

## **Feminist Liberation Theologians' Network 2018 Meeting Report** **Mary E. Hunt** **January 17, 2019**

For the twenty-second year in a row, the Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics, and Ritual (WATER) convened the working meeting of Feminist Liberation Theologians' Network at the American Academy of Religion/Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting in Denver, Colorado on Friday, November 16, 2018 from 4-6 PM. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Mary E. Hunt presided at the session focused on **Economics: Global and Local Intertwined: A Feminist Liberation Theology Priority**.

The topic sprang from the last two sessions on intersectionality (2016) and on resistance, resilience, and creativity (2017), videos of which can be found at <https://www.waterwomensalliance.org/feminist-liberation-theologians-network/>. We persist in our concern with the extraordinary precariousness of the global situation, especially as the Trump Administration in the United States destabilizes the world economic order. It is fruitful to have colleagues from many countries to reflect together on problems and potential solutions.

By way of introduction, more than fifty participants from nine countries named their own economic priorities. These range from concerns about students' food scarcity and rising student debt, to questions about how neo-liberal capitalism shapes everything from the theological job market to privatization of formerly government-run agencies. Students, faculty members, activists, religious professionals, and members of the press shared their insights into economic inequality.

Scholar/activists and longtime committed feminist liberation theologians Professor Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite of Chicago Theological Seminary and Professor Cynthia Moe-Lobeda of the Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary and the Church Divinity School of the Pacific (Graduate Theological Union) offered challenging remarks to start a brisk discussion. Watch the video of these presentations at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z5uH4xSCn\\_Y&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z5uH4xSCn_Y&feature=youtu.be).

Susan laid out the parameters of global predatory capitalism: how the system can morph like a deadly virus creating the contradiction of "green billionaires," for example. She counseled the group to "follow the money," to see the real impact on real people of neo-liberal economic policies. She lifted up the impact on climate change, noting that 80% of those displaced by climate-related events are women. Susan advised critical attention to these matters concluding on a hopeful note by pointing to the recent election of a record number of women in the U.S. Congress. Since feminist liberation theologians have long developed contextual and praxis-based approaches to religion, she observed, we "don't quit" when it comes to working for change.

Cynthia underscored the fact that global capitalism is a human invention and as such it can be changed. She offered a "Feminist Liberation Ethical Framework for Building a New Economy" with emphasis on economics, ecology, and democracy. She urged the deprivatization of love as part of interstructured efforts to achieve gender,

racial, and economic equity. The stakes are high, she claimed, but economics for life and not for profit is the “spirit-filled” work at hand.

Participants and WATER thanked Susan and Cynthia for their insights and suggestions.

Small group discussions followed. Participants talked about the California wild fires as an example of how differently people with resources and those without cope with disasters. Colleagues lifted up the real lives of people in the room who deal with student debt in a low-paying field. One person suggested the need to retire the notion of ‘independence’ entirely in favor of a more communal approach, perhaps replacing it with ‘interdependence’ or a similar concept.

There was consensus that we in FLTN have many resources to offer—including our circular power dynamics, our critical feminist analysis, and the training of many of our peers to facilitate hard conversations in diverse communities. Our connections across continents are a resource as we attempt to chart a more just economic future.

Next year’s topic flowed quite naturally from this one. There is an urgency to look at climate change from feminist liberation theological perspectives in order to better understand how and why economic inequity persists. We need to consider the state of our planet given the dire news of climate-related damage. Surely feminist theological insights can be brought to bear in a useful way.

**Please consider volunteering to make a short presentation and/or suggest other scholar/activists whose work you think we need to include. Thank you. Feel free to contact me at [mhunt@hers.com](mailto:mhunt@hers.com) for these and other related matters**

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FLTN continued its happy collaboration with the Women’s Caucus on Saturday, November 17, 2019 from 9-11:30 AM. The Caucus, as has been its custom in recent years, focused a session on the same theme as FLTN. This time it was Economics. Three presenters gave papers:

1. *Informationalization and the Algorithmic, Automated, Underconnected, Surveilled, Misogynistic Nature of Women's Disempowerment in the 21st Century: Cyberfeminist and Cyberwomanist Theological Responses* by Elonda Clay, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam
2. *Religion’s Response to World Economic Forum’s Ability: Working Hand in Hand to End Sexual Harassment and Violence* by Janice Poss, Claremont Graduate University
3. *Salim, Women, and Oikos: A Planetary Expansion of Family* by Jea Sophia Oh, West Chester University, Pennsylvania

Mary E. Hunt offered a short report of the FLTN meeting and a response to each of the papers in which it was clear that economics plays a pivotal role in establishing norms and behaviors and shaping outcomes.

**The FLTN will reconvene in San Diego at the AAR/SBL meeting in San Diego on November 22, 2019, 4-6 PM, place to be determined. All are welcome.**

Please tell your students and colleagues, especially international ones, to mark their calendars now so they can plan travel accordingly.

Meanwhile, please feel free to use the Feminist Liberation Theologians' Google group to share information and ideas. Contact [feministliberationtheologiansnetwork@googlegroups.com](mailto:feministliberationtheologiansnetwork@googlegroups.com) to be added to the Google group. Once a member, feel free to post relevant information.

The video of this meeting can be found at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z5uH4xSCn\\_Y&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z5uH4xSCn_Y&feature=youtu.be). Use it in your teaching and research.

All good wishes and thanks to everyone who participated, especially to Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite and Cynthia Moe-Lobeda.

Please let me know ([mhunt@hers.com](mailto:mhunt@hers.com)) if you would like further information.

With hope for justice in 2019,

Mary E. Hunt  
Co-director, WATER

Following is the Call for Papers from our Women's Caucus colleagues for the 2019 AAR/SBL:

**Session #1: Creating and Expanding Public Spheres and Climate Change To be held Saturday, Nov. 23, 2019, 9-11:30 AM.**

The AAR/ SBL Women's Caucus, in collaboration with the Feminist Liberation Theologian's Network (FLTN), invites papers asking questions about our role as feminist theologians and scholars of religion and educators' responsibilities to public spaces in times of anthropogenic climate change. In light of AAR/SBL 2019's theme, we are particularly interested in the commitment of scholars and academic institutions in relation to creating and expanding public spheres. How can feminist scholars use our experiences and skills to promote respectful discussions on difficult topics? How might these skills and experiences be used in communicating and bridging people's denial and/or unawareness of anthropogenic climate change? We particularly welcome papers engaging with questions related to how and why public spheres should be expanded to include the religious, gendered and racial experiences of minoritized and/or marginalized people around the globe (e.g. refugees, migrants, etc.). And, what would the next step in inclusivity in our own public spaces look like? Panelists from this Women's Caucus session need to attend the pre-conference FLTN session on

Friday afternoon, and a FLTN representative will attend this Caucus session on Saturday morning to continue the conversation. Panelists will include reflections on the FLTN session in their presentations as well as present their own work.