and provided information on the historical context and social organizations that formed the backbone for the movement.¹² Similarly, women scholars from other Third World contexts have also recounted the histories and struggles of Christian women against patriarchy and other forms of oppression in their societies.

In the United States, there has also emerged a significant body of work reconstructing the history and lived experiences of racial minority women. The accomplishments of the womanist scholars are especially impressive. For example, Delores Williams has used the figure of Hagar as a heuristic key to recover the struggle for survival and quality of life of African American women.¹³ The works of Zora Neale Hurston, Anna Julia Cooper, and Ida B. Wells-Barnett have been given their due attention by Katie Geneva Cannon, Karen Baker-Fletcher, and Emilie Townes, respectively.¹⁴ Joan Martin has

9. Kwok Pui-lan, *Chinese Women and Christianity, 1860–1927* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992).

10. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880–1920* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993); Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1992).

11. For example, Lata Mani, *Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, eds., *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History* (New Delhi: Kali Press, 1989); Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

12. Chung Hyun Kyung, *Struggle to Be the Sun Again: Introducing Asian Women's Theology* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1990).

13. Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993).

14. Katie Geneva Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988); Karen Baker-Fletcher, *A Singing Something: Womanist Reflections on Anna Julia Cooper* (New York: Crossroad, 1994); and Emilie M. Townes, *Womanist Justice, Womanist Hope* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993).

deployed slave narratives as resources to uncover the work ethic of enslaved women.¹⁵ Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham and Cheryl Townsend Gilkes have recovered the roles and leadership of black women in the black churches from historical and sociological points of view.¹⁶

With such a body of knowledge before us, it is time to look back and to clarify some of the issues that have arisen in the ensuing discussions of our works. The first issue concerns what kind of subjectivity we have accorded those women who have historically not been granted subject status. For example, black ethicist Victor Anderson has charged that womanist scholars have essentialized blackness as if it consisted only of suffering, endurance, and survival of life. He further argues that they have followed the masculine construction of the black heroic genius, and stress black women's capacities for survival even against unprecedented oppression.¹⁷ But as Stephanie Y. Mitchem has retorted, the womanists have presented much more multiple and variegated descriptions of suffering, without collapsing all forms of oppression together as equal and homogeneous.¹⁸ Furthermore, as Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza has persistently argued, historical writings are rhetorical, serving particular political functions, and are not to be construed as "objective" or "value-neutral."¹⁹ The emphasis on the historical and moral agency of black women is necessary, as Katie Geneva Cannon argues, because the white racist culture reinforces the stereotypes of the inferiority of the black race and promulgates negative images of black women.²⁰ Like the black women writers they have studied, womanist theologians and ethicists keep in mind the need for self-affirmation and assertion by the black community, to which their works are accountable. To recover black foremothers as strong, resourceful, and enduring is to rewrite a tradition to live by, and to celebrate black women's audacity of creating a way out of no way. Perhaps, when the womanist tradition is more nuanced and developed, and when the social conditions inflicted by white racism improve, we will be able to see black women assuming more varied subject positions in religious discourse.

15. Joan M. Martin, *More than Chains and Toils: A Christian Work Ethic of Enslaved Women* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000).

16. Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*; Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, *If It Wasn't for the Women . . . : Black Women's Experience and Womanist Culture in Church and Community* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2001).

17. Victor Anderson, *Beyond Ontological Blackness: An Essay on African Religious and Cultural Criticism* (New York: Continuum, 1995), 104–17.

18. Stephanie Y. Mitchem, "Womanist and (Unfinished) Constructions of Salvation," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 17, no. 1 (2001): 93–94.

19. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Rhetoric and Ethic: The Politics of Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999).

20. Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, 6.

In the postcolonial Asian context, Wong Wai Ching has argued that Asian women theologians have a tendency to present Asian women either as victims of multiple oppression or as national heroines fighting courageously for freedom and emancipation. Since Asian women have been constructed as "the poor woman," Asian feminist theology tends to follow the similar plot of revolving around the themes of suffering and liberation. As such, Asian feminist theologians have oversimplified women's multiple experiences, diverse interests, and social locations. They have also inadvertently supported the nationalist politics and agendas of Asian male theologians, and as a result, their feminist theology shares the assumptions and rhetoric of their male counterparts, such as the recovery of Asian identities, the commitment to sociopolitical transformation, and the prioritization of practice over Western academic theory.²¹

I find that Wong tends to oversimplify the ideas of the individual Asian feminist theologians she cites and the development of Asian feminist theology in general. The works of Chung Hyun Kyung, Mary John Mananzan, and myself have presented a much more multiple and diverse portrayal of Asian women than the binary constructs of "victim" and "heroine." The social analysis of Korean feminists, who survived through Japanese colonialism and who currently live in a divided country in one of the most highly militarized zones in the world, is very different from that of Indian feminists struggling against abject poverty, the caste system, dowry, and the mobilization of Hinduism as a national ideology. While these feminists are concerned about the multiple oppression of women, their interpretations of why women suffer are culturally and historically specific. While the struggle for independence provided the historical backdrop for Asian women to enter the public arena, Asian feminist theologians are keenly aware of the patriarchal biases of the national male elite both during independence struggles and in the subsequent fight for democracy. Asian feminist theologians do not blindly follow the lead of the male theologians, nor do they willingly participate in and support their epistemological framework.²²

Since both Anderson and Wong rely on elements of postmodern thought to critique the construction of an "essentialized" subject in womanist and Asian feminist discourse, it may be worthwhile to reexamine whether the postmodern critique of subjectivity is appropriate and helpful in these contexts. While

21. Wong Wai Ching, "Negotiating for a Postcolonial Identity: Theology of 'the Poor Woman' in Asia," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 16, no. 2 (2000): 5–23.

22. See also my review of Wong's book *The Poor Woman: A Critical Analysis of Asian Theology and Contemporary Chinese Fiction by Women*, in *Quest: An Interdisciplinary Journal for Asian Christian Scholars* 1, no. 1 (2002): 94–104.

postmodern thought may be instrumental in deconstructing the notion of modern "man" as the transcendental unified subject, its application to other contexts where the enslaved and the colonized have never been allowed to assume subject status must be carefully interrogated.²³ Furthermore, it is necessary to distinguish between a Western habit of "essentializing" and "homogenizing" human experience and the self (as most clearly seen in the colonial enterprise) and the womanist and Asian cultural constructions of the self, which are rooted in and understood through the communal experience. When Delores Williams uses the literary figure of Hagar, she is not interested in the individualist protagonist of the narrative, nor does she try to "essentialize" Hagar's experience to speak for all black women. Rather, she explores how the ancient story may serve as a historical prototype to lift up salient aspects of black women's collective experience (such as the predicament of motherhood, the character of surrogacy, the problem of ethnicity, and the significance of the wilderness experience) and as a model to write black women's history.²⁴

Similarly, Chung Hyun Kyung has used the stories of comfort women, who were conscripted and lured to serve as sexual slaves for Japanese soldiers during the Second World War, as a root story for Korean feminist theology.²⁵ Again, she does not intend to "universalize" the experiences of these two hundred thousand comfort women to speak for all Korean women, who belong to different social classes and backgrounds. Nevertheless, she finds these stories to be powerful heuristic models to expose the interlocking oppression of sexism, militarism, colonialism, and sexual violence.

One may wonder why these theologians dwell on the memories of Hagar and the comfort women and do not move on. But as Thomas Laqueur has elo-

23. Patricia Hill Collins, "What's Going On? Black Feminist Thought and the Politics of Postmodernism," in idem, *Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 124–54.

24. My reading of Delores Williams's work is different from that of Serene Jones. From a poststructuralist perspective, Jones finds that Williams has a tendency to treat the meaning of a text in an "overly static" and unambiguous way, and the social reality she draws from it is too fixed and monolithic. See Jones, "Women's Experience between a Rock and a Hard Place: Feminist, Womanist, and Mujerista Theologies in North America," in *Horizons in Feminist Theology: Identity, Tradition, and Norms*, ed. Rebecca S. Chopp and Sheila Greeve Davaney (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 43–44. I read Williams in the oral tradition of the black people, in which stories are teased out for their multiple meanings to address the needs of the audiences, and there are numerous possibilities of retelling and reinterpretation. The themes Williams lifts up from the Hagar story are suggestive and not definitive or exhaustive.

25. Chung Hyun Kyung, "Your Comfort vs. My Death," in *Women Resisting Violence: Spirituality for Life*, ed. Mary John Mananzan et al. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1996), 129–40.

quently written, "It is precisely by remembering in public that the past can become past—and that memory becomes survivable by entering into history."²⁶ The historical imagination aims not only to reconstitute the past, but also to release the past so that the present is livable. The fact that Hagar and the comfort women are not erased from historical memory is a powerful testimony to the fact that an alternative vision of "social temporality"²⁷ is possible. Hagar, the Egyptian slave woman, was erased for the most part from the Hebrew Scriptures, while the comfort women were covered up as a national shame by Korean politicians and historians. But these women complicate history, for they insist that slave girls and prostitutes exist in the same temporality with the master, the mistress, the military, and the powerful. These figures disrupt national history, mock the identity formation of a people, challenge sexual normativity, and resist any forms of erasure. Like the haunted ghost in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*,²⁸ they come back again and again to demand that their stories be remembered. They stubbornly refuse to accept that history is written only by the winners.

Memory is a powerful tool in resisting institutionally sanctioned forgetfulness. Too often, the memory of multiply oppressed women is inscribed on the body, on one's most private self, on one's sexuality. We have yet to find a language to speak in public how the body in such circumstances remembers and passes on knowledge from generation to generation. While French feminist theorists have debunked the law of the father, explored the possibility of women's writing, and urged women to seek their own *jouissance*, many Third World women regard such high-level theory as Eurocentric and a luxury. The body, in an enslaved and colonial context, speaks a language of hunger, beating, and rape, as well as resistance, survival, and healing. It is not that the female subject is so marked with pain that she cannot enjoy pleasure, but rather that the pleasure she seeks lies not so much in asserting her own individualist sexuality or sexual freedom as found in white bourgeois culture, but in the commitment to communal survival and in creating social networks and organizations so that she and her community can be healed and flourish.

From reading the texts of these women theologians, I do not find that they rest their hope on the final *eschaton*, on an unpredictable utopia, or on historical progress. History for them is too full of ambiguities and unpredictable twists and turns to be constructed as linear, progressive, or sprinkled with unchecked optimism. The hope for some of the disenfranchised women may

26. Thomas Laqueur, "The Naming of the Dead," in *London Review of Books* 19, no. 11 (June 5, 1997), 8.

27. See Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 171.

28. Toni Morrison, *Beloved: A Novel* (New York: Knopf, 1987).

be a place to dry their fish on the beach, enough seeds for next spring, or money enough to send their children to school. The future is not a grand finale, a classless society, or even a kingdom of God, but more immediate, concrete, and touchable. It may be the pooling of communal resources, of living better than last year, or of seeing grandchildren grow up healthy and strong. It is a historical imagination of the concrete and not the abstract, a hope that is more practical and therefore not so easily disillusioned, and a trust that is born out of necessity and well-worn wisdom.

DIALOGICAL IMAGINATION

The term *dialogical imagination* describes the process of creative hermeneutics in Asia. It attempts to convey the complexities, the multidimensional linkages, and the different levels of meaning that underlie our present task of relating the Bible to Asia. This task is dialogical, for it involves ongoing conversation among different religious and cultural traditions. . . . Dialogical imagination attempts to bridge the gaps of time and space, to create new horizons, and to connect the disparate elements of our lives into a meaningful whole.

*Kwok Pui-lan*²⁹

When I wrote the article "Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World" (1989), I was interested in how an Asian Christian woman can enter into dialogue with the cultures and religious traditions of the first-century biblical world. I said: "The Chinese characters commonly translated as dialogue mean talking with each other. Such talking implies mutuality, active listening, and openness to what one's partner has to say. Asian Christians are heirs to both the biblical story and to our story as Asian people, and we are concerned to bring the two into dialogue with one another."³⁰ In a certain sense, my articulation of dialogical imagination was an attempt to work through some of the dilemmas and contradictions of being "Asian" and "Christian." I want to revisit several of my assumptions again to see how my mind has changed in the intervening years.

The primary issue concerns the subject who is doing the "dialogical imagining." The subject I had in mind then was very influenced by the construction of the Western liberal subject, unrestrained by social and historical

location, free to create, to think, to mold consciousness, such that he or she can shape disparate parts into the "whole." I was influenced by Gordon Kaufman's understanding of theology as an imaginative human construction, and his Kantian notion of human consciousness.³¹ The power of human imagination also undergirds Gadamer's "fusion of horizons," in which two different historical worlds or horizons can be fruitfully brought together.

As a postcolonial subject who has been thrown into situations not of her choosing and who has to negotiate different cultural worlds constantly, I have to admit that the drive to "imagine the whole"—a unified country, an undefiled nation, an intact cultural tradition—is strong and often irresistible. It is a longing for what one has never possessed and a mourning of a loss one cannot easily name. It may also be a quest for certainty that one knows is not there! While I do not wish to undermine anyone's desire for a meaningful whole, I want to caution against the enormous power of that desire—the lure to shape things into one, unified, seemingly seamless whole. While such a desire may have the positive effect of resisting the fragmented and disjointed experience imposed by colonialism, it may also lead to the danger of reification of the past and the collapse of differences from within.

Although I still think that human creativity can often transcend social and historical circumstances, I did not pay enough attention in that essay to the analysis of the fragmented subjectivity or the multiple fractures of the colonized subject's mind and psyche in the imaginative process. In his response to my work, the late George Soares-Prabhu, a distinguished Indian biblical scholar, wrote:

Unlike a Hindu reading of the Vedas, or a Buddhist reading of the Pali Canon, an Asian reading of the Bible is never a "natural" reading, taking place spontaneously within a living tradition. It always has to be a deliberate strategy, a forced and somewhat artificial exercise, a reading against the grain, a challenge to church orthodoxy or academic parochialism.³²

My hope to bring the biblical and Asian traditions together through dialogical imagination may have underestimated the fact that an Asian reads the Bible from a situation of great alienation. And I did not sufficiently problematize how the "Asian story," which is so diverse and complex, could be brought into a mutually illuminating relationship with the equally multifaceted "biblical

31. Gordon D. Kaufman, *The Theological Imagination: Constructing the Concept of God* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981).

32. George M. Soares-Prabhu, "Two Mission Commands: An Interpretation of Matthew 28:16–20 in the Light of a Buddhist Text," *Biblical Interpretation* 2 (1994): 270.

29. Kwok, *Discovering the Bible*, 13.

30. Ibid., 12.

story." Throughout the 1990s, mostly due to my readings in postcolonial theories, I have rethought some of my own assumptions about the relation between "Asia" and "the West"—a process necessitated by the fact that I now live and teach as a racial minority in the United States.

I do not believe that most Asian male or female theologians consciously or unconsciously construct an "essentialized" notion of "Asia" and proceed to write and articulate an "Asian" theology. Many of these theologians have traveled widely in Asia, and any ecumenical Asian gathering, with its diversity of languages and national costumes, would show how any easy generalization of "Asia" is doomed. The naming of theology as "Asian" must therefore be seen as a discursive and political construct, arising out of the particular historical moment of the recovery of political and cultural autonomy in the 1960s. Though Asian theologians might have vastly diverse understandings of what constituted "Asian," the deployment of the term signified a collective consciousness against the theological hegemony of the West and a concomitant affirmation that God's revelation and actions could be discerned through the histories and cultures of Asian peoples. The self-affirmation of Asian peoples as part of the people of God was crucial at the time and a dominant theme in Asian theology.

It is also important to remember that soon after independence, most Asian countries had to fight simultaneously against the legacy of imperialism and the centralization of power by the national bourgeois or the military junta. In denouncing authoritarian governments and military dictatorships, progressive Asian theologians recognized clearly that the culture in any Asian country was not monolithic, but multifaceted and stratified. Thus, C. S. Song urged the use of popular myths, stories, and legends of the common people, and *minjung* theologians in Korea rediscovered shamanism, the mask dance, and political satire as resources for doing theology.³³ Such an approach differed markedly from earlier attempts of indigenization, in which Christianity was brought into dialogue mostly with the elitist cultures of Asia. When Asian feminist theologians entered the scene, they, too, paid special attention to women's popular cultures, for they were wary of the patriarchal biases in the elitist traditions.

The emphasis on the use of Asian resources, by, for instance, the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians and the Programme for Theology and Cultures in Asia, was timely and necessary because of the colonial legacy of theological education. Asian students were busy digesting the Tillichs, Bultmanns, and Barths while their compatriots were demonstrating

on the streets or taking turns going to prison for democracy. For, sadly, theological training in Asia at the time continued the process of colonizing Asian minds, even long after the colonizers had packed up and gone home. For Asian theologians who were trying to gain their own voices, Asian theology should have emerged from and responded to Asian realities, rather than reflect someone else's theological puzzles conceived in the faraway Western academy. These Asian theologians were not interested in creating a distinctive "Asia," the essence of which can be found only in the pristine past, undefiled by colonization. Instead, they wanted to establish a dialogue with the living traditions of Asia, especially with people's religiosity, and with emergent issues in Asian politics and history. They did not construct "Asia" and the "West" or "Asia" and "Christianity" as binary opposites. The fact that one can construct "Christianity"—often understood to be a Western tradition—by Asian stories and idioms subverts the binarism of what is "Asian" and what is "Western." Asian liberation theology assumes the posture of a "fighting literature" because it challenges and undermines the power of setting up rigid boundaries in the attempt to safeguard the cultural purity of Western Christianity.

Having said that, I would argue that in emphasizing the use of Asian myths, stories, and religious resources (as opposed to Western influences), Asian theologians have not sufficiently theorized how Asian cultures have been transformed by the colonial regimes—be they French, British, Japanese, Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, or American. The question of how colonization has reconstituted or reconfigured Asian cultures has not been discussed with the intellectual rigor it clearly warrants. Since many Asian countries have gone through a lengthy period of colonization, how can we conceptualize the complicated process of cultural encounter between the colonizers and the colonized? The many modes of such cultural interaction—parody, mimicry, hybridity, syncretism, double inscription, contact zone, translation, and transculturation—discussed with profound insights in postcolonial literature,³⁴ unfortunately have seldom entered into theological discourse.

Moreover, the impact of global capitalism on cultural formation in general and on theology in particular has not been clearly articulated, because the analysis of the religio-cultural dimensions is often separated from the rapidly changing socioeconomic conditions, especially in the Asia-Pacific region. For example, some of the grassroots theological movements, such as *minjung* theology, lost their appeal and efficacy both in their own contexts and abroad during the period of economic expansion in the 1980s, when the so-called Asian

33. See C. S. Song's many books, for example, *Tell Us Our Names: Story Theology from an Asian Perspective* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1984); Commission on Theological Concerns of the Christian Conference of Asia, *Minjung Theology: People as the Subjects of History* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1981).

34. See, e.g., Stuart Hall, "When Was the 'Post-colonial'? Thinking at the Limit," in *The Post-colonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons*, ed. Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti (London: Routledge, 1996), 251.

miracle began to take place. Today, Taiwan, South Korea, Hong Kong, and Singapore, for instance, can hardly be called "developing" countries or regions. Indeed, some of the Asian cultural traditions have been revived to serve the interests of global capitalism (the Chinese silk changsam comes into vogue in Hollywood), and various religious fundamentalisms have been resuscitated to serve nationalist interests. In East Asia, the unholy alliance of capitalism, patriarchy, and Neo-Confucianism sustains the booming economy by supporting oligarchies of old men and by providing a flexible supply of cheap female labor.

The above analysis does not imply that dialogical imagination as an interpretive strategy is no longer useful in some respects, particularly in its emphasis on dialogue with other religious traditions and interpretation as a creative process,³⁵ but it does call for a more explicit discussion of its theoretical grounding and a deepened engagement with postcolonial theories and cultural studies. In the face of cultural and religious pluralism, many liberal theologians have also used the model of dialogue or conversation as a mode to engage the Other.³⁶ In fact, the terms "pluriphonic," "multivocal," "symphony," or "assembly of voices" have popped up frequently in religious and theological discourses as ways to imagine inviting "Others" to the table. But it should be pointed out that in our postcolonial world, all the voices are not equal and some cultures dominate center stage, with the power to push the rest to the periphery. The debate on multiculturalism in the United States has pointed to its inadequacy in dealing with diversity, because it fails to confront the dominant white culture's power to define, appropriate, and assimilate minority cultures, in other words, its power to set the rules of the game. Following Homi Bhabha, I have come to see the limitations of *cultural diversity* when articulated within a liberal paradigm, which treats different cultures as mutually interacting and competing on the same footing in the public square. Such an approach often assumes the stance of cultural relativity, which calls for cultural exchange, the tolerance of diversity, and the management of conflicts through democratic means. Instead, Bhabha uses the term "cultural difference" to underscore that the interaction of cultures in the postcolonial world is always imbued with power

35. I am grateful for Dr. Mrinalini Sebastian's comments at the "Post-colonial Hermeneutics" seminar of the Bossey Ecumenical Institute, 2001. She affirms my emphasis on interreligious dialogue and, as a literary critic, she stresses that the term "imagination" allows for creativity.

36. David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987), 92–94; Paul F. Knitter, "Toward a Liberation Theology of Religions," in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, ed. John Hick and Paul F. Knitter (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1987), 181–90.

and authority. Difference arises not because there are many preconstituted cultures existing side by side, but is manufactured through particular discourses at critical moments when the status quo is questioned:

Cultural difference is not difficult, if you like, because there are many diverse cultures; it is because there is some particular issue about the redistribution of goods between cultures, or the funding of cultures, or the emergence of minorities or immigrants in a situation of . . . resource allocation.³⁷

Furthermore, the tension and anxieties elicited by cultural difference are always overlaid and heightened by the issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality.

Dialogical imagination will need to consider the theoretical challenge coming from the studies of the contact zone, which foreground the modes and zones of contact between dominant and subordinate groups, between people with different and multiple identities.³⁸ The interaction between two cultures with asymmetry of power is often not voluntary and one-dimensional, but is full of tensions, fractures, and resistance. The imposition of the colonizers' language, the institution of the Queen's birthday as a public holiday, and the naming of the street and school as Prince Edward Road and King's College are but a few conspicuous examples. Many Asian people remain hostile to the Christian church because it continues to signify the pain and suffering of the colonial contact. While the creation of a new narrative discourse of Christianity through the use of Asian idioms and stories may be a sincere attempt on the part of Asian theologians, it can be seen as yet another incidence of trying to fit local histories into the global design of Christianity,³⁹ if it does not self-consciously challenge imperialistic impulses. As such, it would be an ironic example of colonization of the mind—this time, not by the colonizers, but with the full consent and complicity of the formerly colonized.

Dialogical imagination also has to capture the fluidity and contingent character of Asian cultures, which are undergoing rapid and multidimensional changes. We can no more conceive culture as static, offering a secure group boundary and an unambiguous sense of belonging. Many postcolonial theorists and cultural critics have deployed traveling metaphors to denote the transient,

37. Gary A. Olson and Lynn Worsham, "Staging the Politics of Difference: Homi Bhabha's Critical Literacy," in *Race, Rhetoric, and the Postcolonial*, ed. Gary A. Olson and Lynn Worsham (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 16.

38. Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

39. This is from the title of Walter D. Mignolo's book *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000).

unsettling nature and displacement in late twentieth-century culture. Instead of speaking of the home or the roots, James Clifford proposes the *route* to capture the sense of "traveling-in-dwelling" and "dwelling-in-traveling."⁴⁰ Much related to this is the notion of *transition*, which destabilizes a fixed time and space, and resists pinning down by preconceived identities or satisfaction with ready-made answers. Provisional and going in different directions, the notion of transition is radically open to new spaces and questions. In a more religious vein, there is the time-honored notion of *pilgrimage*, conceived as either an outward or upward journey, wherein one leaves the local and the familiar to search for the sacred, the global, or the divine. Whether one finds it or not is not the ultimate question, for in going, one leaves traces for others to follow and to critique. This brings me to the diasporic imagination, which occupies much of my current thinking.

DIASPORIC IMAGINATION

It made the colonies themselves, and even more, large tracts of the "post-colonial" world, always-already "diasporic" in relation to what might be thought of their cultures of origin. The notion that only the multi-cultural cities of the First World are "diasporia-ised" is a fantasy which can only be sustained by those who have never lived in the hybridized spaces of a Third World, so called "colonial," city.

Stuart Hall⁴¹

Diaspora has increasingly become a global phenomenon because of cultural and economic regrouping after decolonization, forced or voluntary migration, and transnational linkages in an age of global capitalism, communications, and transport. The term "diaspora," with its root in the Jewish experience, has become a traveling concept, appropriated by and extended to a wide range of cultural and geographical contexts: Jewish, Muslim, African, Latin American, Caribbean, Chinese, Japanese, Indian, Russian, Iranian, and so forth. In doing research for this original essay, I was surprised to find that there were almost 950 entries with the keyword "diaspora" in the titles within the Harvard University library system. On the Chinese diaspora alone, publications can be found issuing from the United States, Australia, France, Hong Kong, and Southeast Asia, in several languages. How can we capture and theorize the

40. James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 36.

41. Hall, "When Was the 'Post-colonial'?" 250.

diasporic moment, which has become such a far-reaching global experience at our historical juncture?

William Safran suggests that there are several characteristics of the Jewish diaspora, which include: (1) a collective forced dispersion of a religious and ethnic group from the "center" to two or more "peripheral" places, (2) retaining a collective memory or myth about the original homeland, (3) believing that they are not fully accepted by the host land, (4) regarding their ancestral homeland as their ideal home to be returned to when conditions are appropriate, (5) believing that they should be committed to the maintenance or restoration of the safety or prosperity of their homeland, and (6) continuing identification with that homeland, personally or vicariously.⁴² Although Safran wants to create something like an "ideal type" based on the Jewish experience of Babylonian captivity and the Roman exile and their contemporary history after the establishment of the Jewish nation-state, when the return to the homeland becomes a historical possibility, his description does not fit the experiences of all the Jewish people at all times.⁴³ In particular, Jewish people scattered throughout the world may have constructed their "homeland" differently (and not just in Palestine), and secularized Jews may have an understanding about their communal myth/history quite different from orthodox religious narratives.

Since the 1960s, the term "diaspora" has been more generalized to apply to many contexts besides the classic cases of Jewish, Greek, and Armenian diasporas. Such a development is the result of the migration of formerly colonized peoples to the metropolitan West, the weakening of the nation-state, and the displacement of people because of the massive transnational flows of capital and labor in late capitalism. Today, the term "diaspora" shares a broader semantic domain that includes words like immigrant, expatriate, refugee, migrant worker, exile community, and ethnic and racial minorities.⁴⁴ Diasporic discourse is currently appropriated by peoples who may not have experienced forced dispersion, who do not share the longing for a return to the homeland, or who may shuttle between the homeland and the host land in continuous commute. It connotes at once the experience of decentered and yet multiple-centered, displaced and yet constantly relocated, peoples who criss-cross many borders. Diasporic discourse has become a fluid and challenging site to raise questions about the construction of the center and the periphery,

42. William Safran, "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return," *Diaspora* 1 (1991): 83–84.

43. Jon Stratton, "(Dis)placing the Jews: Historicizing the Idea of Diaspora," *Diaspora* 6 (1997): 307.

44. Khachig Tölölian, "The Nation State and Its Others: In Lieu of a Preface," *Diaspora* 1 (1991): 4.

the negotiation of multiple loyalties and identities, the relationship between the "home" and the "world," the political and theoretical implications of border crossing, and the identity of the dislocated diasporized female subject. James Clifford describes the situation of those living in diaspora in this way:

Diaspora communities, constituted by displacement, are sustained in hybrid historical conjunctures. With varying degrees of urgency, they negotiate and resist the social realities of poverty, violence, policing, racism, and political and economic inequality. They articulate alternate public spheres, interpretive communities where critical alternatives (both traditional and emergent) can be expressed.⁴⁵

In his important book *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Paul Gilroy attempts to write back the diasporic history of black people in Britain, Europe, and the Caribbean into a history overdetermined by African American narratives. He argues that black culture is multiply centered, diasporic in the Atlantic space, and cannot be narrowly inscribed in an ethnically or racially defined tradition. He opines, "The history of the black Atlantic yields a course of lessons as to the instability and mutability of identities which are always unfinished, always being remade."⁴⁶ He is fond of using the images of the ships and sea voyages to imagine the map/history of crossing, migration, exploration, and travel. As his images of travel and movement from place to place may reflect a more masculinist script, I want to propose another trope to signify diasporic imagination. It is the image of the storyteller who selects pieces, fragments, and legends from her cultural and historical memory to weave together tales that are passed from generation to generation. These tales are refashioned and retold in each generation, with new materials added, to face new circumstances and to reinvent the identity of a people.

I want to conjure a female diasporic subject as multiply located, always doubly displaced, and having to negotiate an ambivalent past, while holding on to fragments of memories, cultures, and histories in order to dream of a different future. Such a female subject may not easily find a language with which to speak, as the heroine of Maxine Hong Kingston's classic Chinese American novel *The Woman Warrior* has her tongue clipped. And when she speaks, she has to constantly spin and weave the Chinese stories, legends, and myths into the new fabric of American culture and history.⁴⁷ In *The Joy Luck Club*, Amy Tan weaves a complex tapestry of women's memories across generations, with

45. Clifford, *Routes*, 261.

46. Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), xi.

47. Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts* (New York: Knopf, 1976).

both continuities and ruptures and elements from here and there—the United States and China.⁴⁸ The texture of the tapestry is rich and thick because there are two weavers at the same time—the mother and the daughter. The intergenerational difference of the weavers is clearly shown, as the same story may be knotted and tied differently to the whole piece, one showing the front, the other the reverse side in a quite contrasting manner.

Since the diasporic female subject is multiply located, it would require multiple tactics of intervention to unravel the dominant discourses and to negotiate a different cultural politics. In considering how to apply current theories in the emergent field of Chinese cultural and literary studies, Rey Chow demonstrates how the diasporic mind of "here" and "there" is constantly negotiating, shifting, and changing contexts. While she is skillfully trained in postmodern and poststructuralist theories, she is mindful that the postmodern moment may not have arrived in Third World countries, wherein the myths of modernity are still running strong. While adept in French and Euro-American feminist scholarship, she is keenly aware that much of this work is done in a relatively secure and safe environment, which may not be able to provide tools to weave the complex tales of women crossing borders, constantly shuttled between tradition and modernity.⁴⁹ At the same time, she does not let the postcolonial intellectuals in the West off the hook, challenging repeatedly their assumed positions as "authentic" spokespersons or informants of the Third World, when they are less vigilant about their own privileges of class, education, and sometimes gender.⁵⁰

The works of Rey Chow and other theorists in diasporic and borderland discourses have helped me raise new questions and make fresh connections in the feminist study of religion. If religious tradition has been deployed to provide powerful narratives of "home" and "roots" for people, feminists need to interrogate how such narratives of communal identities have been constructed leaving out women and others whose identities have been policed or negated. Judith Plaskow's classic text *Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective* is important not only as the first book-length work of Jewish feminist theology, but also as a heart-wrenching reminder of how women's participation had been disallowed or discredited at critical moments in the shaping of communal story and memory.⁵¹ Plaskow's work points to the need

48. Amy Tan, *The Joy Luck Club* (New York: Putnam's, 1989).

49. Rey Chow, *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 55–72.

50. *Ibid.*, 17.

51. Judith Plaskow, *Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1990).

for women to examine, however painful the process may be, the myth/history that a diasporic people have created and retold for survival and continuity. Bringing questions and ruptures to the "continuous" memory, Plaskow opens new possibilities for renegotiating identity and forms of community. At the same time, one has also to be mindful of the complicit roles women have played in spawning the myths of origin and upholding the rituals and celebrations that put them in a subordinate position, while simultaneously giving shape and meaning to "home" in a less than friendly environment. Laura Levitt writes about her ambivalent search for "home" as a Jew in the feminist discourse and as a female subject in rabbinic discourse. She writes:

This home was the site of a great many conflicting desires. It was a place of both comfort and terror. The knowledge that home could be both de/ and re/constructed was visceral. . . . From the beginning I was engaged in a process of reconfiguring home on many fronts.⁵²

Levitt's experience of finding herself simultaneously situated on the boundaries of different discourses, shifting in and out, is shared by Islamic feminists who must resist multiple axes of patriarchal marginalization at the same time: globalization, Islamization, and local nationalisms. With Islam as a transnational tradition and Mecca as the "home" of Muslims, Islamic feminists have to find their way through the dense web of significations of their national/transnational, religious, and familial narratives. Miriam Cooke observes that they have to reject the Islamic groups' using women as passive cultural emblems, resist the patronizing "compassion" of Western feminists, and sustain their struggle through imagining an alternative vision of women in Islam. Since these Islamic feminists have to balance "their collective and individual identities while interacting with multiple others," Cooke argues that they have developed a multiple critique: "a multilayered discourse that allows them to engage with and criticize the various individuals, institutions, and systems that limit and oppress them while making sure that they are not caught in their own rhetoric."⁵³

The image of having to negotiate with multiple others to develop an oppositional discourse and praxis can also be aptly used to describe a postcolonial feminist interpretation of Christianity. Diasporic imagination has to decenter and decompose the ubiquitous logic and "common sense" that says that the cultural form and norm of Christianity is defined by the West. It resists a pre-

determined and prescribed universalism and a colonial mode of thinking, by insisting on reterritorialization of the West and by tracing how the so-called center and periphery of Christianity have always been doubly inscribed and mutually constituted. I have argued that Christian feminist theology is an intercultural discourse. For example, the nineteenth-century Western feminists developed their sense of superiority by deploying racial rhetoric and by portraying women in the colonies as waiting for their benevolence and their "gospel of gentility." Reading history cross-culturally, we can see the policing of European and American women's sexuality in the Victorian period occurred at a time when colonial and missionary discourse condemned promiscuity, polygamy, foot binding, and veiling in what has been called "colonialist feminism." A diasporic consciousness, which is located here and there, reads back metropolitan history and regimes of knowledge from multiple vantage points because people in diaspora are "outsiders" from within.⁵⁴

Diasporic imagination recognizes the diversity of diasporas and honors the different histories and memories. The diasporic experiences of being a Chinese in the United States are different from those of a Chinese in Indonesia or in Peru. The Jewish, Armenian, Chinese, Japanese, and Asian Indian diasporic communities in the United States are different not only because of history and religious tradition, but also because of class, race, and ethnicity. As different "outsiders" within, the diasporic communities can learn from others to forge new cultural, religious, and political coalitions. I have been interested in Jewish feminist discourse for some time because I want to learn how Jewish women have reimagined their tradition, which is so much intertwined with Christianity. At the same time, as a Christian theologian, I have to pay attention to the charge of anti-Jewish and anti-Semitic tendencies that surface not only in white feminist theological reconstruction, but may also appear in the work of some Third World feminists.⁵⁵ But I have begun to see that apart from the Jewish-Christian axis, there are other axes that I can relate to Jewish women's experiences. In my postcolonial study of Christianity, I have found anti-Semitism, women's subordination, and colonialism as operating in the same episteme of nineteenth-century European religious discourse. The critique of liberalism and colonialism as two sides of the same coin by Laura Levitt has shed further light on the intersection of postcolonial critique, feminism, and religious discourse.⁵⁶ The

52. Laura Levitt, *Jews and Feminism: The Ambivalent Search for Home* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 2.

53. Miriam Cooke, "Multiple Critique: Islamic Feminist Rhetorical Strategies," in *Postcolonialism, Feminism, and Colonial Discourse*, ed. Laura E. Donaldson and Kwok Pui-lan (New York: Routledge, 2002), 151.

54. Patricia Hill Collins, "Learning from the Outsider Within Revisited," in idem, *Fighting Words*, 3–10.

55. Amy-Jill Levine, "Lilies of the Field and Wandering Jews: Biblical Scholarship, Women's Roles, and Social Location," in *Transformative Encounters: Jesus and Women Re-viewed*, ed. Ingrid Rosa Kitzberger (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 329–52.

56. Levitt, *Jews and Feminism*, 51–62.

imperial impulse of cleansing the Jews as the Others within Europe had much to do with the universalizing of Western culture and homogenizing the Others from without. The evolutionary understanding of religion in the late nineteenth century, for instance, was premised on Christianity's displacement of Judaism on the one hand and the falsification and misrepresentation of other wisdom traditions on the other.

As a Chinese in diaspora, I also detect a Chinese-Jewish axis that features prominently in my own consciousness. A quite significant number of leading scholars in Chinese studies in the United States are Jewish. My professor at Harvard, who guided me in the study of Chinese culture and listened patiently to my feminist critique, was the late Professor Benjamin Schwartz. A Jewish scholar of great learning, he had once spoken about the Tao of the Chinese in a Jewish synagogue. Some Jewish scholars, such as Vera Schwarcz, have found study of Chinese history to be a fruitful comparison with Jewish cultural memory. As a scholar of China and daughter of holocaust survivors, Schwarcz uncovers the resonance of narratives of Chinese intellectuals recovering from the Cultural Revolution and the halting tales of her parents. Her book *Bridge across Broken Time* seeks to create a bridge between Chinese and Jewish memories.⁵⁷ From the other side, the Jewish diasporic discourse and the critique of the narratives of "homeland" offer an invaluable mirror for my critical interrogation of Chinese identity, whether it is founded on the land, a "shared" tradition, or an "imagined community."⁵⁸ The Jewish diasporic discourse, in its radical critique of the Zionist ideology and the questioning of the power of the state of Israel, offers profound testimony to the richness and strength of the Jewish tradition, which provides comfort and consolation in times of weakness and prophetic witness in times of power.

A diasporic consciousness finds similarities and differences in both familiar territories and unexpected corners; one catches glimpses of oneself in a fleeting moment or in a fragment in someone else's story. For nearly seven years Indian diasporic writer Bharati Mukherjee could not write anything because of her experience of racism in Canada, and feared she would never write again. She was encouraged when she read Bernard Malamud's stories about Russian and Jewish people in the Lower East Side of Manhattan, and saw that "his characters were hers, his themes hers" and took up her pen again.⁵⁹ André

57. Vera Schwarcz, *Bridge across Broken Time: Chinese and Jewish Cultural Memory* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1998).

58. Benedict R. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (New York: Verso, 1991).

59. See the introduction written by Mukherjee's husband, Clark Blaise, in *The Workshop*, ed. Tom Grimes (New York: Hyperion, 1999), 163.

Aciman, a Jewish writer originally from Alexandria who writes about exile, diaspora, and dispossession and who calls himself "a literary pilgrim," may be right when he says:

We write about our life, not to see it as it was, but to see as we wish others might see it, so we may borrow their gaze and begin to see our life through their eyes, not ours. Only then, would we begin to understand our life story, or to tolerate it and ultimately, perhaps, to find it beautiful.⁶⁰

60. André Aciman, "A Literary Pilgrim Progresses to the Past," in *Writers on Writing: Collected Essays from "The New York Times"* (New York: Henry Holt, 2001), 6-7.

Searching for Wisdom

Sources of Postcolonial Feminist Theologies

My beads mark my presence
Beads of wisdom, beads of sweat

*Mercy Amba Oduyoye*¹

My mother, of course, didn't know all these ideas, all these theories about the position of women. But she knew all these things in practice.

*Rigoberta Menchú*²

In the summer of 1992 I met Felipe and Elena Ixcot and their children during a conference in Stony Point, New York, that commemorated the five centuries of struggles of Native peoples in the Americas. Felipe and his family were leaders of the weeklong event, during which they graciously shared their creation myths and stories of their Mayan culture, as well as playing the marimba, introducing us into the enchanting world of the Mayans. I vividly remember one afternoon when Elena told us the meanings of the symbols and animals on the colorfully woven costume she was wearing. Demonstrating how she wrapped her braid with a colorful piece of cloth, she said she wore the braid on the left side when the sun rose up and on the right side when the sun went down. Even though the conquistadors had killed many Mayan people and burned their books and stolen their artifacts, trying to convince the world that Mayan civilization was destroyed, the Mayans have managed to keep their her-

1. Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1995), vii.

2. Rigoberta Menchú, *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*, trans. Ann Wright (London: Verso, 1984), 221.

itage, continue to sing their songs, and pass their wisdom on to their children from generation to generation.

About five hundred years ago, Africans, Asians, people in the Americas, the Caribbean, and Pacific peoples were forced to join the emerging world order with Europe as its center. The genocide of indigenous peoples, the colonial empire building, the imposition of slavery, and the systemic rape and sexual oppression of subjugated women led to the accumulation of wealth and power in the North and poverty and marginalization of people in the South. Since the Second World War, most of the colonies have become independent political entities, but they have been subjected to the continued control of the West through transnational capitalism, the mass media, information technology, international debt, and high-tech military intervention. The rapid transformation in the late 1980s has led to the redrawing of the world map, the reexamining of the legacy of the cold war, and the revisioning of the world order. Political scientist Samuel Huntington has predicted the "new world order" would be a clash of civilizations; his conceptualization of civilization and his forecast were much debated after September 11.³ Another suggested it will be a struggle between the "Jihad" and the "McWorld"—the "Jihad" referring to religious and tribal fundamentalism and "McWorld" meaning global consumerist capitalism.⁴ What will be the prospects of the formerly subjugated and colonized peoples in this "new world order"?

This chapter raises questions concerning the sources and resources of feminist theology from a postcolonial perspective. It scrutinizes the categories that are traditionally understood to be important sources of theology—experience, Scripture, tradition, and reason—and exposes how they have masked or excluded the voices of multiply marginalized women. A postcolonial feminist theology will have to look beyond the confines of Eurocentric tradition and the logic of the "Man of Reason" to be able to articulate the theological visions of those African women who continue to mark their presence with their beads and the Mayan women who persist in wearing their hair according to their tradition as a sign of preserving their culture.

WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE

Since feminist theologians cannot rely on the androcentric interpretation of Scripture and church tradition for truth claims, they have appealed to women's

3. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996).

4. Benjamin R. Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld: How Globalism and Tribalism Are Reshaping the World* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1996).

experience as a source and criterion of truth. Women's experience has been invoked to challenge the orthodox notions of revelation and dogma by exposing their historical and constructed character. It has also served as the basis to debunk and demystify the androcentric bias of humanism in liberal theology.⁵ As Rosemary Radford Ruether has said: "The uniqueness of feminist theology lies not in its use of the criterion of experience but rather in its use of *women's* experience, which has been almost entirely shut out of theological reflection in the past."⁶ But women's experience is the most contested source of feminist theology. First, as Grace Jantzen has pointed out, the concept of experience has deep roots in masculinist Enlightenment thinking, and the appeal to religious experience in the philosophy of religion gained prominence during the nineteenth century, a time of the triumph of imperialism and capitalism.⁷ Second, feminist theologians have different opinions on what constitutes women's experience and how experience, given its diverse and changing nature, can be normative in theology. I would like to analyze four issues that have emerged in the discussion of the use of women's experience in feminist theology: the truth claim of theology based on women's experience, the universalizing tendency in feminist discourse, the postmodern challenge to the notion of "subject," and the politics of difference and solidarity among women.

Euro-American feminist theology, emerging in the late 1960s, was influenced by the intellectual climate and feminist theory developed at the time. The early wave of feminist theory, produced by Sherry Ortner, Gayle Rubin, and Nancy Chodorow in the 1970s, did not pay sufficient attention to cultural and historical specificity. These theorists were trying to search for grand theoretical explanations for the social reproduction of gender and women's universal subordinate status. The earlier works of Mary Daly and other white feminist theologians assumed that patriarchy was the common enemy of women, and set out to exorcise Christianity of its androcentric symbols and practices. But as Delores Williams has pointed out, there are substantial differences between white women's and black women's experiences of patriarchy in the United States. While white women are oppressed by patriarchy, they at the same time benefit from the protection and privilege bestowed by the patriarchal white-controlled American institutions. Such protection is not offered to black women.⁸ Williams

further observes that while white feminists give priority to issues such as rape, domestic violence, women's work, inclusive language, the gender of God, and so on, black women focus on the issues of physical survival, economic justice, educational opportunities, political participation, and encountering God as family (masculine and feminine, father, mother, and child).⁹

In the 1980s, the use of women's experience as a foundation or normative claim for feminist theology has been challenged by white women scholars. Sheila Greeve Davaney argued for a historicist understanding of women's existence and pointed to the futility of the search for sure foundations in feminist theology.¹⁰ I do not think that the feminist theologians she critiqued, such as Rosemary Radford Ruether and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, were looking for ontological or metaphysical foundations for feminist theology, for they too understood women's experience as historically constructed. Davaney is more helpful when she warns against universalizing white women's experience to cover up racial and class privileges, when the appeal to women's experience is to "assert a universal and common essence that somehow defined women as women, and that laid the basis for feminist solidarity as well as providing the content for feminist reflection."¹¹ Responding to the charge of universalizing white women's experience, Schüssler Fiorenza proposes to shift from patriarchy, based on gender dualism, to kyriarchy (the rule of emperor/master/lord/father/husband over his subordinates), to signal more comprehensive, interlocking, and multiplicative forms of oppression.¹² In a colonial situation, the fact that there is a foreign kyriarchy superimposed on and intersecting with the local one requires a much more complicated analysis than her model has so far laid out. In such a case, the people of the colonizing nation, including the rich and the poor, men and women, dominate and exert control over the colonized people by imposing their systems of power.¹³ For instance, once in the colonies, white women enjoyed freedom and power not accorded them at home because of their relatively privileged status.

9. Ibid., 52.

10. Sheila Greeve Davaney, "Problems in Feminist Theory: Historicity and the Search for Sure Foundations," in *Embodied Love: Sensuality and Relationship as Feminist Values*, ed. Paula M. Cooley, Sharon A. Farmer, and Mary Ellen Ross (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987), 79–85.

11. Sheila Greeve Davaney, "Continuing the Story, but Departing the Text: A Historicist Interpretation of Feminist Norms in Theology," in *Horizons in Feminist Theology: Identity, Tradition, and Norm*, ed. Rebecca S. Chopp and Sheila Greeve Davaney (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 200.

12. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet* (New York: Continuum, 1994), 14.

13. Musa W. Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000), 36.

5. Mary McClintock Fulkerson, *Changing the Subject: Women's Discourses and Feminist Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 51–52.

6. Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983), 13.

7. Grace M. Jantzen, *Becoming Divine: Toward a Feminist Philosophy of Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 116, 118.

8. Delores S. Williams, "The Color of Feminism; or, Speaking the Black Women's Tongue," *Journal of Religious Thought* 43, no. 1 (1986): 48–49.

Given the fact that women live in different, socially constructed worlds, what are the factors giving rise to a universalized way of thinking about women's experience? In *Inessential Woman*, Elizabeth Spelman traces the philosophical roots of this problem in the Western tradition.¹⁴ Plato and Aristotle, she points out, used the argument that human natures are different to justify the unequal position of different groups in society. To counteract such claims, feminist thinkers such as Simone de Beauvoir and Nancy Chodorow choose not to highlight the differences among women to avoid a hierarchical ranking, and to posit that sexism affects all women alike. Spelman shows that "the notion of a generic 'woman' functions in feminist thought much the way the notion of generic 'man' has functioned in western philosophy: it obscures the heterogeneity of women."¹⁵

Universalizing, however, is more than the philosophical trap Spelman suggests. It is also rooted in the complex social and material contexts of the expansion of the West and the superimposition of Western cultures onto other peoples. Samuel Huntington has rightly pointed out: "Universalism is the ideology of the West for confrontation with non-Western cultures. . . . The non-Wests see as Western what the West sees as universal."¹⁶ The assumption that the human experience of Western people is the norm for all people is not just an intellectual blind spot, but is heavily influenced by the colonial experience. The appeal to universal human experience and the inability to respect diverse cultures are expressions of a colonizing motive: the incorporation of the Other into one's own culture or perspective.

Just as white women in North America have to investigate how their gendered selves are also racialized, European women have to ask how their construction of gender is affected by their experience of colonizing others. Historian Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham has pointed out that the cult of true womanhood that taught women to be gentle, domestic, and ladylike in nineteenth-century America was not applicable for black women such as Sojourner Truth, who had to plow, plant, and gather into barn. Furthermore, the cult of white womanhood was made possible only with the exploitation of the labor of black women.¹⁷ Borrowing insights from Higginbotham, we have to ask in what ways the accumulation of wealth and the exploitation of women in the colonies affected Victorian conceptions of womanhood. How did the experi-

14. Elizabeth V. Spelman, *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988).

15. *Ibid.*, ix.

16. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, 66.

17. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, "African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race," *Signs* 17 (1992): 256-57.

ences of colonialism influence the literary imagination of British women? In the rush to reclaim Jane Eyre as the heroine of a "feminist" novel, why have so many feminists forgotten the imperialist impulse that set the stage for Charlotte Brontë's story?¹⁸

At a time when women are claiming their historical and theological subjectivity, postmodern and poststructuralist theories challenge the very notion of the "subject." These theoreticians point out that there is no autonomous and transcendent "I" that is not marked by social coding and discursively constituted. The ensuing debate among feminists focuses on whether we can speak of "women," of "subjectivity," and of "agency" and on the implications of these concepts for the struggle against injustice. Feminist theorists who work within a poststructuralist framework emphasize the subject as constructed by discourse. Others who are suspicious that this will lead to "no reality outside the text" argue for women's subjectivity and agency for social change. I will discuss this debate more fully in chapter 5.

In the United States, some of the second-generation feminist theologians use postmodern and poststructuralist frameworks to critique the essentialism of the earlier feminists. Rebecca Chopp, for example, points out that it was the reliance on the theoretical assumptions of modern theory that led the first generation of feminist theologians to universalize their experience and adopt an essentialist viewpoint. She critiques the basic tenets of modern theory, including the belief in a coherent self with essential structure, the importance attached to human reason, and the assumption that language is transparent and without ambiguities.¹⁹ But Chopp's postmodern critique does not interrogate the racial prejudice of many of the influential thinkers who shaped modern consciousness, including Locke, Hume, and Kant. Their racist theories have justified the institution of slavery and the expansion of colonial powers to the ends of the earth.

While the critique of essentialism of first-generation feminist theologians has become commonplace,²⁰ Beverly Harrison has warned that the use of postmodern and poststructuralist frameworks is not without problems. The first generation of feminist theologians, she retorts, are more involved with the women's liberation movement and the structural changes of the church and society, while some second-generation feminists have been preoccupied with

18. This insight is from Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," *Critical Inquiry* 12 (1985): 244-47.

19. Rebecca S. Chopp, "Theorizing Feminist Theology," in Chopp and Davaney, *Horizons in Feminist Theology*, 216-17.

20. See, e.g., Chopp and Davaney, *Horizons in Feminist Theology* and the critical conversations about the book in "Roundtable Discussion: From Generation to Generation," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 15, no. 1 (1999): 102-38.

feminist theory current in the academy. For Harrison, those feminist theologians who are more interested in correct theory than political activism risk losing touch with the rank and file of the women's movement. They will be easily co-opted by the predominantly white neoliberal academy and use language and theory that are too abstract, understandable only by the elites.²¹ As I have noted in chapter 1, second-generation black scholars and Asian scholars have also relied on postmodern and poststructuralist theories to critique the alleged essentialism in the construction of "Asianness" and "blackness." I think Harrison's observation may also be applicable, and her warning should be heeded. I do not deny that we need a pluralistic and diverse understanding of *mujerista*, Asian, or black women beyond the stereotypes, but I am keenly aware of the need for strategic deployment of certain generalized representations by a subalternized group at a particular stage of the political struggle, while keeping in mind that these representations are provisional, open to change, and negotiable.²²

Since feminist theory and theology have shifted from focusing on women's commonalities to theorizing about women's differences, how can we speak of solidarity across differences? Two dominant metaphors have been offered to denote the solidarity of women in feminist theological discourse: "sisterhood" and "women-church." In *Beyond God the Father*, Mary Daly suggests that women who left the patriarchal church can form the "sisterhood of cosmic covenant."²³ The use of "sisterhood" has been criticized because of its familial ideology, its bourgeois individualism, its assumption of the nurturing and reproductive roles of women within the family, and its confining to women with common roots.²⁴ Furthermore, Daly displayed condescension toward her Third World "sisters" when she can only imagine Indian women as burned-alive immolated subjects, Chinese women as eroticized feet-bound subjects, and African women as geni-

21. Beverly Wildung Harrison, "Feminist Thea(o)logies at the Millennium," in *Liberating Eschatology: Essays in Honor of Letty M. Russell*, ed. Margaret A. Farley and Serene Jones (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 156–71.

22. See the multilayered discussion of cultural identities in Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 222–37. For a discussion of strategic essentialism, see Serene Jones, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology: Cartographies of Grace* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 42–48.

23. Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), 155.

24. See Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, "The Personal Is Not Political Enough," *Marxist Perspectives* 2 (1979–80): 94–113; and Elisabetta Donini, "Women and a Politics of Diversity: A Perspective of Radical Immanence," in *Ecofeminism and Theology*, ed. Elizabeth Green and Mary Grey, Yearbook of the European Society of Women in Theological Research, no. 2 (Kampen, the Netherlands: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1994), 65.

tally mutilated subjects.²⁵ And we have to take note of how the space metaphor is used in "global sisterhood" or "cosmic sisterhood." Daly says that the new sisterhood occupies a new space. At times she refers to this space as abstract and mental, "a province of the mind."²⁶ At other times, she describes such space in concrete spatial terms: "our space set apart," "it is not static space but constantly moving space," and "its center is on the boundaries of patriarchy's spaces."²⁷ Daly's spatial imagery suggests there is a common space we can call "ours" and there is a "transparent space" in which we can find each other and ourselves because everything is visible under our gaze.²⁸ A postcolonial perspective must insist that not all women are included in the pronoun "our," the boundaries of patriarchy's space are not the same, and the transparent space is constructed because of the power difference implicit in the white gaze.

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza has proposed the much-debated image of women-church. Her explanation of "women-church" has been constantly refined in response to critics²⁹ and she currently prefers to render it as "*ekklesia* of wo/men."³⁰ *Ekklesia* is a political term denoting an assembly of free citizens to decide their own affairs. Schüssler Fiorenza admits that the translation of the term to "church" does not hold together the double meanings of "democratic assembly" and "church."³¹ In response to postmodern challenges, she introduces the term "wo/men" to indicate that "women are not a unitary social group but rather are fragmented and fractured by structures of race, class, religious affiliation, heterosexuality, colonialism, age, and health."³²

In a postcolonial setting, "*ekklesia* of wo/men" can only be understood by a few academic elite. "Wo/men" is hardly translatable because other languages may not have similar devices to indicate the "fracture" and "fragmentation." Except in Korea where there is a small women-church in Seoul, the notion of women-church is a nonstarter in Asia because the church is associated not only with patriarchal authority but also with colonial power. Whether as the assembly of self-identified women and supportive men, or as a feminist space

25. Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978).

26. Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 156.

27. *Ibid.*, 157.

28. Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose, "Introduction: Women's Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies," in *Writing Women and Space: Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies* (New York: Guilford Press, 1994), 6.

29. See Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 5–7.

30. Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet*, 24–27.

31. Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said*, 128.

32. Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet*, 24.

or public sphere to articulate a counterhegemonic discourse against kyriarchal power, the concept of women-church has not made explicit the material conditions in which women of such diversity can gather and work together. Why do formerly colonized subjects want to gather with their oppressors or to occupy the same space? How can we guarantee that such women-church is not a false inclusion, a democracy dictated by the interests of the powerful, and a space marked by the interests of the few?

I agree with womanist theologian M. Shawn Copeland when she urges us to go beyond the clichéd rhetoric of solidarity and raise the question of the moral obligation of speech in relation to action.³³ She elaborates:

Solidarity is a wrenching task: to stand up for justice in the midst of injustice and domination; to take up simplicity in the midst of affluence and comfort; to embrace integrity in the midst of collusion and co-optation; to contest the gravitational pull of domination.³⁴

She does not see difference as a problem for solidarity, because she insists "not difference, but indifference, ignorance, egoism, and selfishness are obstacles to solidarity."³⁵ The plurality of feminist theological discourse will be a threat and a fragmentation if the politics of identity leads to competition and parochialism. This happens when identity is seen as a possession or treated like a commodity to be exchanged and competed for in the market. On the other hand, the multiplicity of theological voices will provide mutual critique and enrichment if we understand that identity is always constructed in relation to others. We cannot understand ourselves without listening to others, especially to those we have oppressed or have the potential to oppress. Such critical engagement is the beginning of solidarity.

SCRIPTURE

For women who choose to remain within the Christian tradition, the Bible is an important source and resource for theology. Using the critical lens of a hermeneutics of suspicion, feminist scholarship has critiqued many traditional claims regarding the Bible. Feminist theologians have challenged the authority of the Bible, the boundary of the canon, and the androcentric bias of the text and the history of interpretation. Seeking to construct feminist models of

33. M. Shawn Copeland, "Toward a Critical Christian Feminist Theology of Solidarity," in *Women and Theology*, ed. Mary Ann Hinsdale and Phyllis H. Kaminski (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1995), 18.

34. *Ibid.*, 29–30.

35. *Ibid.*, 24.

interpretation, they have scrutinized the master's tools, created feminist frames of meaning, and developed different norms of interpretation. Reconstructing women's early Christian history, they examined the everyday lives of women, women's religious leadership in church and synagogue, and the marginalization of women in the patriarchalization of the church. Reclaiming the Bible as bread and not stone for women, they proposed new liturgical usage of the Bible, alternative methods of feminist Bible study, and liberating paradigms of teaching biblical studies.³⁶

These issues are significant for women in diverse contexts. In the past two decades, feminist scholars from the Third World and from minority communities in the United States have increasingly contributed to the emerging feminist biblical scholarship.³⁷ From a postcolonial situation, we need to discuss a few issues before the Bible can be used as a resource for feminist theology: the use of the Bible in colonial discourse, the influence of colonialism in the academic study of the Bible, and the development of postcolonial readings of the Bible.

The Bible is an integral part of the colonial discourse. The introduction of the Bible and Christian faith to foreign lands was used to justify the political and military aggression of the West. For example, Hong Kong was ceded to the British in the same unequal treaty of 1842 that granted permission for missionaries to preach in the seaports of China. To teach the Bible and to spread the gospel were seen as the "civilizing mission" of the West, or the "white man's burden." Selective passages from the Bible were emphasized to justify this cause and to show the superiority of Christianity. For example, the Matthean commission of Jesus to go and make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:19) and the Acts of the Apostles were mobilized in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to justify missionary efforts. These texts were dormant and disregarded by Reformation thinkers, but were reinvoked during the evangelical revival, which coincided with the rise of Western imperialism.³⁸

Revered as the revealed Word of God, the Bible was seen as a prized possession of the West. The Bible thus served as a signifier that functioned to support Western beliefs in the inferiority and deficiency of "heathen" cultures.

36. For a helpful guide to the breadth of feminist scholarship on the Bible, see Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, ed., *Searching the Scriptures*, vol. 1, *A Feminist Introduction* (New York: Crossroad, 1993).

37. See, e.g., Renita J. Weems, *Battered Love: Marriage, Sex, and Violence in the Hebrew Prophets* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995); Elsa Tamez, *The Amnesty of Grace: Justification by Faith from a Latin American Perspective*, trans. Sharon H. Ringe (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993); and Kwok Pui-lan, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1995).

38. R. S. Sugirtharajah, "The Postcolonial Exploration of Collusion and Construction in Biblical Interpretation," in *The Postcolonial Bible*, ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 95.

Furthermore, revelation through the Bible was regarded as special revelation. Insights and wisdom offered by other traditions could at best be classified as general revelation. This biased view reinforced the superiority of Christianity in the evolutionary scheme of "religions." Even the "great" theologians of the twentieth century were not immune from seeing the world from this superiority complex. Although Karl Barth insisted that God judges all "religions," including Christianity, he upheld the Bible as God's special revelation, more important than other revelations. Karl Rahner, in his generosity, would label people of other faiths as "anonymous Christians."³⁹

The introduction of the Bible to other cultures was a mixed blessing for women. In order to teach women to read the Bible, Christian missions established girls' schools, catechism classes, and women's Bible study classes. However, the curriculum of these mission girls' schools was meant to instill the cult of true womanhood and to reinforce the domesticity of women.⁴⁰ Because of sexual propriety, women missionaries were sent to mission fields to work among women. These women missionaries wrote voluminous amounts of material about their lives in foreign lands in mission pamphlets, local religious news, and memoirs in order to generate support for mission. Such religious literature popularized the idea that "heathen" women were miserable, groping in the dark, waiting for the light to be brought to them. Before the advent of the mass media, this widespread literature shaped the perception of Third World women by European and American women, a legacy that had far-reaching effects in the past and continues to affect us in the present.

While the ethnocentrism of the missionaries working "in the frontiers" has been criticized, the academics studying the Bible in the metropolitan centers of Europe were seen as immune from cultural imperialism. In the past, little reflection has been given to the relationship between the emergence of the historical-critical method and the ascendancy of European power. There are two reasons for this oversight. First, the historical-critical method was seen as a progressive tool to challenge church dogma and the authority of the church in the West. Second, the method was considered by its practitioners as scientific, objective, and value-neutral. Focusing on the bygone eras of Hebrew history and the Greco-Roman world, historical-critical research was not supposed to be clouded by the political interests of its time.

However, if we examine historical criticism from an international frame, a different picture begins to emerge. I can cite as an example the first quest for

39. Karl Rahner, "Observations on the Problem of 'Anonymous Christian,'" in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 14 (New York: Seabury, 1976), 280-94.

40. See Kwok Pui-lan, *Chinese Women and Christianity, 1860-1927* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 104-6.

the historical Jesus, a paramount concern of historical criticism.⁴¹ Some of the key spokespersons of the first quest were not disinterested scholars. David Friedrich Strauss (1808-74) was an ardent supporter of a strong and unified Germany under the hegemony of Prussia, and defended the Prusso-Austrian war. Ernest Renan (1823-92), who was passionate about French landscape and taste, went to Phoenicia and Syria under the auspices of Napoleon III. His *La Vie de Jésus* reflected his love of French high culture and portrays a Jesus that served bourgeois interests. An interpreter of Bach's organ music, Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965) left behind not only the classic *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, but also an autobiography detailing his life as a "jungle doctor."⁴² Labeling African people as "primitive creatures" without much progress, his autobiography displayed deep-seated cultural superiority.

The expansion of Europe into other parts of the world affected these scholars' conceptualization of both Western civilization and Christianity. The comparative study of myths and "religions" at the time showed that "primitive" people were mythical, superstitious, and idolatrous. To prove that Christianity was superior to other wisdom traditions and could withstand the criticism of science, all the nonsense of virgin birth, miracles, and supernatural happening surrounding Jesus had to be questioned. This can be done only by a "critical" and "scientific" study of the Bible, which would lead to a historical Jesus free from the mythological trappings. The quest of the historical Jesus was far from being value-neutral. The political interests of Europe determined the questions to be asked, the gathering of data, the framework of interpretation, and the final outcome.

The rise of the historical-critical method must be situated with the cultural space and political configurations of its time. As Shawn Kelley has written:

The nineteenth century was a time of vast social engineering, fueled by the widely held category of race. We should also note that this is the formative period of modern biblical scholarship, when its categories were developed, when seminal theories were proposed and debated, and when methods were developed and institutionalized. Is it possible that biblical scholarship could exist untouched by the ideological context during which it was conceived?⁴³

41. Kwok Pui-lan, "Jesus/the Native: Biblical Studies from a Postcolonial Perspective," in *Teaching the Bible: The Discourses and Politics of Biblical Pedagogy*, ed. Fernando R. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1998), 69-85.

42. Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (1906; reprint, New York: Macmillan, 1968), and *Out of My Life and Thought: An Autobiography* (New York: Henry Holt, 1949).

43. Shawn Kelley, *Racializing Jesus: Race, Ideology, and the Formation of Modern Biblical Scholarship* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 25.

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Thus, we must begin to question the assumptions about historical consciousness, historicity, and historiography of the so-called scientific historical-critical method. The historical questions raised by this method may be too limiting for people in other contexts. As Renita Weems has said, the negative result of the historical criticism has been "to undermine marginalized reading communities by insisting that their questions and experiences are superfluous to Scripture and their interpretation illegitimate, because of their failure to remain objective."⁴⁴ In fact, other cultures have their own assumptions about history and their own historical method. A *Western* historical criticism should not be taken as universally valid, because *Western* notions of historical process are not universally valid. We have to learn from other cultures insights to broaden our historical imagination.⁴⁵

The discussion of postcolonial interpretation of the Bible has gained momentum among Third World scholars and intellectuals within the indigenous and diasporic communities.⁴⁶ R. S. Sugirtharajah has said that the postcolonial perspective will have to go beyond mimicry of Western critical method and an Orientalist valorization of ancient precolonial cultures.⁴⁷ It has to negotiate a different past, one that is not reified, glorified, or unitary. Employing tools from critical theory and cultural studies, postcolonial criticism exposes the relationship between power and knowledge, challenges both imperialist and nationalist claims, and maintains the posture of a "fighting literature." There are several characteristics of postcolonial criticism: (1) it challenges the totalizing forms of Western interpretation, exposing its co-optation by imperial interests and destabilizing its frame of meaning; (2) it is a counterhegemonic discourse, paying special attention to the hidden and neglected voices in the Bible; (3) it places the Bible within the multifaith context of many Third World situations; (4) it encourages and welcomes contributions from marginalized groups that have not been fully heard: the Dalits, the indigenous peoples, the migrants, people in diaspora and in borderland, and especially women in these communities; and (5) it debates with and draws insights from other hermeneutical frameworks, such as postmodernism.

Postcolonial feminist criticism looks at the Bible from the vantage point of women multiply oppressed because of race, class, conquest, and colonialism.

44. Renita J. Weems, "Reading *Her Way* through the Struggle: African American Women and the Bible," in *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Cain Hope Felder (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 66.

45. See, e.g., Brian K. Blount, *Cultural Interpretation: Reorienting New Testament Criticism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995).

46. A series titled "The Bible and Postcolonialism" has been published by Sheffield Academic Press with R. S. Sugirtharajah as the series editor.

47. See R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism: Contesting the Interpretations* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1998).

Laura Donaldson, a scholar of Cherokee and Scotch-Irish descent, has objected that feminist biblical scholars have often used the single-axis framework of gender in their interpretation, without paying attention simultaneously to other power dynamics at work in the text. She points out that while feminist scholars condemned the extravagance of violence, torture, murder, and dismemberment of the unnamed concubine in Judges 19,⁴⁸ they have not equally denounced the slaughtering of the Benjaminites and the burning of their cities in Judges 20. That story of war against the Benjaminites has been used to justify the genocide of the Native Americans and the taking of their land.⁴⁹ A postcolonial reading needs to pay attention not only to violence against women, but also to the political conflicts between different peoples, and the ways the stories in Judges help pave the way for the rise of the monarchy in Israel.

Postcolonial feminist criticism also examines how marginalized women in the Bible are rendered invisible, consigned to signify the Other, and denied speech. As we have seen, Delores Williams has used the story of Hagar to develop a womanist hermeneutics, arguing that there is not only the tradition of liberation in the Bible, but also the tradition of the struggle for survival and for quality of life. The Hagar story illustrates the multiple oppression of black women and reveals the tension and hidden scars of their relationship with white women in America. Another story that has been frequently discussed among postcolonial critics is that of the Syrophenician woman (Mark 7:24–30; Matt. 15:21–28). White feminist critics have moved her from the margin to the center by either reclaiming her as a foremother of gentile Christians or by praising her faith and her wit, which enables her to win the argument over Jesus and broaden Jesus' perspective toward the Gentiles. Postcolonial critics, however, emphasize that she is a woman of other faith and her story is inscribed within the master discourse of the Christian canon and interpreted to justify mission to the Gentiles.⁵⁰ In addition, the significance of the daughter possessed by the spirit is highlighted to show how her illness, which is considered taboo, challenges the boundaries of normalcy, health, and order of society.⁵¹

Postcolonial studies contribute to the feminist study of the Bible in some significant ways, as I will discuss in the next chapter. It questions the presumptions and ideologies behind current paradigms of the study of women and

48. See, e.g., Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 65–91.

49. Laura Donaldson's presentation at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, Boston, 2000.

50. See Kwok Pui-lan, "Overlapping Communities and Multicultural Hermeneutics," in *A Feminist Companion to Reading the Bible: Approaches, Methods, and Strategies*, ed. Athalya Brenner and Carole Fontaine (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 103–18.

51. Laura Donaldson's presentation at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, Toronto, 2002.

gender in the Bible and challenges the construction of "feminist issues," the mobilization of data, and the frameworks of analysis. It contests the meaning of women's history by raising new questions and issues. Postcolonial theorists have argued that gender inequalities are essential to the structure of colonial racism and imperial authority. This has important implications for the analysis of the body politic of the early church, a colonized community living under the shadow of the Roman Empire. It also illuminates how the Bible was selectively cited to legitimate imperial authority through the claim that Christianity was superior to other religious traditions because of its treatment of women.

TRADITION

Tradition is an important source of theology for Catholic theologians. Although its influences may not be so pervasive in Protestantism, most Protestant theologians acknowledge it has bearings on their theological reflection. Discussion of tradition is critical in feminist theology because tradition defines the memory of the Christian community. Women have been shut out from shaping the collective memory of the church: they have been excluded from discussions of biblical canon, the debates on the creeds, the deliberation on church pronouncements, and the formulation of church doctrines. In the past several decades, Western feminist theologians have exposed the androcentric bias of Western Christian tradition. In her earlier work, Letty Russell identifies what she has called a "usable past" for women and delineates a liberating tradition within the tradition. Using the method of correlation, Ruether argues that the radical prophetic tradition can be correlated with women's experiences.⁵² Schüssler Fiorenza, who is more critical of the biblical heritage, argues that all tradition must be scrutinized through the critical feminist lens, and women have the freedom to choose and reject traditions.⁵³

A postcolonial feminist theologian brings another set of questions to tradition that are seldom raised by Western feminist critics. Women who are not of European or Euro-American descent often feel that the Western theological tradition has been taken for granted as the universal tradition for churches around the world. From a postcolonial perspective, the notion of tradition and its boundaries must be reconceptualized and radically expanded. Three issues

52. Letty Russell, *Human Liberation in a Feminist Perspective* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974); and Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Feminist Interpretation: A Method of Correlation," in *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Letty M. Russell (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), 111–24.

53. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "The Will to Choose or to Reject: Continuing Our Critical Work," in Russell, *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, 125–36.

need to be addressed: the move beyond Eurocentrism to multicultural investigations of Christian tradition, the use of resources from cultures historically not shaped by Christianity, and future visions of tradition informed by feminist insights and struggles from the global context.

Eurocentrism means placing Europe at the center of attention, as the focus of the production of knowledge and as the reference point with which to judge human development and civilizations of the world. In *Provincializing Europe*, Dipesh Chakrabarty argues that Europe has constructed its history to put itself as the center of the world and as the model of modernity for all societies to follow. He seeks to displace the highly constructed "Europe" as the center from which all historical imagination gravitates, so that other narratives can be thought and articulated.⁵⁴ The need to decenter or provincialize Europe is paramount if we are to develop a vibrant, polycentric, and plurivocal theological imagination. For even though Christianity first emerged from West Asia on the shores of the Mediterranean and has had a long history of the Eastern Orthodox tradition, European history and theology have defined what is usually thought of as the Christian tradition.

In order to reterritorialize Europe and to place Christian history in proper perspective, we must develop an international and multicultural understanding of Christian tradition. One of the ways is to examine how Christianity has defined itself through its contacts with Others: Judaism and Hellenistic traditions, the so-called barbarian attack, the rise of the Muslim world, and the encounter with cultures and peoples of the Third World. Since the conversion of Constantine, Christianity has had complex relationships with imperial powers. The rise and fall of empires affected theologians' outlook of the world order and their views about morality and social order. For example, Augustine's formulation of original sin would not have gained acceptance without the changing political situation in the late fourth and early fifth centuries.⁵⁵ A multicultural and postcolonial evaluation will help us see in sharp relief how the Christian tradition has been shaped by interactions with other cultures throughout the ages. For example, the work of Jewish feminist theologians, such as Judith Plaskow, has pointed to the troubling anti-Semitic trends in Christian thought, including those of feminists.⁵⁶

Feminist theologians from many parts of the world can participate in this inquiry by posing new questions, revealing Western cultural bias, and con-

54. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), 45–46.

55. Elaine Pagels, *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 98–126.

56. Judith Plaskow, "Anti-Judaism in Feminist Christian Interpretation," in Schüssler Fiorenza, *Searching the Scriptures*, vol. 1, 117–29.

structuring new discourse. For example, Elsa Tamez has critically evaluated the central notion of justification by faith from the vantage point of Latin American dehumanizing situations. To interrupt the subjective and individualistic interpretation of justification by faith in liberal Christianity, she accents the justice of God and interprets justification as God's solidarity, in Jesus Christ, with those who are excluded.⁵⁷ In her controversial presentation at the Canberra assembly of the World Council of Churches, Chung Hyun Kyung challenged doctrinal purity to argue for a life-affirming, survival-centered understanding of the work of Holy Spirit.⁵⁸ These insightful discussions have radically transformed our way of looking at traditional doctrines and enlarged our collective memory.

Besides critiquing Western Christian tradition, feminist theologians from diverse cultures are exploring the use of myths, legends, and other oral and literary resources for theology. In many Third World countries, the white male Christian tradition has been treated as the normative text, while indigenous traditions become the context in the processes of inculturation or contextualization. But from a postcolonial perspective, the primacy of the whole Western tradition is contested, and indigenous resources should be used on an equal footing and interpreted intertextually with Western sources. For example, Mercy Amba Oduyoye of Ghana uses the rich depository of popular wisdom in what she calls "folktalk" in her articulation of the saving power of God.⁵⁹ Some Asian feminist theologians also begin to draw insights from a wide array of resources, including Asian philosophy, shamanism, women's literature, and wisdom of women passed from generation to generation.

The use of these indigenous sources has been derogatorily condemned as syncretistic by some Western male theologians.⁶⁰ They look at the new theological landscape with alarm and suspicion because the terrain is so unfamiliar to them. They have completely forgotten that Rudolf Bultmann has called Christianity syncretistic, without any negative connotations.⁶¹ In fact, it was the success of Christianity in adapting to its cultural context and its ability to change as circumstances required that made it a viable tradition. In the history of Western Christianity, many cultural elements of the West have been

adopted, including philosophy, art, symbols, and music. Nobody raises an eyebrow and condemns such practices as syncretistic. But when feminist theologians around the world are exploring new expressions of faith, they are labeled as heretic or syncretistic!

The use of indigenous resources, however, does not mean going back to the premodern stage when one's culture and tradition were undefiled by the conquistadors and the colonizers. As Sugirtharajah has noted: "At a time when societies are becoming more multicultural, where traditions, histories, and texts commingle, and interlace, a quest for unalloyed pure native roots could prove to be not only elusive but also dangerous."⁶² The exploration of one's cultural resources does imply challenging the hegemony of Europe and Euro-America and a determination to resist the globalized culture of the McWorld. Instead of "postmodern," which is largely based on the experiences of the Western world, Enrique Dussel has coined the term "transmodern" to describe the stage when formerly colonized peoples who have modernity thrust on them can look back and reassess its ambivalent legacy and its collusion with colonialism. At the same time, they would have the space and freedom to evaluate their own heritage and would not be coerced to act and think like the white people. Transmodernity will need to make room for the reason of the Other and, within such a project, "all ought to be welcomed in their alterity, in that otherness which needs to be painstakingly guaranteed at every level."⁶³ Just as the early church fathers did not need to give up Plato and Aristotle, Christians in the non-Western world would not be required to give up their cultures in order to become Christians. A genuine intercultural dialogue, for Dussel, "endeavors to construct not an abstract universality, but an analogic and concrete world in which all cultures, philosophies, and theologies will make their contribution toward a future, pluralist humanity."⁶⁴

In the twenty-first century, I anticipate an increasing demand from formerly colonized and enslaved peoples to participate in shaping and expanding the Christian tradition. The postcolonial era offers unique opportunities for Christianity to interact with diverse cultures in the world, not as a missionizing force or a conquering ideology. With the shift of demographics of Christians and the majority of the Christians living in the South, Christianity is on the threshold of becoming more multicultural than before, and must open

57. Tamez, *The Amnesty of Grace*, 14.

58. See her controversial address at the World Council of Churches, "Come, Holy Spirit—Renew the Whole Creation," in *Signs of the Spirit: Official Report, Seventh Assembly*, ed. Michael Kinnamon (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1991), 37–47.

59. Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa*.

60. See the discussion in Jeffrey Gros, "Christian Confession in a Pluralistic World," *Christian Century* (June 26–July 3, 1991), 644–46.

61. Rudolf Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity in Its Contemporary Setting* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1956), 177–79.

62. R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 197.

63. Enrique Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas: Eclipse of "the Other" and the Myth of Modernity*, trans. Michael D. Barber (New York: Continuum, 1995), 132. I benefited from conversations with Dussel in June 2003.

64. Ibid.

itself to learn from other traditions. Just as it has interacted in the past with Greek philosophy, scholastic thought, the Enlightenment, and the scientific revolution, Christianity will be brought into dialogue with other cultures in a more sustained way in the future. Christianity may not be the same as before, but it will learn to speak many peoples' tongues. Postcolonial feminist theologians, together with other liberation theologians committed to justice and peace, are at the forefront of this emerging process. They are aware that because of the lack of educational opportunities and access to the media, only a small number of Third World women's voices have been heard. In the future, they hope that creative ways can be found so that minority women in the Third World, indigenous women, migrant women workers, Dalit women, and younger women can contribute to the articulation of global feminist theologies.

REASON

The relation between faith and reason has been controversial in Christian theology. For Anselm, theology is *fides quaerens intellectum*, faith seeking understanding. But there have been continuing debates on whether faith transcends reason and whether God's revelation can be grasped by human's rational faculty or is beyond human's mental capacity. Although theologians may take different positions on these issues, few will go so far as to say that reason is not necessary in theological reflection. Karl Barth and other theologians even called theology a "science," in the German sense of the word, because it has a definite object of knowledge and utilizes a consistent method. In his *Systematic Theology*, Paul Tillich delineates helpfully the three senses in which theology can be considered rational. First, semantic rationality means that theologians should use their terms and language with precision and clarity. Second, logical rationality entails the capacity to make cogent and coherent argument and to avoid contradictions, although theology does make effective use of paradoxes and dialectical tension. Third, methodological rationality refers to the use of a consistent method, the crafting of an orderly presentation, and the construction of a systematic system as the final outcome.⁶⁵

But "reason" is a heavily loaded term for postcolonial feminist theologians, because the "Man of Reason," created by the Enlightenment, has put them in double jeopardy. As women, they were considered emotional and irrational when compared to men, and as the colonized, they were seen as childlike and immature, in need of the tutelage of white people. In her article "Gender

and Knowledge in Modern Western Philosophy," Sarah Coakley traces the development of various constructions of "Man of Reason" from Francis Bacon (1561–1626) to Immanuel Kant (1724–1804).⁶⁶ For Bacon, the task of the male scientific mind is to unlock the secret and eventually to gain control over nature, imagined to be feminine. Of critical importance is the much-criticized dualistic formulation of the mind over body by René Descartes (1596–1650). While in principle the exercise of reason is open to men and women, Descartes made it perfectly clear in his correspondence that the arduous demands of his particular form of abstract reasoning would be too rigorous for women to sustain. The formulation of an autonomous, individualist "Man of Reason," shunning sexual love and passion, reached its height in Kant, whose essay "What Is Enlightenment?" (1784) helped to define a historical epoch. Kant implored individuals to enter the public realm of universal reason and morality, and he imagined this autonomous individual as sexless. But he did not carry this through in his political writings, for he was adamant in supporting the bourgeois arrangement of husband ruling the household of his time because he believed in the "natural superiority of the husband over the wife."

If we place the Enlightenment in an international context, we will see that this passionless and autonomous "Man of Reason" created by the philosophers was considered not only fit to rule over women, but also destined to be the master of the world and to remake other peoples in his image. Sexual metaphors have been frequently deployed to describe the unequal relationship between the colonizers and colonized. Both the colonized people and their land have been referred to as feminine. Amerigo Vespucci named the land he "discovered" by the feminine form "Ameriga" or "America." As I have said, in his voyages in search of "the East," Christopher Columbus fantasized that the world was not round, but pear shaped and much like a woman's breast, with a nipple. Laura Donaldson has noted that "breasts possess a colonial history and that the female mammary glands constitute a significant part of imperialism's political anatomy."⁶⁷ Another metaphor frequently used to describe the colonized is that of the child, immature, unruly, and uncivilized, whose culture and society lagged far behind of those of Western men. Durkheim, Freud, and Jung have labeled native and indigenous peoples variously as elementary,

66. Sarah Coakley, "Gender and Knowledge in Modern Western Philosophy: The 'Man of Reason' and the 'Feminine' 'Other' in Enlightenment and Romantic Thought," in idem, *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy and Gender* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 89–97.

67. Laura E. Donaldson, "The Breasts of Columbus: A Political Anatomy of Postcolonialism and Feminist Religious Discourse," in *Postcolonialism, Feminism, and Religious Discourse*, ed. Laura E. Donaldson and Kwok Pui-lan (New York: Routledge, 2002), 42.

65. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 54–55.

primitive, dreamlike, or childlike, while missionaries in the field routinely treated native converts as if they were children or pupils. Poor and illiterate "heathen" women, in particular, were seen as objects of Western compassion, waiting to be taught to read and to take care of basic hygiene.

Given the misgivings about the "Man of Reason," should postcolonial feminists rely on reason when doing theology? Some have argued that postcolonial theology should not mimic the forms of Western philosophical debates and their styles of argument or create huge systematic tomes modeled after Barth or Tillich, and instead should be free to experiment with new forms and genres. While we still need more samples to envisage what these experimental forms would look like, I submit that whatever creative forms of doing theology emerge, they would still involve some use of reason, and it is pressing to discuss the style and shape of postcolonial reasoning. For this concerns the fundamental questions of the approaches of feminist epistemologies, the foundation of knowing, and the self-critique of postcolonial reason.

An obvious point to begin is with the deconstruction of the "transcendent I," who stands outside the material world and who derives knowledge and gains control through his mental and rational capacity. Sarah Coakley distinguishes three ways by which feminist epistemologies have called into question the privileged "knower" of mainstream epistemology. First, feminists unmask the political, gendered, and racial specificity of this "knower" and demand that other "knowers" previously excluded be taken into account. Second, some feminists have turned to a "standpoint epistemology," emphasizing that what you see depends on where you stand. Two major strands of standpoint theory have evolved: radical feminists such as Mary Daly argue that women's knowing is ontologically different from men's, and socialist feminists such as Nancy Hartsock stress the socially constructed nature of the knowing subject and partiality of vision. Third, some French feminist theorists have appealed to an intrinsically gendered form of "knowing" that is subversive to male reasoning.⁶⁸

A postcolonial feminist epistemological framework debunks any claims to the innate form of feminine knowing that is superior to or subversive of male knowing and finds embarrassing any romanticizing suggestions that women, by nature, are more caring and loving, or closer to God. The colonizers have been both men and women, and female colonizers, either through their overt support of the colonial regimes, or through their silent complicity, have not

68. Sarah Coakley, "Analytic Philosophy of Religion in Feminist Perspective: Some Questions," in *Powers and Submissions*, 103. See also Rebecca Chopp, "Eve's Knowing: Feminist Theology's Resistance to Malestream Epistemological Frameworks," in *Feminist Theologies in Different Contexts*, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Mary Shawn Copeland, Concilium 1996, no. 1 (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1996), 116-23.

demonstrated themselves to know more about loving and God. Thus, a mere shifting from the male to the female knowing subject is not enough, without being vigilant of the temptation to step into the position of the masculinist knowing subject, who assumes sovereign status in controlling the material world as well as the production of knowledge. A postcolonial knowing subject insists that changing the gender of the subject is not enough, without simultaneously taking into consideration how race, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, age, physical abilities, and colonialism form an intricate web to shape both the identity of knower and her "situated knowledge."

The discussion on postcolonial reason must also debunk the myth that there is an evolutionary development in human thinking which entails an inevitable progress from "mythos" to "logos." Myths have been seen as opposed to, or incompatible with, rationality. The earlier or "primitive" stage of human civilization was called the mythic stage, and mythological consciousness has to be replaced with science and technological reason in the march toward modernization and secularization. Partly because of their mission to save the "lost civilizations" and partly because of their fascination with the Other, Western anthropologists and historians of religions have been obsessed with the myths and legends of indigenous and native peoples. They treated these myths as rich depositories of a human mind that is not dominated by consciousness, reason, and technical proficiency. Mircea Eliade has argued that archaic myths are important for modern people and has described favorably Western people's fascination with Asian religious practices, ancient and prehistoric spiritual values, and shamanistic practices as a way to compensate for the stress and alienation of modern life.⁶⁹

A postcolonial critic is keenly aware that the myths and religiosity of non-Western peoples have been appropriated and commercialized to ease the ills of and provide healing for modern living. She would refuse to create "mighty opposites"⁷⁰ and see the world in a dichotomous manner: that myth and reason are diametrically opposite to each other, and that Easterners or indigenous peoples think in mythical or symbolical ways, while Westerners think in scientific and logical ways. Such simplified generalizations not only are reductionistic, they also fail to appreciate that different societies interpret myths in radically different ways, and do not necessarily see them as contrary to reason. In fact, myths often show a form of reasoning that has its own logic, though

69. Mircea Eliade, "Waiting for the Dawn," in *Waiting for the Dawn: Mircea Eliade in Perspective*, ed. David Carrasco and Jane Marie Law (Boulder, Colo.: University Press of Colorado, 1991), 11-16.

70. See Zhang Longxi, *Mighty Opposites: From Dichotomies to Differences in the Comparative Study of China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

different from that of our own. Myths provide a focus for thought, put the mind of the contemporary in touch with that of the forebears and ancestors, validate present practice in the wider picture of time and space, and offer a set of attitudes and ideas for grounding group identity.⁷¹ In the midst of the environmental crisis, many Western thinkers have spoken of the need for the re-enchantment of the world and the discovery of the power of ancient myths, such as the Gaia story.⁷² It seems to me that in the face of Derrida's persistent challenge of logocentrism in Western philosophy and the postcolonial critique of the studies of myths,⁷³ a simple dichotomy between mythos and logos is untenable and we have to attend to cultural specificity in terms of modes of thinking and reasoning.

This leads us to the question whether there exists an international division of labor in feminist work, that is, will Third World feminists merely talk about stories of their lives, while First World feminists do theory? Implicit in this question is that "theory" means Western academic feminist theory, with a distinct and strong French accent. We need to recall that during the colonial period, Third World peoples provided raw data and materials for Western "experts" to examine, analyze, and theorize. In our present time, those who are not engaged with high academic theory and discourse are considered naive, unsophisticated, and uninitiated. I do not underestimate the usefulness of theory, be it Marxist, feminist, poststructuralist, or postcolonial, but I am critical of the heavy-handedness of the superimposition of Western theory onto Third World realities. The warnings by Barbara Christian in her essay "The Race for Theory," published eighteen years ago, are still relevant today. As a black literary critic, Christian bemoans the hegemony of Western philosophies and French feminist theories in the academy, and insists that people of color have always theorized, not in the form of Western abstract logic, but often "in narrative forms, in the stories we create, in riddle and proverbs, in the play with language, since dynamic rather than fixed ideas seem more to our liking."⁷⁴ She implores us to read black women's literature with an eye to develop a literary theory that is rooted in practice, which is culturally relevant and appropriate. To heed her charge, postcolonial feminists need to take each other's works seriously and establish an alternative community of discourse so that

71. Kenneth McLeish, *Myth: Myths and Legends of the World Explored* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996), v.

72. Anne Primavesi, *Gaia's Gift: Earth, Ourselves and God after Copernicus* (London: Routledge, 2003), 118–21.

73. See especially the critique of Eliade's work in Russell T. McCutcheon, *Mamufacturing Religion: The Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

74. Barbara Christian, "The Race for Theory," *Cultural Critique* 6 (1987): 52.

we can encourage each other in theory building. Henry Louis Gates Jr. has warned against the uncritical use of Western theory:

The concern of the Third World critic should properly be to understand the ideological subtext which any critical theory reflects and embodies, and the relation which this subtext bears to the production of meaning. . . . To attempt to appropriate our own discourses by using Western critical theory uncritically is to substitute one mode of neo-colonialism for another.⁷⁵

The Third World critic can ill afford to remain insular or parochial, for, as Edward Said has said, ideas and theories, like persons, travel from place to place and such movements are an integral part of academic life and an enabling condition of intellectual activity. But when the traveling theory is applied, it would have to be accommodated to the new situation and assume "a new position in a new time and place."⁷⁶ The power dynamics embedded in such traveling theory when it migrates from the West to other parts of the world must be seriously considered and attended to, given the enormous difference of the cultural, social, and economic backgrounds of the First and Third Worlds.

I would like to conclude this chapter by emphasizing the necessity of self-critique of postcolonial intellectuals. The works of postcolonial critics have also been criticized as highly abstract and difficult, paying more attention to Western literary theory and criticism than to political economy. As such, their output is in danger of speaking primarily to the Western audience and engaging more with the concerns of the Western academy than with actual social and political change. In her book *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak chastises postcolonial intellectuals as performing the roles of former "native informants," by assuming to speak for and represent the oppressed.⁷⁷ She underscores the privileges of these intellectuals and the great gulf that separates them from the subalterns. As someone who is highly skilled in deconstruction theory, feminism, and Marxism, Spivak has turned her attention to translating Bengali writer and activist Mahasweta Devi's stories, and during the last decade has been involved in literacy projects in India. Spivak challenges postcolonial intellectuals to regard our privilege as our loss.

75. Henry Louis Gates Jr., "Editor's Introduction: Writing 'Race' and the Difference It Makes," in *"Race," Writing, and Difference*, ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 15.

76. Edward W. Said, "Traveling Theory," in idem, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), 227.

77. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), ix.

Because of our relatively affluent position and education, we do not have the life experience and perspectives of those less fortunate. Therefore, though with good intention, we may not be able to see the world from the underside of history. Such an honest admission of our privileged location and our limited epistemological vision does not undermine our work, but it does qualify it and reminds us to listen to the voices of those who are less privileged and those whom we have the potential to oppress.

Making the Connections

Postcolonial Studies and Feminist Biblical Interpretation

In their feminist practices of reading and writing, Two-Thirds World women call for the decolonization of inherited colonial education systems, languages, literary canon, reading methods, and the Christian religion, in order to arrest the colonizing ideology packed in the claims of religious conversion, Western civilization, modernization, development, democratization, and globalization.

*Musa W. Dube*¹

Some time ago, when I was reading the writings of women missionaries in a library archive, I came across a fascinating story about a Chinese woman. A female missionary reported at the turn of the twentieth century that a Chinese woman who could barely read used a pin to cut from the Bible verses where Paul instructed women to be submissive and remain silent in church. I have long forgotten where I read the story, but it lodged in my mind as a vivid testimony to the fact that Chinese women were not passive recipients of biblical teachings. Instead of subscribing to Paul's sexist ideology, this woman exercised the freedom to choose and reject what she thought was harmful for women.

A postcolonial feminist interpretation of the Bible creates a space so that the reading of this and other women in similar colonial and semicolonial situations can be remembered in order to enliven our historical and moral imagination. For this story demonstrates how oppressed women have turned the Bible, a product introduced by the colonial officials, missionaries, and educators, into

1. Musa W. Dube, "Postcoloniality, Feminist Spaces, and Religion," in *Postcolonialism, Feminism, and Religious Discourse*, ed. Laura E. Donaldson and Kwok Pui-lan (New York: Routledge, 2002), 115.