

Feminist Liberation Theologians' Network Meeting Report 2016
Mary E. Hunt
December 15, 2016

The twentieth meeting of the Feminist Liberation Theologians' Network convened at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion/Society of Biblical Literature in San Antonio, Texas, on Friday, November 18, 2016 from 4-6 PM. Mary E. Hunt and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza presided. More than seventy participants from more than a dozen countries gathered to explore the theme of *Intersectionality and Political Action*.

If ever the group needed to meet, this was the year, given the U.S. presidential election, the many ways in which oppression is playing out in the world, and the rise of nationalist movements in many regions. The FLTN meeting was a chance to hear from each person in the room about their struggle and/or political involvement. It was a time to thank one another for our work, and to realize that despite the dim global situation there are plenty of efforts underway to bring about justice.

You can watch and share the video of the meeting at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7vZHGPiczAI&t=4004s>

We are grateful to our speakers who focused on kyriarchal structures that oppress and feminist theological resources/actions that are conducive of justice.

Nami Kim, Associate Professor at Spelman College, spoke about “*Survival at No One's Expense: Forging an Intersectional Coalition*.” She described two recent book projects, one on “U.S. imperialism in Asia” and the second a feminist analysis of “gendered politics of the Korean Protestant right.” She brought insights from both to bear on the U.S. presidential election and its aftermath. Using Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's model of kyriarchy, she showed the connections between “sexism, homophobia, and Islamophobia” as they relate to the “hegemonic masculinity.” Dr. Kim pointed out that such analysis is needed now more than ever both in theory and activism.

Judith Plaskow, Professor Emerita of Religious Studies at Manhattan College, shared her insights on “*I'm here as a Jewish feminist*.” She described her anti-racism work through Jews for Racial and Economic Justice (JFREJ) and the importance of doing her work as a Jew since her commitment to justice flows from her religious values. She reported on JFREJ's work on police accountability. She also related her experience at a meeting entitled the “We Won't Wait Summit” which was focused on economic justice for women. These were opportunities to engage in meaningful solidarity actions. She concluded with an inspiring post-election statement from JFREJ that resonated with many participants: “We are grateful for our movements and our communities, and in this difficult moment we will show up for each other in ways we never have before.”

Andrea Smith, Associate Professor at the University of California Riverside, laid out an argument for moving “*Beyond Ethnographic Entrapment: Changing the Terms of the Debate*.” She rejected simply including people, for example Native People

or people with disabilities, into the existing models. She proposed that we change the “logic of oppression.” She related how many Native American children are expelled from schools supposedly for unacceptable behavior, but probably because they are bored. These are the same schools that are geared to teach people to tolerate boredom in their jobs, thus creating the workforce for capitalism. Instead, she proposed that we teach people to expect fulfillment, to change the normative experience beginning with the educational system, and build what we think is appropriate. Anything less will be inadequate.

Discussion ensued in small groups and was reported in the plenary gathering. The conversations were a welcome chance to sit together as people from around the world and ponder the impact of the U.S. political situation that was on everyone’s minds. Issues included privilege and risk, the politics of empathy, the need for self-care, and the importance of local as well as national focus for action. The plight of refugees, the expected rollback of gains made in reproductive health, and LGBTIQ justice were all part of the mix.

We did not decide on a topic for next year. But several people made suggestions that converge on “Feminist Liberation Theologies: Resistance, Resilience, and Creativity” which is our current working title. We are happy to receive suggestions for speakers and issues in that area.

The conversation continued on Saturday November 19, 2016, when the Women’s Caucus and the Feminist Liberation Theologians’ Network collaborated, as we have done for several years.

The theme was *Agitating Boundaries: Intersectionality and Political Action* chaired by Elizabeth Ursic who teaches religion at Mesa Community College. Mary E. Hunt reported on the FLTN meeting of the day before and responded to the papers; Nami Kim joined in the responses to the papers.

Three papers were offered:

1. **Julia Berger of the University of Kent and Maha Marouan from Pennsylvania State University** spoke about “Faith-Based and Feminist NGOs: Forging a Common Agenda.” They focused on women’s efforts at the United Nations, which many FLTN people could well join. Like Judith Plaskow, they were intent on building new coalitions of women for whom their faith commitments inform their justice work.

2. **Elaine Nogueira-Godsey of the Methodist Theological School in Ohio** shared her work on “Postcolonial Imaginations of a Feminist Liberation Methodology.” Her experiences as a Brazilian scholar and activist who has lived for years in South Africa and is now newly arrived in the United States made for a unique perspective. Like Andrea Smith, Elaine was interested in creating new paradigms, relying helpfully on the work of Brazilian theologian Ivone Gebara.

3. **Evangeline Anderson Rajkumar of Lenoir-Rhyne University** reflected on

“Busting and Blurring Boundaries: Coagulation of Bodies at the Site of Struggle.” Her work on evangelical Christians was particularly relevant given the high percentage of those women who voted for Donald Trump. Like Nami Kim, she saw decolonializing and de-imperializing work as central to the feminist agenda. She asked what “evangelical” means given that some of the views that some evangelicals express would seem to run counter to values of love and justice as found in Christian scriptures.

Table discussion followed with college students, graduate students, professors, and activists sharing experiences and insights. The general impression was that this work is more necessary than ever given the current political situation. There was also a sense that we who engage in feminist liberation theologies are well positioned and have decades of experience analyzing and strategizing for change so the contemporary challenges are not brand new to us.

The Feminist Liberation Theologians’ Network will meet at the AAR/SBL in Boston, on Friday, November 17, 2017 from 4-6 PM at a place to be announced. Meanwhile, feel free to post to the FLTN Google Group, feministliberationtheologiansnetwork@googlegroups.com to share ideas, information, and actions relevant to our shared focus which is to bring feminist liberation theological insights to the work of social change.

Best wishes and thanks to all who were involved in these activities.