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A RESPONSE TO GERALD M. BOODOO'S "SPACES OF POSSIBILITY" – TOWARD ANOTHER POSSIBLE NONVIOLENT WORLD: RECOGNIZING THE GIFT AND INSIGHTS OF "GLO-CAL"[1] THEOLOGIES

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Through its president-elect, María Pila Aquino**,** the CTSA has called us to envision a nonviolent world and to consider ways to make such a world possible. Responding to this call, Gerald Boodoo's paper addresses some of the road blocks to such a possible world. He invites us to consider how such a world might be possible by recognizing and embracing what he calls "gifts" from Global South and the ways its theologies might unblock what he calls "epistemological" (i.e., knowledge) flows, thus helping the world gain better traction in the journey en route to the possible but elusive non-violent world.

In my response, I acknowledge and concur with Gerald's central proposal: Namely, that disdain for Global South and other theologies of liberation has itself been a form of violence against the people of the Global South. It has also robbed humanity of much needed ethical and practical insights, tools with which to construct the world we dream of.

Gerald makes his case in a series of subthemes, with his paper roughly divisible into two parts. Part one names the problem of domination of the Global South by the Global North and the moral concerns that this raises. It also shows how theologies from the Global South, specifically EATWOT (the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians) and WFTL (the World Forum of Theologies of Liberation) emerged both to resist this domination and to offer alternative spaces where the transformation of theology itself would happen so that theology would be more efficacious and able to meet the Global South's challenges, particularly that of impoverishment. Part two outlines various challenges in the Global South and offers some insights regarding how these challenges (colonialism, gender power differences, environmental degradation and religious diversity) have become or could become opportunities for creating "Spaces of Possibility" where another world could be forged.

My response acknowledges Gerald's broad two-pronged outline and his various subthemes. However, considering the time allotted for the response, I will necessarily be selective in my highlights. I will also cluster the subthemes not only to enable me

[1] The neologism glo-cal refers to the fact that under the various forces of globalization particularly technology, what is local goes global and what is global is found in local backyards. The overlap /intersection of the global and the local leads to the term: Glo-cal.

to respond to more of Gerald's ideas but also to recognize and highlight the *intersectionality and nexus* between and among the various issues his paper raises. I will showcase several situations where the challenges (e.g., the challenge of cultural imperialism and the consequent genocide) have become not only an imperative to resist the violence but also an occasion to dream and offer alternative thought and practices more conducive to the quest for enhanced flourishing in the Global South and beyond.

Further, I will give examples of spaces of possibility from the African context, pointing, for example, at several visionaries of another possible world and the insights and strategies that they offer. Here, I will specially highlight the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (hereafter the Circle), founded in 1989 by Mercy Amba Oduyoye as an exemplary and paradigmatic space of possibility, as defined by Gerald. In line with the subtitle of the conference theme which invites us to consider both spaces of resistance to violence as well as spaces of transformation of consciousness and structures of "domination" to pave the way for a possible non-violent world, I will highlight the Circle both as a site *of resistance and transformation*. For indeed, the Circle is an intentionally transformative theological space, not just an add-on to the many theological versions out there. It is a space designed to transform women theologians who create an alternative model of theology that is more capable of challenging and overcoming injustices in their multiple intersecting forms

I offer my response under several distinct but related subthemes: (i) the imperative to diagnose violence, its roots and branches; (ii) the imperative to name and address the entangled roots and intertwined branches; (iii) examples of challenges (e.g., economic violence) triggering both resistance and transformative action to pave the way for another possible world; and (iv) the imperative of recognizing African visionaries of another possible world and their "gifts" (i.e., insights and strategies) conducive to the becoming of the nonviolent world we long for.

Starting with the imperative to diagnose violence as a necessary first step towards the world we seek, I describe violence with the metaphor of a tree, and note that violence has deep entangled root*s*, a stem and many intertwined branches, i.e. various ways in which violence manifests itself. Regarding the branches of violence, analysts for example distinguish between hot violence and cold violence. Hot violence is direct and physical harm (e.g., rape, shootings, choking, slapping, or stabbings) often with the use of weapons (e.g., bombs, guns, machetes, or fists). Cold violence[2] is the kind of violence that doesn't include weapons, though it is as deadly and traumatizing. The example that comes to mind here is that of a child who dies of starvation. His or hers is a slow, painful and violent death due to hunger. Both forms of violence (cold and hot) ethicists say, need to be addressed and their intersectionality exposed and dealt with if a world without violence is to be reached.

[2] For an article discussing "cold violence" as a form of domestic violence see Helen McLarren, "Domestic Violence in Chinese Families: Cold Violence by Men toward Women," *Journal of Internal Women's Studies* 17, no. 4 (2016): 1-15.

Other "branches" or types of (hot) violence include wars, that involve the so-called child soldiers, in effect the weaponization of children, turning them into killing machines.[3]

The violence of war sometimes mutates or scales up into *sexual violence* when rape becomes a weapon of war. Such weaponized rape leaves thousands of victims, mostly women (e.g., in the Democratic Republic of the Congo),[4] literally torn apart as they endure not only excruciating physical pain but also spiritual, psychological and moral injury and trauma exacerbated by "social death," adding yet another layer to the violence they suffer due to stigma and social rejection. Gerald's paper laments this gross violence against women and calls for urgent action to eliminate it.

From this analysis, it would seem that clergy sexual abuse of minors, a crisis which has preoccupied the CTSA and all people of compassion and conscience this last year, is a subbranch of sexual violence in general. This kind of violence is distinguished in terms of the perpetrator (clergy) and victim (minor). It can manifest both as a hot violence, such as rape, or a cold violence, such as the abuse of power or the exercise of psychological control and manipulation over the victim long before and after the actual assault (e.g., through grooming).

It follows from this analysis of the branches of the reality of violence that if we are to get rid of violence, as CTSA encourages us to dream, it would be necessary, but not sufficient, to deal with only one branch, such as sexual violence, or, in the case of clergy sexual abuse of minors, a subbranch. Pruning the tree of violence will not yield the hoped-for result of a nonviolent world.

The metaphorical tree of violence also has deep and entangled roots. To get rid of violence, uprooting the tree, rather than just pruning and trimming the branches, will be necessary and possibly sufficient. This necessitates a Root Cause Analysis (RCA)[5] of violence as a necessary prior step to eradicating violence.

Now, Gerald's paper reveals that concern about the economic violence of poverty was the major inspiration for the emergence of EATWOT in 1976 and WFTL at the

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[3] See, for example, Faith McDonnell and Grace Akello, *Girl Soldier: A Story of Hope For Northern Uganda's Children* (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 2007). The girl soldier is not only turned into a killing machine like her male counterpart, she is doubly vulnerable because she is often made into a sexual slave by the captors.

[4] Consider for example the case of Panzi hospital where over 80,000 women have received treatment, including undergoing surgery to repair fistulas after being gang raped or due to "obstructed labor" in situations where appropriate maternal and prenatal care is non-existent or rare. For details see "Panzi Hospital," Panzi Foundation, https://www.panzifoundation.org/panzi-hospital.

[5] Root Cause Analysis (RCA**)** is formally defined as a systematic process for identifying "root causes" of problems or events as a strategy for responding to the said problems. The strategy is based on the basic idea that effective solutions of problems (such as clergy sexual abuse or poverty) requires more than merely putting out fires when the problems develop. They require finding a way to prevent them from happening in the first place and finding a way to ensure that the problems are totally eradicated when they do happen. For a formal definition of RCA as a problem-solving strategy and examples of the strategy in practice, see "What Is Root Cause Analysis (RCA)?," Quality Resources, American Society for Quality, https://asq.org/quality-resources/root-cause-analysis.

turn of the millennium. It also reveals that EATWOT accurately diagnosed colonialism, a "structure of domination" as the root cause of radical impoverishment in the Global South. While EATWOT accurately named colonialism as the structure of domination fueling poverty, other analysts particularly feminist theologians and ethicists (both male and female) have identified other forms of structural domination, which they name as structural violence (i.e., cold violence). Such structural violence is systemic and comes in multiple forms. The structures have been referred to as kyriarchies (e.g., racism, colonialism, ableism, and sexism) by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza or pathologies of power by Paul Farmer, a male feminist in my view.[6] The kyriarchies often intersect one another with a cumulative, multiplying impact on the affected person or persons. These intersecting kyriarchies are themselves manifestations of cold violence and simultaneously are root causes of hot violence (e.g., racism triggering shooting of innocent people of color).

Elsewhere, those involved in gender and sexuality studies have identified and named distortions in prevailing masculinities as yet another root cause of violence. Addressing what has been labeled variously as hegemonic masculinity,[7] dangerous masculinities or even toxic masculinities as a root cause of violence particularly gender-based violence against women, they have proposed action aimed at the transformation of consciousness in order to deal with this root. They have proposed that it is imperative to shift from hegemonic, toxic masculinity to redemptive masculinity[8] in order to address adequately gender-based violence as well as the violence of sexually transmitted disease, specifically HIV/AIDS.

I submit that it is imperative to address the intertwined branches or types of violence and the intersectionality of the entangled roots (i.e., structures and systems of domination, or cold violence, which are root causes of hot violence in its multiple expressions,[9] such as rape, war, and the disproportionate and random killings of black people as if their lives don't matter) if we are to make any headway towards another possible non- violent world.

Gerald's paper also speaks of many challenges blocking the path to human flourishing in the Global South. In particular, he discusses the impact of colonialism

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[6] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways: Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 211; Paul Farmer, *Pathologies of Power: Health, Human Rights, and the New War on the Poor* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003).

[7] For a detailed analysis that traces sexual violence in places like the Democratic Republic of the Congo to what has been identified as hegemonic masculinity, see Leatherman Janie, *Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2010), 131-148.

[8] In efforts to deal with the crisis of HIV/AIDS, the World Council of Churches through its Ecumenical HIV and AIDS Initiative in Africa Desk, having identified hegemonic masculinity as a driver of HIV/AIDS in Africa, embarked on a Panafrican program of transforming Masculinity. One outcome of this efforts was the publication of a book edited by Ezra Chitando and Sophie Chirongoma, suitably entitled *Redemptive Masculinity.* See Ezra Chitando and Sophie Chirongoma, eds., *Redemptive Masculinity: Men, HIV, and Religion* (Geneva: World Council of Churches Publications, 2012).

[9] Racism (a structural violence) leads to disproportionate and random killings of black people, a situation that recently triggered the Black Lives Matter movement of protest.

as a structure of domination in creating barriers on the road to a nonviolent world. He points out, for example, that colonialism was not just a matter of territorial domination. Rather, colonialism thrived on a hierarchical and kyriarchical understanding of culture that assumed certain cultures (i.e., European) are inherently superior while others (e.g., African or Native American) are inherently inferior and of little or no value. On the basis of this assumption of superiority and alleged inferiority, cultures and knowledge systems of people from the Global South, particularly indigenous peoples, were not just frowned upon but actively blocked and even "erased." Here Gerald references George Tinker, who concludes that missionary approaches to Indigenous American cultures and knowledge added up to what he called "cultural genocide,"[10] which preceded and paved the way for actual genocide of Native Americans. Such genocide was the result, Gerald argues, of the failure to allow epistemological or knowledge flows for mutual enrichment in a pluriverse world. Moreover, the colonized often internalized the disdain projected by the dominant cultures, thus entering a condition that Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o calls "colonization of the mind."[11] Gerald argues that decolonial thought and practice is the antidote to the violence of mental colonization that manifests in several ways, including the emergence of theologies in the Global South that are at best an echo of the Global North theologies.

For some in the Global South, this challenge of cultural imperialism, epistemological chauvinism and their capacity to pave the way for genocide was a major occasion for resistance. This is the case for example of Tinker, who wrote the expose, *Missionary Conquest*, cited above. Cultural imperialism also occasioned the quest for alternative decolonial thought and practice as a counter measure. This was the case, for example, of the emergence of what has come to be referred to as inculturation theology. Jean-Marc Ela, a major proponent of this decolonial project in Africa, passionately makes the case against the homogenizing and universalizing tendencies of the colonial project and its theologies in Africa and elsewhere. Notwithstanding the view that the church is "universal," he argues that Africans (and other colonized peoples) have the right and possibly the duty to be different.[12] Inculturation theology, however, is not just a form of resistance against cultural imperialism, genocidal homogenization and erasure. Rather, inculturation unblocks the epistemological flows blocked by colonialism in order to allow Africans to embrace and live the gospel as Africans. In Ela's words,

> The essential thing is to take up the gospel in everyday life reminding ourselves that it should be lived as a message of liberation. … Only at this price will the Christian message instead of being hammered into paralyzing routines or shriveled up in little enclaves, be an energy released for the transformation of Africa. The gospel would

[10] See George E. Tinker, *Missionary Conquest: Native American Cultural Genocide* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Press 1993).

[11] Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: James Currey Ltd., 1986).

[12] For details, see chapter 7 in Jean-Marc Ela, *African Cry*, trans. Robert J. Barr (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2005).

> no longer come to the African as the end of a journey undertaken by other Christians. … It would be the flesh and bone of the Africans own spiritual journey. the Christianity mission would no longer be reduced to the product of a colonial system. The history that has been forced upon us now obliges us to a self-rooting that will produce something very different from a resurrected past … the die is not yet cast. … In the churches in Africa, the time has come to reinvent Christianity so as to live it with our African Soul[13]

For Ela and other proponents, inculturation is both an expression of resistance asserting the right to be different and a strategy for transformation of church and society, towards another nonviolent future.

Many similar examples of challenges prompting both resistance and transformation exist. But it is sufficient to highlight two more examples arising from Gerald's paper: (i) ecofeminism and ecowomanism, movements that protest ecocide and femicide as intersecting forms of violence, and (ii) the *Via Campesina*, a global peasants' movement aimed at resisting and transforming the intersection of economic violence and a global economic systems where capital and corporations rule kyriarchically.

While ecofeminists recognize sexism and patriarchal anthropocentrism as the entangled roots of both ecocide and femicide, ecowomanists[14] recognize racism as yet another entangled root behind the crisis of ecological degradation. This diagnosis of the root causes of ecological degradation was made clearly by world-renowned ecofeminist, Wangari Maathaai. She pointed out that in the reckless cutting of trees for selfish anthropocentric reasons, humans are "digging their own graves," since they are destroying the ecosystems of which they are a part and upon which we depend. She consequently mobilized the women of the Greenbelt movement not only to plant trees and thus replenish and heal the distraught eco systems, but also to champion transformation of consciousness, so that we can move away from suicidal, ecocidal, and femicidal anthropocentrism entangled and reinforced by racism, sexism and even speciesism.

For their part, peasant farmers across the world have gathered and mobilized a global movement, the *Via Campesina*, designed to resist economic violence of poverty, particularly hunger and food insecurity that is the plight of many in the Global South. Besides being a protest movement against global economics where capital and corporations rule, the *Via Campesina* has become a site for transformation, offering an alternative to the economy that kills in many ways, particularly through hunger. In their 2007 Nyéléni Declaration, they articulate their vision of another possible world where, ordinary people will have sovereignty over their lives, specifically through—though not limited to—food sovereignty.[15] The lament that the money-centered, corporation-

[13] Ela, *African Cry*, 119-120

[14] See Melanie Harris, *Ecowomanism: African American Women and Earth-Honoring Faiths* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2017).

[15] See "Nyéléni Declaration," Nyéléni Forum 2007, Nyéléni Newsletter, February 27, 2007, https://nyeleni.org/spip.php?article290.

driven economy completely subverts or devalues ordinary peoples' knowledge about food and agriculture. As the peasants declared:

> This heritage and our capacities to produce healthy, good and abundant food are being threatened and undermined by neo-liberalism and global capitalism. Food sovereignty gives us the hope and power to preserve, recover and build on our food producing knowledge and capacity… defining food sovereignty as "the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems."[16]

The *Via Campesina* is a site of transformation. It pushes for

> genuine and integral agrarian reform that guarantees peasants full rights to land, and ensures community survival, social and economic justice and ecological sustainability, and respect for local autonomy and governance with equal rights for women and men…where peoples' power to make decisions about their material, natural and spiritual heritage are defended.[17]

Inculturation theologies, ecofeminist and ecowomanist thought and the *Via Campesina* are potent, though hardly recognized examples of challenges morphing into "spaces of possibility."

Gerald's paper also invites us to name, acknowledge and embrace the gifts of glocal theologians and their insights. While there are many theologians whose insights are a gift to be recognized and embraced, here I give the example of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Agbonkhianmeghe Orobator and Mercy Amba Oduyoye, three African visionaries of another possible world, and their insights and strategies for forging that world for which we hope. Tutu dreams of a future where the dignity and beauty of all humans regardless of race, creed or gender will be recognized so that there emerges a global "rainbow people of God."[18] Such a community devoid of the violence of racism will not be possible without forgiveness. It will also not be possible if we take the path of retribution against violence already perpetrated or total amnesia as a response to the horrors of racial and other forms of violence. For Tutu, the future nonviolent world is possible if we tread what he calls "the third way" the path of Truth (i.e., acknowledging

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[16] "Nyéléni Declaration," https://nyeleni.org/spip.php?article290.

[17] "Nyéléni Declaration," https://nyeleni.org/spip.php?article290.

[18] See Desmund Tutu, *The Rainbow People of God: The Making of a Peaceful Revolution* (New York: Random House, 1994). A recent book, echoes this dream for a nonviolent world based on our capacity to see beauty in the other; see Cassarella Peter and Mun'im Sirry, eds., *Finding Beauty in the Other: Theological Reflections Across Religious Traditions* (New York: Crossroads, 2019).

moral accountability for our part in perpetrating violence), Justice and Reconciliation.[19] Orobator invites us to consider that another world is possible if we embrace and engage the gift of theology and ethics brewed in an African pot. To help name and identify various dimensions of this theology and ethics, he convened a three-year (2013-2016) Pan African "palaver" where theologians from across the continent—members of the laity and members of the clergy (including bishops), men and women—sat down to brew together the kind of theology and ethics that will be more conducive to flourishing in Africa and beyond.[20]

Finally, Oduyoye, founder of the Circle Of Concerned African Women Theologians invites us to embraces African women's theology and to apply "circle thinking" to subvert "pyramid thinking" that fuels violence in its multiple intersecting forms.[21] I have spelt out in detail what I call the African women's theological footprint in my 2017 book, *African, Christian, Feminist*.[22] In the third chapter, I urge all to listen to concerned African women. I celebrate their will to arise and name their various efforts to do research that intentionally unveils both positive and negative impacts of religion in their lives. I celebrate their collective intentional strategy of transformative dialogue, determined through such dialogue to transform consciousness, theirs and that of others, as a prerequisite for creating a just peace in another possible world.

Above all, in light of the fact that the underlying root causes of violence are pathologies of power and kyriarchical thought and practice, I celebrate African women's theologies transforming power. Circle thinking, I submit, is the antidote of binary, pyramidal and kyriarchical thinking and pathologies of power that fuel the violence we endure. I submit that the intentional adoption of the name Circle signifies African women's resistance to oppression. Beyond being a symbol of their resistance, however, the Circle is a practical and ethical way of thinking. It signifies African Women's desire for transformation and their capacity to do transformative theology as hoped for by EATWOT. While I have spelt out the vision and work of the Circle as a community of theologians and visionaries of another possible world elsewhere in more detail, here I can summarize the contribution of the African women's theology as a two-pronged gift: (i) the gift of the will to arise[23] and name the moral outrage of violence in all its forms (the violence of poverty, disease and ecocide) and (ii) the gift

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[19] For details of this insights, see chapter two, entitled "Nuremberg or National Amnesia?: A Third Way," in Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness* (New York: Random House, 1999), 10-41.

[20]The Outcome of the three-years palaver was the publications of several books including: Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, ed., *The Church We Want: African Catholics Look to Vatican III* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books 2016).

[21] Oduyoye's vision of another possible world is articulated in detail in one of her many books: Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995).

[22] Teresia Mbari Hinga, *African, Christian, Feminist: The Search for What Matters* (Maryknoll,NY: Orbis Books, 2017).

[23] This was the title of the book that came out of the papers during their first meeting, September 1989

of circle thinking[24] that is an antidote to pyramidal kyriarchical thought that is the root cause of much of the violence that particularly women and children endure in Africa and beyond.

In conclusion, I reaffirm the president-elect's invitation through the CTSA, an invitation reinforced by Gerald's paper, alone or preferably in community, to become visionaries of another possible nonviolent world. This invitation, nay, exhortation reminds me of a similar exhortation by the late Edwardo Galeano, a poet from Uruguay. He considered the 1948 Declaration of Human Rights and its thirty principles (or ways to treat each other as humans) as the global community dreamt of another nonviolent world devoid of the atrocities of genocide that marked the Second World War. Galeano imagines what he calls the thirty-first right, i.e. the right to dream of another possible world. This right gives other rights traction and weight and without it the others are moot. In his words, "The right to dream does not figure in the 30 Human Rights proclaimed in 1948. But were it not for this right [to dream] and the water it gives us to drink, the other rights would die of thirst [or neglect]."[25] I concur. But instead of just asserting the human right to dream, I think there is a duty thus to dream and envision another possible world. We have a duty not to be satisfied with the violent status quo or to be cynical and give up on the world and ourselves. We have a duty to resist and transform our ways (of doing theology in this case) to pave the way for the nonviolent world we hope and long for.

Galeano offers his own vision of another possible world in a poem. In his envisioned world for example:

> The television set will stop being the most important member of the family and will be treated like the ironing board or the washing machine. …
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> People will work to live, not live to work. …
>
> Economists will not confuse the standard of living with the level of consumption, nor the quality of life with the quantity of things. …
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> In Argentina, the crazy women of the Plaza de Mayo will be exemplars of mental health, because they refused to forget in times of obligatory amnesia. …
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> The Church will also dictate an eleventh commandment, which God forgot: 'You will love Nature, to which you belong. [26]

[24] This is the tittle of a book by Carrie Pemberton n documenting and analyzing the work of the Circle as a community of Theologians

[25] Eduardo Galeano, "The Right to Dream," *The Internationalsit*, April 13, 2005, https://newint.org/blog/2015/04/13/galeano-right-to-dream.

[26] Galeano, "The Right to Dream," https://newint.org/blog/2015/04/13/galeano-right-to-dream.