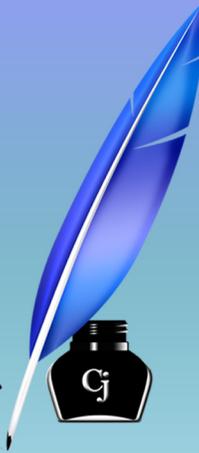


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Indecent Theology as Catachrestic Postcolonial Method: Gayatri Spivak and Asian Catholic Women

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This paper claims that despite diverse cultural frameworks Ecclesia of Women in Asia, a self-declared feminist theologian's group, use on issues surrounding body and sexuality in its book, *Body and Sexuality: Theological-Pastoral Perspectives of Women in Asia* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila Press, 2007), the articles in the book reflect a postcolonial methodology which fits into what Gayatri Spivak deems as catachresis which she defines as “the act of ‘reversing, displacing, and seizing the apparatus of value-coding.’”¹ Thus, *indecent theology* as a catachrestic term captures a particularly postcolonial methodology in the way EWA triangulates gender, religion and ethnicity to challenge women’s exclusion in the mainstream (masculinist) theologies as well as expose the implicit ethnocentrism in Western feminist theologies.

Introduction

One of the most far-reaching implications of feminist theology is the unmasking of the truth that religious language is deeply patriarchal and that this language could not encompass or articulate women’s experience because the latter is absent in dominant religious and theological discourses.

Traditional feminist theology has always been mindful of its “feminist project” of liberating women from the clutches of patriarchy. Now more than ever the “feminist project” is being questioned by feminists themselves, particularly those who come from non-Western countries, non-white, non-heterosexual, and postcolonial. This reflexive questioning is very important as it exposes the implicit ethnocentrism in white feminist theologizing in several levels. Firstly by rejecting the idea of a universal women’s experience of victimization and powerlessness; secondly, by going “there” where these white feminist theologians fear to tread—eroticism and playfulness that are borne out of understanding the female body as profoundly erotic; and thirdly, by subverting, and by extension, rejecting their idea of female solidarity that is blind to differences in and among women in the world. Ecclesia of Women in Asia (EWA) through its book, *Body and Sexuality: Theological Pastoral Perspectives of Women in Asia*, forces the uncomfortable truth that despite the liberatory project that animates the works of white feminist theologians they are still burdened by the centuries-old suspicion of the body, of eroticism, of play and wit, of slyness and seduction that Asian women in particular employ to negotiate for their space and their share of power. EWA then has set out to do, perhaps unwittingly, an indecent theology that is a form of subversion because it uses the feminist body discourse that highlights the redeeming aspect of body and sexuality while not losing sight of how hegemonic discourse uses it to put “women in their proper place.”

¹ Spivak, Gayatri, “Poststructuralism, Marginality, Postcoloniality and Value” in *Literary Theory Today*, edited by Peter Collier and Helga Geyer-Ryan (London: Polity Press, 1990), 228.

It is clear that Gayatri Spivak meant *catachresis* to be understood as *appropriation* yet the word in itself is also an appropriation. In the act of appropriating, something is, voluntarily or involuntarily, wittingly or unwittingly, left out. It is because the search for the appropriate translation, sign, and image is always mediated by the epistemic lens of the searcher or seeker. Translation is sadly a traitor in so far as it betrays the original meaning of the word that is being or translated or appropriated. Betrayal lies in its very nature. In the case of EWA, there is a deliberate reclaiming of words like *silenced, broken, bent, erotic, queer*, to destabilize stereotypes of female body. Stereotyping, according to postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture*, is an attempt to fixate. "Colonial discourse depends on the concept of fixivity. Locating, acknowledging and presenting it. The grossly exaggerated that comes with the fixivity (Bhabha 83)."

Ecclesia of Women in Asia: Her Story

Geo-political literature declares Asia as largely an imagined space firmly gripped, bound and sequestered by Western epistemological trajectories. By Asia, most people refer to that bunch of islands east of West. That Asia encompasses two-thirds of the earth's total land mass is mostly ignored, and all countries that lie within are thrown together in one indistinguishable heap. In masculinist, imperialist, ethnocentric gaze, the *Orientalists* are the "Other" insofar as they are "east of west" which pretty much captures the polarity you have in mind. *Orientalism* as coined by Edward Said refers to "a systematic way of conceptualizing the "other" based on the ontological and epistemological difference between Eastern and western economic mentalities. In actuality the inhabitants of Asia are varied and often inhabit lands, contexts and realities very markedly different from one another. Religion-wise, Asia claims to be the birthplace of the world's major religions as well as numerous spiritual traditions. This fact alone is a testament to the cultural diversity of the region.

The "Asia" in Ecclesia of Women in Asia (EWA), a self-proclaimed feminist forum of women doing theology from the academe and grassroots level in the region, is a deliberate attempt to frame the word in its own terms. It is meant to highlight both the particular way of looking at Asia (from a Catholic, feminist lens) and the general way of regarding it (different countries in the region which come together for shared goals). In so doing, EWA renders "Asia" as a metaphor for both the real and imagined spaces that Asia includes and encompasses. "Asia" as a metaphor is consistent with the feminist recognition that language can be liberating for women insofar as it is understood as deeply metaphorical. A good use of metaphor produces a flash of insight when one is able to grasp the continuum between dissimilar events, objects, things or situations and is able to draw similarities in and among them. It also echoes what Sri Lankan theologian R.S. Sugirtharajah in *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation* deems as postcolonial work which is essentially a "style of inquiry, an insight or a perspective, a catalyst, a new way of life" (Sugirtharajah 13).

The attempt is an important one to highlight. Even though there are marked differences in and among Asian women, they are intimately linked to one another, whether they like it or not, in their being female and embodied. In the global stage, the burgeoning conservative backlash is threatening to undermine all the gains of the feminist movement. At the heart of this backlash are women's bodies, which have always been a political, ideological, and spiritual battlefield. The intertwining ideologies of andrarchy and neo-liberalism are particularly violent against women. Andrarchy is an ideology which regards women as inferior to men. Neo-liberalism is an

economic model that emphasizes fair competition, free trades, liberalization and privatization. According to Roberts (2008) both legitimized the superiority of masculine thought, ideals and practices. Both are hegemonic in so far as their manifestations are global, deeply-entrenched and un-challenged. The dominance of masculine ideologies means that women are, for the longest time, considered as inferior to men in terms of intelligence, physical strength and over-all value. The subaltern status which Gayatri Spivak extends to include women, finds its embodiment in exotic Asian female bodies.

The female body—at once real and imagined—provides this space of contention where power is exercised, either in the form of disciplinary measure for the elites and a room for negotiation for the non-elites.

The story of EWA began when, in a conference organized by the Asian Federation of Catholic Bishops Conference (AFCBC), the four women theologians, greatly outnumbered, were wondering, “Where are the women theologians? Are there more women doing theology in Asia that are culled from women’s experiences?” These questions spurred a conference specifically targeted for women doing theology in Asia. This event described in EWA website as “a historic attempt at making Asian Catholic women seen and heard, 55 women theologians from all over Asia gathered in Bangkok, Thailand, for a five-day conference held on November 24-29, 2002 entitled “Ecclesia of Women in Asia: Gathering the Voices of the Silenced”.” Thirty papers were presented on various themes: Women and Violence, Women and Spirituality, Women and Church Structures, Eco-feminism and Theological Method, Women and the Bible, and Women and World Religions. “Ecclesia” was re-imagined as the “democratic assembly of free citizens.” Since then, EWA has organized 5 conferences and has been in existence for 10 years.

This article focuses on the 2004 conference with its provocative theme, “Body and Sexuality: Theological Pastoral Perspectives of Women in Asia.” The conference was aware that there were many traditions and varieties of Asian cultures with regard to body and sexuality. Yet, the goal of the event was two-fold: to recognize—make visible—the marginalized and invisible indigenous resources by putting it side by side with Christian (and oftentimes, Western) ones, and critically examine both from women’s perspectives. The event gathered an enthusiastic response; 48 participants from all over the world converged in Yogyakarta, Indonesia on November 2004. Sixteen papers were selected to be part of the book, *Body and Sexuality: Theological Pastoral Perspectives of Women in Asia* which came out in 2007. In her review which appeared in *Asian Christian Review* (2007), Hongkong born feminist theologian Kwok Pui-lan praises the book for its boldness saying, “Never before have we seen a plurality of female subjects entering into Asian theological discourses. By attending to bodies in their peculiarities, the anthology testifies to the commitment to diversity and inclusivity of the Ecclesia of Women in Asia (Kwok, 85).”

The Convergence of Methods

The inaugural 2002 EWA conference was, by and large, a call for Asian Catholic women to come out from invisibility and into the spotlight. Thus, the call for papers and participation was broad. The 2004 conference was more focused in terms of limiting the scope to body and sexuality and its attendant over and under tones like space, eroticism, violence, ecology, dance, sacred, etc. The choice of theme is very telling on how EWA was, at this time, in the process of consolidating its methodological frameworks to do theology which reflected the “signs of the

times.” Most Catholic theologians in Asia operate under the liberationist paradigm due to the prevailing influence of Latin American theologians doing theology of the poor. A prominent group, Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT), which has members from Latin America, Africa and Asia, promotes liberation theology. It is not surprising that women theologians and pastoral workers are heavily geared towards social justice. However, most academic theologians (to distinguish them from grassroots workers) are exposed to feminism, especially Western feminism and this exposure added another trajectory to their analysis. Gender then becomes an epistemological lens with which to do contextual theology. The deft use of feminism in the works of these women theologians suggests that they were abreast in the current discourses in feminism.

Postcolonialism as a methodology was liberally employed. While there is no chapter in *Body and Sexuality* which overtly used the word postcolonialism either in the title or mentioned as a conceptual framework, we can glean from the titles of chapters that it is indeed *there*, explicit in the words “Revisioning Eros,” Pauline Body as Metaphor of Whole Human Being,” “Re-imagining woman and Reshaping her Destiny,” Women Re-living the Eucharist,” “Queer Revisions of Christianity,” and “Theologizing on Difference.” And while there is no chapter which deals exclusively on the theoretical take on resistance, which is one of the marks of postcolonial method outlined by R. S. Sugirtharajah in *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation* (2002), I will argue however that the ways with which EWA forwards its arguments, themes and language is deeply resistant—a sign of its postcolonial bent in the manner after Homi Bhabha’s description of resistance as “escaping the frame.” I take it to mean that the mere act of writing or of crafting words to articulate oneself or of announcing one’s presence is postcolonial in a sense that one is more than this phenomenal field called colonialism. In other words, one’s identity, though crafted, informed and motivated by one’s colonialist past, one transcends it. I am more than what shaped me; the whole is always greater than the sum of all its parts.

Postcolonial writing then is necessarily resistance. It is resistance in the most subtle way because while it appears to embrace the colonialist ideologies and even engages in the colonialist discourse through adoption of its language, it rejects the fundamental logic with which colonialism is hinged upon, and that is, as a colonial subject one is thoroughly and completely colonized so resistance is futile.

From Contextual Feminist Theology to “Indecent Theology”

In *Body and Sexuality* we see the convergence of methodological frameworks: feminist, liberational and postcolonial. The classic hermeneutic circle, experience-reflection-action, which is used in liberation theology is expanded and deepened by feminism which was evident in the dynamics adapted by the 2004 EWA participants. The 1st step thus in contextual feminist theologizing is identification of a contemporary Asian women’s experience. In the process of identifying the experience, women are encouraged to ask why this experience is critical; what are the religious and cultural beliefs that have reinforced dominant perspectives on the experience; who suffers from these perspectives; how they suffer and who profits from their suffering. Conversely, questions like “Are there local cultural categories which can help provide a lens for looking at the experience differently?” are asked. From identification and analysis, the process

then moves on to identification of insights culled from these days together at the conference which seem relevant to analysing the experience. 2nd step involves rereading scriptural and theological tradition. Similar to 1st step, local cultural categories are employed to help towards a rereading of Scripture or tradition in relation to body and sexuality. Finally, 3rd step involves the pastoral response/s needed for action. How would a newer and clearer theology on body and sexuality assist people's lives? What deeper theological examination or pastoral action or strategizing can each one personally undertake in relation to body and sexuality? These are some of the questions asked to elicit concrete actions that directly affect women's lives.

Plato, Eros and the Hindu Goddesses

Pushpa Joseph's article, "Revisioning Eros for Asian Feminist Theologizing: Some Pointers from Tantric Philosophy" rejects Plato's understanding of eros and also by extension, the Roman Catholic Church's embrace of it. Pushpa starts with a childhood reflection on being admonished by her mother for "dancing" like the Hindus because "dancing is not part of our Christian culture" (Pushpa 34). Pushpa acknowledges that her mother was perpetrating a dualistic mindset which pits spirit or soul against body that results in rejection of all things associated with body such as eroticism, which is brought out into the fore in dancing. Her theological education which included forays in feminist theology enabled her to understand that contextual feminist theologizing reclaims eros as "the glue that binds the universe together, the allurements of one body for another, whether those bodies are humans or another" (Pushpa 36).

What is objectionable about Plato? Plato had deftly spun Eros into something that speaks of desire only as the quest for the One, the True, the Good and the Beautiful. Of course, these are all rational undertakings achievable when one has mastery over one's body, tempered by countless hours of gymnastics and sports, and possession of a sharp, penetrating mind attuned to reflections of perfect geometry.

Symposium, which is the Greek word for "drinking party," parades a host of characters in various degrees of drunkenness who extol the virtues of love, in particular, the love of and for young men. Although some of the men in *Symposium* were smitten with Socrates, the story revolves around a certain young man named Alcibiades—brilliant and beautiful—who is in love with him although Socrates treats him quite badly. Instead of forwarding his own theory on what constitutes real love, Alcibiades offers quite a lengthy recollection of his experiences with his "beloved." Those reminiscences are a delight to read particularly when Alcibiades claims that there has never been anyone like Socrates—a man so powerfully erotic he turned the conventional world of love upside down by "seeming to be a lover while really establishing himself as a beloved boy instead." Nonetheless, Alcibiades still subscribes to the conventional understanding of love as desiring the other, which then renders desire as the frustrating pursuit of that which one does not have. This is not surprising as Eros is an offspring of Fullness (Poros) and Poverty (Peneia). Eros navigates between these two sides of himself, always teetering and lurching.

It is a misreading to claim that Plato regards Eros in *Symposium* suspiciously. A more correct reading would be that Eros participates and is present in different levels. At one point, Plato even describes a biological basis for desire. In this case, it is crucial to recognize now that desire in itself is positive in a sense that it is what prompts us to continue living. There seems to

be something primordial in us, which enables us to latch on to the presence of a beloved—something deeply wired within us. I believe that it is something positive insofar as it affirms that we are humans. Desire too feeds the longing for immortality through begetting of offspring.

However, Plato through Socrates finds Eros in first level crude. The second level somewhat purifies the first when one recognizes a kindred spirit whose desire is not of the bodily kind because after much contemplation both have realized that once the sensual pursuit of beautiful forms (i.e. physical desires) are satisfied, there is no sense at all to look for more. One beautiful form is the same as any beautiful form; truth to tell the pursuit has become trifle and trite. Lovers do the “more honourable” contemplation of the beauty of institutions and laws. After reaching this level, one moves towards philosophy and sciences where the highest, noblest form of it is *love of wisdom*, one that propels the beloved in ecstatic heights because it is the soul’s longing of the hope-for-good. Eros then is intense desire yet in an *impersonal* and *disembodied* way—only through the pursuit of Philosophy, Education and Fine Arts though we get a taste of the truly erotic. From the above we gather that Plato puts primacy of reason, soul, spirit (these words are often interchangeable) over that of body. *Concupiscence* or the powerful feeling of lust came down to us as a dirty word and anything that reminds us of genital sexuality becomes suspect. Feminists have mixed feelings with Plato’s legacy. For Pushpa, Plato’s notion of eros belittles women’s selfhood.

Pushpa then turns towards India to attempt to “revision eros” as vastly different from a Platonic understanding of it which had been and continues to be catastrophic for women.

What is the implication when one draws from one’s cultural fount to destabilize a dominant worldview? In so doing, is one claiming that one’s cultural tradition is as good as the other, if not better? In a global stage, do all actors get equal billing? What does it take for a former colonial subject to take pride in one’s own culture—preferably that which is unsullied by colonial onslaught—and claim legitimacy out there? Can tantric philosophy knock Plato off from his pedestal when it comes to a *better* or more empowering notion of eros for women? *Tantra* in Hinduism celebrates the female, creative energy which emanates from the divine and permeates the entire universe. Ritualistically, Hindu goddesses are the embodiment of *Shakti*, the female energy.

In “Moving Devi,” Spivak reflects on the second-tier goddesses in the Hindu pantheon of gods and goddesses and juxtaposes them with her notion of subaltern. On the question, “Can subalterns speak?” which has reverberated around the world, Spivak muses that “it was a feeling at that time that all ejaculations should not be confined to the Abrahamic.” (Spivak 175) In the said essay, Spivak constructs a double movement that sprung forth from a play of words in *Shakti/Sati*, the latter referring to an ancient ritual practice where a widow immolates herself at her husband’s funeral. The first movement privileges *shakti* as the primordial force, a coiled energy emanating from the lowest *chakra* or energy fount which is located at base of the spine, a source of eros and creative power. The second movement yanks the *sati* from the margins where it has been banished to ever since the British outlawed it in 1829 and places it side by side with *shakti*. This double movement underscores the similarity between *shakti* and *sati*: embodied by a woman and therefore worshipped and damned at the same time.

Another Indian feminist theologian, A. Metti, writes on the significance of Hindu Goddesses in theologizing. In “Bodily Representations of Hindu Goddesses,” Metti argues that

the worship of female Hindu goddesses is dissonant with the actual situations of Indian women. She draws from the representations of popular Hindu goddesses viz., *Lakshmi*, *Saraswati*, *Parvati* and *Kali* in temples and artworks around India. These goddesses are worshipped because they possess *shakti* which is missing in male gods. Technically, these goddesses are consorts of male gods but are worshipped on their own because their male counterparts are frankly, helpless without them. Metti notes that India is one of the few civilizations that retain goddess worship and presents it as vital aspect of religious life (Metti 253).

It is quite significant to mention that 1st wave Western feminist theology was preoccupied with reclaiming the female face, aspect, or nature of God. Goddess image has been slain and replaced by God as male and father. For Mary Daly (1973), an ex-Catholic theologian, women's power ruled in ancient times as evident in old myths and legends and in archeological discoveries of a period in early human history when female images abound. God-Father image represents a new level of thinking about divinity; its elements were already present in the Great Goddess, which also developed from the Great-Mother image. In patriarchy, men became "individuated" with their identification with the Father God, resulting in a fixation with the all-powerful, separate, and otherworldly self. Men have created God in their own image. From them on, to be a man necessitates the denial of the femaleness and the natural within and the declaration of these elements as "unfit" for a man. Not so in the case of Hinduism and India it seemed, if we were to base it in the continuing worship of goddesses.

Pushpa's claim that *shakti* in Tantric philosophy is equivalent to notion of eros as creative energy (2007, 38) and that feminist theologizing would be enriched by revisioning eros through understanding tantric philosophy deeply, is interesting. For one, the claim challenges traditional feminist theologizing to be more *erotic*; to be more accepting of the sexual energy that is considerably more *dirty*, *earthy*, *messy* and *corporeal*. None of those silly terms that disclose their Platonic moorings such as the phrase "embodied spirit" please. Yet, it is the very problematic woman-nature connection that some Western feminists have an issue with, and it seems to be what Tantric philosophy offers: that women have special privilege over men because women are mediators for nature and culture; they are *consorts* and only through them *shakti* is released and through which enlightenment—spiritual liberation—occurs. This is still essentialism, albeit, cloaked differently.

Let me muddle this further by going back to Metti's claim that Hindu representations of goddesses are inconsistent with the realities of actual Indian women who are still denied access to basic education, denied property rights, viewed as properties of their husbands if married and of their fathers if unmarried, and oppressed by the beauty myth which is perpetuated by the impossibly beautiful representations of Goddesses (Metti 258-261). Her analysis in fact drew her to conclude that goddess worship is a device perpetuated by the patriarchal Brahmanical system to maintain its supremacy over women. (Metti 261) But is Christianity—as an alternative to Brahmanism—any better? Metti anticipates this question by underscoring that while Christianity's emphasis on simplicity acts as a countervailing force against the opulence in Hindu marriage rituals for example, Christianity's rejection of the feminine, which is evident in its emphasis of the maleness of Jesus, of privileging virginity in women, and of interpreting incarnation as "spirit purifying the flesh," is not so good news to Indian women as well (Metti 264).

And here we see where postcolonial method enriches contextual feminist theologizing because through it we learn what R. S. Sugirtharajah terms as "coding" and "decoding" R.S. Sugirtharajah originally meant these to be applied to the Scriptures using postcolonial method by "coding" the text so that it is taken in context; its milieu; how a particular place in text was regarded by its neighbours and vice-versa; and how gender, race and ethnicity are foregrounded or relegated to the background. "Decoding" text involves being aware of hegemonic discourses: Who is speaking? Who is silent or silenced? Decoding one's own culture is part of postcolonial theologizing because it has now become imperative that culture becomes the *locus theologicus*. The location of which, according to Bhabha, is continually defined and redefined, contested, and interrogated by people coming in and going out who often bring with them ideas of modernity and liberalism, which, when used to interrogate "native" culture, the same people often find the latter short and wanting (Bhabha 175). On the other hand, the act of interrogating enables Metti to look even closer at Kali's "black face, disheveled hair and naked body" (Metti 264). Her emaciated body and menacing eyes seem to mock other goddesses in temples who are adorned (burdened?) by jewels, flowers and beautiful saris while she stands outside guarding gates of villages. Metti had not encountered Kali before because her strict Catholic upbringing forbade her to enter temples or scrutinize Hindu goddesses' faces. But now that she did, she marveled at what Kali represents for village women and how the worship of her is something that can help feminist theologians in articulating the Divine that is disruptive, erotic and no-nonsense.

It is interesting to note that Kali worship has subaltern origins. (Metti 266) In the book, *Other Asias* (2008), specifically in the article, "Moving Devis," Gayatri Spivak reflects on the ways the subaltern in India manifest their subversion and resistance against the hegemonic, caste-bound Brahmanism through their worship of second-tier goddesses. Often small, sometimes headless, certainly not popularly worship throughout India, these goddesses represent the women who are rendered as "subaltern" in Spivak sense, guiding them in their life-cycles. One of them is *Chandi*, the "little mother:"

When cathected in ritual, each small goddess is the great goddess. The cycle of her praise and worship is much shorter than the annual festival cycle of the great ones. Daily, weekly and by the phases of her moon, she relates not only to the house but to the household as it is run by women, often by women in subordinate positions, such as a daughter or a daughter-in-law (Spivak 190).

The great goddesses confined as they are in temples then do not speak for subaltern Indian women; their representations speak so much of the elitest status of the upper middle-class, upper-caste women, who, like their goddess counterparts, are burdened by adornment which keep them immobile. Ironically, it is the subaltern women who are more mobile because they work outside the home along side men. This mobility—nonconfinement—is reflected in their goddess worship which is done outside temples, in their very own homes which are now deemed sacred by the goddesses and the women have become priestesses. Metti in particular articulates that a closer look at Kali (and by extension the second-tier goddesses) renders the Roman Catholic Church's insistence that only the [male] clergy participates in ritual for no other reason it seems, because Jesus himself was male, incredulous. (Metti 264)

Doing Indecent Theology

Quickly, what does it mean to say that a theology is indecent? What are some of the words associated with indecent? I'd guess: *unwelcomed, intrusive, inappropriate, dirty, vulgar,*

pretentious, irreverent, and immodest. I can hear Kali chortling mightily in the background, and I suppose, spewing venom as she laughs!

Are there differences between the performances of subaltern Indian women in their worship of second-tier goddesses in their homes and a group of Asian Catholic feminist theologians with the publication of the book, *Body and Sexuality*? At first glance nothing, because we can claim that participants in EWA conferences as well members of the group are not exactly subaltern in the sense that they can participate publicly, they can afford to hold conferences in many countries in Asia, and are able to publish books in English. Some even hold doctorate degrees in Theology and Philosophy. Upon scrutiny however we find that both performances are not at all different from one another. In "Moving Devis" Spivak notes the autobiographical tone in a prayer for *Sati* recited by women:

Pond of good work, Garland of flowers,
Who worships in the morning?
I am Sati Lilabati
Lucky girl with seven brothers? (Spivak 192)

Here is a ritual done during the 2004 EWA conference:

Participants stand in various positions around the prayer room to form the outline of the womb. All the other participants walk meditatively from the "ovaries" through the "fallopian tubes" into the "uterus" and flow out from the "vagina". Participants stop for a moment in the "uterus." Then they continue to walk the menstrual flow as the Menstrual Psalm is recited.

Holy the Blood poured out for me
as a testament of love through the cup of a new covenant
the cup of my salvation.
Holy the blood that flows through me, the blood of life cleansing flood;
liberating blood.
A women's blood is holy. Blood is a symbol of death to life.

The women now stand in a circle and a tray of 8 Chinese herbs that are used for brewing tea that rejuvenates women immediately after her menstrual cycle is passed around. Each participant inhales the fragrance of the tray of herbs to symbolize her appreciation for the life giving forces that flow from God into her body.

Both performances suggest that spaces are created by women, whenever they feel they need blessing or affirmation, and wherever they are, may they be at work, in auditorium, in prayer rooms and in the case of EWA, in cyberspace for it has no physical office. These spaces are carved out from and through their bodies, of which tendrils of patriarchy, andrarchy, and colonial hegemonic discourses seek out to bind and suppressed. But there are spaces which they

can't reach, even if they'd do their damndest best, and these are the spaces of resistance, of subversion, of noncooperation, of defiance, of dissent and of power.

And this effort, which takes into account the nuances with which we resist and negotiate for power in spaces the network of relations of power will allow us, hopefully translates into a theologizing that is mindful of differences in, and among, women in the world.

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