

FEMINIST THEOLOGIES, CATHOLICITY & MISSION IN
A GLOBAL CONTEXT

- Topic: In Search of Global Solidarity: The Future of Catholic Scholarship in the Context of Gender Injustice
- Co- Conveners: Susan A. Ross, Loyola University Chicago
Elisabeth T. Vasko, Duquesne University
- Panelists: Jeanine Viau, Loyola University Chicago
Susan A. Ross, Loyola University Chicago
Elisabeth T. Vasko, Duquesne University
- Respondent: Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike, Kenyatta University

This session reflected upon the successes and limitations of a collaborative research project among American and Kenyan women theologians that took place in Nairobi during the summer of 2009. The project, which spanned four and a half weeks, consisted of a course on African women's theologies taught by Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike, supervised field work at the Maryknoll Institute of African Studies (MIASMU), and a ten-day integrative listening symposium. Drawing upon their experiences in Kenya and scholarship produced by the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, panelists attended to the significance of cross-cultural dialogue in shaping the commitments and practices of Catholic scholarship and pedagogy in the West.

Susan Ross began the session with "Feminist Theologies and Global Pedagogy." Her paper offered a brief description of the project and focused on its pedagogical contributions for intercultural collaborations in theology. As a student initiative, this project not only highlighted the importance of listening to the voices of the youngest members of the community, but it also pointed to the challenge of doing vs. reading within Western theological education. Too often cross-cultural studies within graduate theological education are limited to textual analysis, eclipsing issues of economic and imperial privilege within the learning process itself. Ross also discussed the issue of resource allocation within intercultural projects. As privileged members of the global north, U.S. participants took primary responsibility for project organization and funding. Kenyan participants were not recruited until after grant monies had been secured. However, doing so inadvertently created a situation that replicated "dependency upon the white lady" and overlooked the resources available to Kenyan participants. Future collaborations need to involve the voices, resources, and perspectives of all conversation partners from start to finish.

The second panelist, Elisabeth Vasko, spoke about "Prophetic Vision and *Mzungu* Listening in Postcolonial Space." Drawing upon the work of Musa Dube, she argued that prophetic vision, as the mission of the church, cannot be the vision of one individual, community, or nation. In the context of gender injustice and Western imperialism, prophetic vision must arise out of a posture of global solidarity in which we form partnerships to work for justice. The second part of her paper attended to the practical aspects of nurturing such partnerships, with a focus

on the role of *wazungu* (white people/visitors) listening. Vasko pointed to the significance of 1) honest naming, 2) geographical space, and 3) intentional silence within the dialogue process. Honest naming of one's social location in postcolonial space begins by listening first to the words of the marginalized. However, as her experience in Kenya revealed, the capacity for these words to be spoken and heard was closely linked to geographical space. Vasko also emphasized the role of intentional silence within the listening/speaking process. Silence not only creates space for the spirit to enter the conversation, but it also contests "quick fixes" in the face of structural injustice.

The title of the third presentation, given by Jeanine Viau, was "Convergent Tensions between Gendered Cultures and Methods" and focused on the group's experience at MIASMU. While MIASMU is committed to recovering and preserving the differences between Western and traditional African culture, its framework for learning bypassed the significance of gender difference within various cultural domains. Drawing upon Musimbi Kanyoro's method of engendering cultural hermeneutics, Viau argued for the adoption of a critical principle of truth-telling within postcolonial contexts. As the religion of the colonizers does not tell the complete truth of the cultures it encounter, neither do patriarchal cultural matrices tell the whole truth about women as women have not been able to fully participate in telling the story. Viau contended that it is the responsibility of the entire community to acknowledge these silences and to create space for women to define, tell, and do their own truths.

In her response, titled "African Feminism," Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike further clarified the context of the project and spoke of the need for Kenyan women to reclaim feminism in their own terms. In the aftermath of Kenya's post-election violence, the context of conversation was one of internally displaced persons. The four Kenyan women who participated in the project represented four different ethnic groups. Therefore, the issue at stake in this project was not only that of bridging the divide between the global north and south, but also that of engaging in meaningful conversation in the context of violence. Nasimiyu-Wasike also argued that feminism and feminist projects in Kenya must take a holistic approach to life and be directed toward the continuity, resistance, and survival of the entire human community and the natural world. She concluded by stating that the place of true solidarity in the project was found in the participants' recognition of their shared vulnerability to environmental destruction.

A thoughtful discussion followed the presentations.

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