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Editorial

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Author(s): Javney Mohr and Charissa Jaeger-Sanders

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Editorial

Revolutionary Labors of Love Taking Root Every Day: The Moral Imperative of Feminist Theological Praxis, Resisting Occupation and Cultivating Life

Javney Mohr and Charissa Jaeger-Sanders

Co-Managing Editors (2024 to Present),

Graduate Theological Union

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Of what effect are acts of care, compassion, and protection – the materiality and international scope of an ethic *towards* "the other"? Can service and solidarity – labors systematically unseen and erased by Western imperialist design – be truly global in significance? Of what is the "everyday"? For the Western liberal intelligentsia, such queries are simply fodder for decadent academic debate; extracted from history, these notions are confined to the abstract realms of theoretical consideration for the Western scholars alone. However, "everyday" is the singular historical terrain upon which every struggle for national liberation and anticolonial revolution are seeded and sown, tended to and grown, until their emerging, blossoming, and full uprising. We pose and propose the following thus: **might it be that the very labors, Lands, and people that the Western world deems lesser-than, as feminine, are the precise and collective materialization of a counter-politics of equal or grander force to the Western colonial world system?** If this is indeed the case, and the historical moment in which our lives unfold is as we analytically perceive it, anti-imperialist feminist praxis is a theo-ethical imperative of intellectual and political urgency – promising and

constructing the historical possibility of liberation, once and for all.

Let us say a few words on the current global historical context: the contemporary terrains of our lifetimes. The conditions of structural injustice across the hemispheres are sharpening in extremity, and the prospects of political movements that can upend globalized Western colonialism seem dim. The disparities between the peripheralized nation-states and the imperial metropolises are increasing across all indicators, claims of “democracy versus autocracy” are wielded for imperialist aims, and the permanent de-development of the Global South, upon which Western wealth and geopolitical stature are derived, intensifies each day as the colonial arrangement now breaches planetary scope – a new world order of climate apartheid. An international division of humanity – between the white Western property masculine deemed superior and those allotted to the zone of nonbeing – the present context is an indisputable indictment of the capitalist world system birthed by colonialism.

Yet, a global historical materialist analysis also perceives these very conditions of the historical moment as indicative of Western hegemony’s coming collapse, marked by materializations of geopolitical shifts and global anticolonial possibility. At this juncture, these are years of precipice thus: of at-once accelerating Western state/settler violence and hyper-imperialism,⁶ and, of historic anti-imperialist resistance and internationalist solidarity demonstrated by the Global South on behalf of humanity.

The enduring grip of the colonial world-order appears interminable. The barbarity of the mass poverty and death it creates, indescribable. However, history moves in the direction

⁶ See: TriContinental: Institute for Social Research, "Hyper-Imperialism: A Dangerous Decadent New Stage," *Studies, Contemporary Dilemmas*, no. 4 (2024).

of the Third World⁷ towards a horizon of liberation for the global majority. This Special Issue of the *BJRT* seeks to illuminate the fact that the “way(s) forward” are not only im/possible, but always already everywhere underway.

Alive and arising in incalculable manifestations across the Earth, anti-imperialist feminist praxis is grounded in the theoretical frameworks of subaltern disciplines – principally anticolonial thought, Third World Marxism, and anti-imperialist feminism. Additionally, it draws upon religious, faith, and wisdom traditions that are perceived and understood as divine callings to modes of existence that inculcate and foster liberation and love, or liberation *as* love. These philosophical and theological traditions chronicle the functionality of the onto-epistemic foundations of colonial capitalism and imperialism, elucidating and advancing understanding of the ideological cognates (race, class, gender, sex, etc.) that function and refunction Western hegemony over the world. Furthermore, they demonstrate how locally specific anticolonial resistances collectively challenge, counter, and *deform*⁸ capitalism as the world-system, which occurs through the materialized ethic of internationalist solidarity. Paradoxically, here, we witness that the intimate and “everyday” practices of compassion and resistance are global in emancipatory effect.

In this late-stage era of Western “wasting”⁹ of Indigenous, oppressed, and planetary life, anti-imperialist

⁷ In anticolonial Marxist thought, “Third World” is a political not a geographic term. Per Prashad, “the Third World is a project, not a place only.” See: Vijay Prashad, *The Poorer Nations: A Possible History of the Global South*. Verso, 2014.

⁸ On the onto-material notion of resistance as the process of deforming the colonial-structure, see: Georges Bataille, *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939*, trans. Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1985); Abdaljawad Omar, “Bleeding Forms: Beyond the Intifada,” *Critical Times* 7, no. 2 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1215/26410478-11216928>.

⁹ “Waste” here refers to Ali Kadri’s conception of waste as the specific logic of dollarized financial imperialism’s political economy, whereby the annihilation of Indigenous, oppressed, and planetary life is the “waste” that advances its expansionist

feminist praxis is an imperative subject of intellectual and political urgency. Firstly, such praxis gestures towards the alternative epistemes buried and obscured by Western liberal conceptual abstractions. Secondly, it centralizes and prioritizes the national liberation question, redefining the moral and political parameters of what constitutes “decolonization” and “love” – terms defined by and in the hands of those under the boot of Western fascist domination. At what Desai terms this “hegemonic moment”¹⁰ in history, reclamations of all kinds — epistemic, ontological, and material — *from* the imperial cores *back* to the Third World — is of vital significance. Finally, anti-imperialist feminist praxis underscores the historical inventiveness, intellectual breadth, and moral authority of the revolutionary consciousness of the colonized and oppressed — from Palestine to Wet’suwet’en, *de Cuba a Irlanda*.

Indeed, as we noted above, the grip of the colonial world-order appears interminable. The barbarity of the mass poverty and death it creates is indescribable. The perpetual, all-encompassing suffocation and extermination of the people and Lands of the Global South is accelerating. However, despite the serial efforts of the “settlement,” history moves in the direction of the Third World towards a horizon of liberation for the global majority. **From Palestine to Wet’suwet’en, the landless workers of *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra* to the Axis of Resistance in West Asia, each and every act of resistance and compassion constitute an indispensable component of the collective process of global anticolonial liberation.** Upon the everyday terrains of the human life, holding onto a horizon and right of liberation, each and every act of love/resistance is an indomitable contribution to this historical trajectory.

needs. In other words, killing/waste is the intrinsic characteristic of the domain of production under U.S. imperialism. See: Kadri, Ali, *Accumulation of Waste: A Political Economy of Systemic Destruction*, (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2023).

¹⁰ Desai, Radhika. *Geopolitical Economy: After US Hegemony and Globalization*, (London: Pluto Press, 2013).

In this issue, we endeavor to shed light on the multifaceted politic of anti-imperialist feminist scholarship and practice. Made of the loving acts of oppressed people and those in solidarity across the Earth, this praxis stands upright; it is not only a radical refusal, rejection, and resistance to the Western colonial world system, but also, the simultaneous reclamation and cultivation of the consummate counter-world, a present and future categorically otherwise, oriented *towards* "the other." From the time of Fatima to the present and the morrow, liberative praxis lives across temporalities, offering pathway(s) to a world rid of oppression, practiced in the every day, made of multiple expressions and modes, generation to generation, seed to tree, into forest, unto the sky.

Whether or not liberation occurs during our lifetimes, it comes upon the horizon. Surely.

This special issue of the *Berkeley Journal of Religion and Theology* celebrates and honors the Women's Studies in Religion (WSR) Program at the Graduate Theological Union, which resides at the intellectual and cultural heart of the GTU and works to foster, promote, and advance commitment to the study of women, gender, and religion. The WSR celebrates the pioneering contributions of women in theological and religious disciplines, offers enriching opportunities for critical conversations, and promotes intellectual advocacy and mentorship, creating a vibrant space for scholarly inquiry, community, and activism.

A "grounded" scholarship, featuring the works of WSR students and faculty is an intentional choice of the *BJRT*. It is our hope that, in so doing, the centrality of anti-imperialist feminist theologies and theories in all forms of knowledge production can be more comprehensively understood, that the often student-led and self-sacrificial struggles for justice within, against, and beyond Western academia are better recognized, and that the historically constant leading role of women upon

the intellectual and material fronts of liberation is understood as the very praxis of global anti-colonialism – a theory-practice already always everywhere underway, from Rafah to Caracas.

Entitled “Servant Leadership: Honoring the Labor of Love,” this Special Issue of the *BJRT* commences with the WSR Faculty Lecture, delivered by Dr. Mahjabeen Dhala at the WSR Conference in the Spring Semester of 2023. Dr. Dhala currently serves as the Director of the Madrasa-Midrasha Program and the Assistant Professor of Islamic Studies at the Graduate Theological Union. In this insightful and compelling lecture, Dr. Dhala lifts up Fatima, the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad, to the status of theologian, prophet, advocate, and exemplar for servant leadership. Through this analysis, Dr. Dhala underscores the moral imperative of feminist theological practice and emphasizes the significance of resisting occupation and cultivating a life of flourishing.

Following Dr. Dhala’s contribution, Diane Saunders, former Program Chair of the WSR and a fourth-year PhD student in the Historical and Cultural Studies of Religion Department with a concentration in Art and Religion, offers a profound reflection on the Women’s Studies in Religion Program at the GTU. Saunders skillfully integrates and weaves the feminist theories exemplified in the scholarship across the WSR faculty and student body, the contributions featured in this Issue, and the intellectual commitments of the *BJRT*. Insightfully, Saunders illuminates key characteristics of feminist theology, such as the inseparability of theory and practice, the imperative of activism and social justice, the role of the prophetic voice, the centrality of scholarship produced by women and marginalized people, and servant leadership through mentorship – themes elucidated upon in the contributions that follow. As you will experience reading Saunders’ reflection, her unique viewpoint as the program coordinator is one that discerns the radical throughline – the theoretical, spiritual, and moral underpinnings – that connects

the diverse WSR participants and faculty, and the myriad faith traditions and social intersections that ground their work. A brilliant scholar and servant-leader herself, Saunders' perspective is informative and inspiring, embodying the highest aspirations of the WSR.

Letesa Isler, a graduate student at the Institute for Buddhist Studies, ushers in the Issue's Articles section, providing a rich theological and pastoral care reflection in her piece entitled "Ārya Tārā as an Archetype for Spiritual Caregivers." Isler showcases how Ārya Tārā serves as an abundant source for the fundamental qualities essential for caregivers who provide spiritual care, celebrating and emphasizing the importance of vulnerability, compassion, and confronting challenges with intentional presence and courage.

Following Isler's work, Yanan Lu, a PhD Candidate in the Theology and Ethics Department at the Graduate Theological Union, presents a vision of Chinese Feminist theologies in her article titled, "Women Hold Up Half the Sky: Exploration and Calling for the Prospect of Chinese Feminist Theologies." This article aims to celebrate her cultural context while advocating for more liberative theological interpretations and practices.

We acknowledge and celebrate the full array of contributions that *BJRT* hosts, authored by both emerging and established scholars alike and from theoretical and theological traditions that span the Earth, principally from the Global South. As a journal, the embodiment of plurality commonly committed to humanity – to which the *BJRT* strives – is the precise inverse of the normative scholarship produced by the West. As the epistemic pillar of empire, Western educational institutions take up their role in the *mission civilizatrice* with feverish vigor, reproducing the hierarchical arrangement of society that defines Western modernity through the power of narration and designation. With self-awarded authority, Western academia performs their duty: determining, on behalf

of humanity, who is a voice of knowledge and who is not, where knowledge is located and where it is not, who is and is not worthy of thought, which, in other words, is to say who is human, and who is nonbeing. As a perpetuating system, scholars' epistemic productions that legitimate Western omnipotence correlates to their careerist ascendancy. Consummately convinced of both their moral and intellectual superiority, a substantive portion of Western academia enthusiastically embraces the colonial mission as the ultimate epistemic arbiter of global knowledge.

The capacity to narrate the historical situation to the colonized, settler, and colonial master is an essential component in the maintenance of empire and expansion of its supremacy. We wish to be clear that Western academic institutions and those who wield positions of power within those institutions play a formidable role in perpetuating, maintaining, and justifying the death-dealing world-structure of Western hegemony.

It is not hyperbolic to assert, therefore, that students within these institutions are subjected to the quotidian force of epistemic and pedagogical violence. This is not happenstance. For at stake in the locality of "student-in-school" is the very definition of space, subjectivity, and time - i.e., sociality: who we are in *relation* to others. In the university, the questions are determined: Who has the right to explore ideas and share expressions? Whose forms of subjectivity are vilified or glorified? Whose conceptions of knowledge and knowledge production are veritable? Who gets to shape the world, and who does not? And *why*?

Centers of education across the globalized world, thus and however, are pivotal and formidable zones of struggle: for they reside at the existential crux of colonial modernity's *surety*. Despite the atmospheric structure of hegemonic criteria and pre-definitions of excellence versus worthlessness into which they must fit and/or attain, however, students uprising (*intifada*)!

Holding to a right to and horizon of liberation, the historical record documents that it is nearly always students leading radical movements, unyieldingly perceiving and committed to a world categorically rid of oppression, once and for all. This resistance manifests in subversive scholarship, radical acts of care, and uncompromising political solidarity. We argue that *this* is brilliance. Brilliance lies in the struggle for freedom and the concretized pursuit of a just, flourishing, and decolonized world.

In this Special Issue, the *BJRT* is honored to feature the scholarship of two scholars currently pursuing studies. We encourage readers to consider their work as seriously as other contributions found in the issue. While practitioners of feminist theological praxis seek to dismantle and bury colonialism, the racialized, classist, and gendered ideological underpinnings of the Western world are deeply ingrained in the structural and socio-cultural fabric of our lives. The decolonization of the mind is as necessary as the repatriation of Land. Therefore, in addition to encouraging readers to consider all contributions with equal appreciation, we remind ourselves and readers that authors pull and write from their lived experiences and that, at times, their analyses may not fully align with the anti-imperialist and liberative commitments of this journal, which acknowledges the pervasive and extensive impact of colonialism, white supremacy, and patriarchy in even the most radical and leftist of our spaces.

Tucked towards the back of the issue, you will encounter a list of monographs that require review. Book reviews play a critical role in scholarship and have played a key role within the *BJRT*. Book reviews have the significant impact of guiding readers and assisting scholars in discovering and learning from sources that may not otherwise come to their attention. In this section, we have made a conscious effort to elevate and prominently feature sources from women and the Global South. Moreover, in our next issue, we are delighted to

include a book review by PhD Student Raya Hazini of Mahjabeen Dhala's *Feminist Theology and Social Justice in Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, January 2024).

This issue culminates with a thoughtful lecture by Emeritus Professor at the Institute for Buddhist Studies, Dr. Richard K. Payne. The lecture is entitled "Doctrine and Practice: Dialectic and Nondual" and was originally given as the 47th Annual Distinguished Faculty Lecture on November 15, 2022, at the Graduate Theological Union. Dr. Payne explores the relationship between doctrine and practice, showcasing their meaningful imbrications and the way that practice is legitimate in its own right. Payne's critical and constructive essay offers a wonderful bookend to the issue as a whole.

Anti-imperialist feminist praxis is an imperative response to the oppressive Western colonial patriarchal world system. This praxis, grounded in subaltern disciplines and religious traditions, envisions and creates a counter-world of liberation and love, challenging the dominant epistemology, ontology and materiality. It is a call to action for intellectual and political urgency, emphasizing the everyday acts of resistance and compassion as the primary components of global anticolonial liberation. As you read through this issue, may you also be called to this sort of life work and active commitment!

Finally, a brief note looking beyond this issue. Soon, you will have the opportunity to contribute to *BJRT's* next issue, which will include both a Call for Papers and a Call for Art. It will be an issue that centers Palestine, anti-imperialism, and liberation theology. Please watch for the formal call for papers and art in the coming months.

Javney and Charissa have served as the Co-Managing Editors of the Berkeley Journal of Religion and Theology since January 2024. Both are committed to liberative praxis and scholarship that resists destruction and cultivates flourishing for all.

Javney Mohr, a PhD student in the Department of Theology and Ethics and Presidential Scholar at the Graduate Theological Union, is a Marxist activist-scholar. Grounded in anticolonial thought, her research inquires the pedagogic and internationalist character of Third World resistance movements and the geopolitical ecologies of anti/imperialism. Her work proposes anticolonialism as the political activity of love and the ethical orientation of the Land.

Charissa Jaeger-Sanders is a PhD Candidate in the Department of Theology and Ethics at the Graduate Theological Union. She is part of both the Center for Dharma Studies and the Center for Theology and Natural Sciences. As an eco-feminist, interreligious comparative theologian rooted in a Wesleyan theology and in deep dialogue with Hindu Śākta theology with a secondary concentration in theology and science and underpinned by philosophy of science, Charissa has a special interest in the Divine relationship with materiality and how one's theology impacts their understanding of evil and suffering in the world.