

Introduction:
Re-Imagining Im-Possibilities All-Together?

Rita Nakashima Brock and Tat-siong Benny Liew

Throughout her remarkable career, Kwok Pui Lan has demonstrated an uncanny ability to work with a multitude of people. Her contributions to feminist theological scholarship and to Asian and Asian American studies of religion and theology are extraordinary both for her publications and for her decades of involvement in grassroots movements that have become enduring organizations. The two most obvious organizations are PANAAWTM (Pacific, Asian, and North American Asian Women in Theology and Ministry) and ATSI (Asian Theological Summer Institute). Her ability to move among and across different networks of people in the Global North and Global South is extraordinary as she engages with different habits of thought and praxis between ministry and the academy and across academic fields beyond her own discipline of theology. As a result, she has edited books on the Anglican Church, on postcolonial practices of ministry, on Asian and Asian American women's theologies and religions, and on the "Third World."¹ In addition, Kwok is an international scholar of diverse movements with published works on Occupy Wall Street and the protest movement in Hong Kong.² As Helen Jin Kim points

¹ Ian T. Douglas and Kwok Pui-lan, eds., *Beyond Colonial Anglicanism: The Anglican Communion in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Church Publishing, 2001); Kwok Pui-lan, Judith A. Berling, and Jenny Plane Te Paa, eds., *Anglican Women on Church & Mission* (New York: Morehouse, 2012); Kwok Pui-lan and Stephen Burns, eds., *Postcolonial Practice of Ministry: Leadership, Liturgy, and Interfaith Engagement* (Lanham: Lexington, 2016); Kwok Pui-lan, ed., *Asian and Asian American Women in Religion and Theology: Embodying Knowledge* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020); Kwok Pui-lan, ed., *Hope Abundant: Third World and Indigenous Women's Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2010).

² Joerg Rieger and Kwok Pui-lan, *Occupy Religion: Theology of the Multitude* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012); Kwok Pui-lan and Francis Ching-wah Yip,

out in her essay, Kwok shows us that working with different populations and movements is important for effective, lasting change, which Kwok accomplishes with her deft negotiation of many roles as “Theologian, Educator, Mentor, Public Voice, Prophet, Spiritual Guide, Pioneer, Organizer.”

Occupy Wall Street offers an example of how, in this book, we are using the term “multitude.” It was inspired by Arab Spring and spread internationally within weeks of the launch of the first encampment on September 17, 2011, in New York City. Deliberately eschewing charismatic leaders, it was decentralized, globally networked, and focused on “inclusion and groping toward consensus.” Multitudes of this movement continued to pursue new strategies long after police forces destroyed the visible encampments.³ For example, artist and lifelong activist Boots Riley of Occupy Oakland wrote and directed the feature film “Sorry to Bother You” in 2018⁴ and the current chair of the progressive caucus in the US House of Representatives, Pramila Jayapal (D-WA), announced her run for office at the former location of Occupy Seattle, which she supported.⁵ Occupiers in Boston began to work with and through existing community organizations to push for change in local housing and public transportation. In the words of one such Occupier, “Once folks got out of the tedium, you know, of needing to protect that space and maintain that space and the things you need to do to run a small city, you know, keeping people fed, keeping it sanitized, people were able to focus on broader issues.”⁶ From the Occupy Movement, organized activities included the 99

eds., *The Hong Kong Protest and Political Theology* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2021).

³ Douglas Rushkoff, “Think Occupy Wall St. Is a Phase? You Don’t Get It,” *CNN*, October 11, 2011, <https://www.cnn.com/2011/10/05/opinion/rushkoff-occupy-wall-street/index.html>.

⁴ Amy Goodman, “Boots Riley’s Dystopian Satire ‘Sorry to Bother You’ Is an Anti-Capitalist Rallying Cry for Workers,” *Democracy Now*, July 17, 2018, https://www.democracynow.org/2018/7/17/sorry_to_bother_you_boot_s_rileys.

⁵ Astra Taylor, “Occupy Wall Street’s Legacy Runs Deeper Than You Think,” *Economic Hardship Reporting Project*, December 17, 2019, <https://economichardship.org/2019/12/occupy-wall-streets-legacy-runs-deeper-than-you-think/>.

⁶ Cited in Tovia Smith, “Occupy Boston Holds on as Other Camps Close,” *National Public Radio*, February 9, 2012, <https://www.npr.org/2012/02/09/146657528/occupy-boston-holds-on-as-other-camps-close>.

Percent Spring, Occupy Homes, Occupy the Hood, and Occupy the Dream.⁷

Multitude is a word popularized by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, meaning “an internally different, multiple social subject whose constitution and action is based not on identity or unity” but “on what it has in common.”⁸ Hardt and Negri note that multitude can be present “both within and against” powers of domination, even as they assert that “the challenge of the multitude is the challenge of democracy.”⁹ While we build upon their work in this collection, we need to do so with nuance, as Kwok and other critics have shown.¹⁰ Specifically, our authors variously address three huge lacunae in Hardt and Negri’s proposal regarding multitude. First, Hardt and Negri state that racial difference should have room to express itself freely without becoming the basis of determining a power differential, but their emphasis on the eighteenth-century (particularly the French and the American Revolutions) as “the North Star... to guide...political desires and practices” of the multitude shows that they have little sense or sensibility when it comes to matters of race, despite their acknowledgment of the “exclusion of the nonwhite.”¹¹ Second, Hardt and Negri demonstrate the same dismissal of gender by including it as a key component of multitude and questioning the normalization of the male body while lifting up models for multitude that are primarily male.¹² The biblical David, for instance, functions for them as an exemplary figure to imagine “the multitude as champion of asymmetrical combat, immaterial workers who become a new kind of combatants.”¹³ When Hardt and Negri think about David and power asymmetrically, their focus is solely on two men (David and

⁷ Rieger and Kwok, *Occupy Religion*, 32, 37, 60.

⁸ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 100.

⁹ Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 100–101.

¹⁰ For sample critiques of Hardt and Negri’s work on the multitude, see Ayça Çubukçu, “Review of *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri,” *The Arab Studies Journal* 13/14 (Fall 2005–Spring 2006): 168–73; Samir Amin, “Contra Hardt and Negri: Multitude or Generalized Proletarianization,” *Monthly Review* 66 (November 2014): 25–36.

¹¹ Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 241.

¹² See, for example, Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 157, 199, 355.

¹³ Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 50.

Goliath); completely off of their radar screen, it seems, is how David rises to kingship using conventional military power and uses his status to rape Bathsheba, the wife of an exemplary officer in the military he commands. Third, Hardt and Negri pay no attention to religion and theology when they talk about the multitude, even as they draw examples from religious texts while ignoring scholarship that troubles the valorizing narratives involved and simultaneously announcing that today's multitudes have no need of God.¹⁴

While Hardt and Negri propose multitude as an emerging global class formation against the empire of globalized capitalism, the concerns they dismiss – gender, race, and religion/theology – are even more pressing now as #MeToo, #BlackLivesMatter, and #StopAsianHate have become the largest, intersecting multitudes over and against a White Supremacist Christian nationalist multitude. Gender, race, and religion/theology as dimensions of multitude are precisely what Kwok's global and postcolonial scholarship¹⁵ and the work of the writers in this collection are all about and what are most needed in this historical moment, as the world struggles with a global resurgence of fascist forces.

One hesitation that many have raised about movements of multitudes is their continuity or durability. Patchen Markell proposes through his reading of Hannah Arendt that we can talk about power not in terms of "power over" but in terms of "power to" or "power after."¹⁶ According to Markell, Arendt focuses on power as something that follows and outlasts action ("power after") rather than as something that precedes and enables action ("power to"). Power, in Arendt's own words, "keeps people together after the fleeting moment of action has passed."¹⁷ However, attaching power to the aftermath of a movement uprising elides the reality that such

¹⁴ Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 159; Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 396.

¹⁵ See, for example, Kwok Pui-lan, *Chinese Women and Christianity, 1860-1927* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1992); Kwok Pui-lan, *Introducing Asian Feminist Theology* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2000); Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005); Kwok Pui-lan, *Globalization, Gender, and Peacebuilding: The Future of Interfaith Dialogue* (New York: Paulist, 2012); Kwok, *Asian and Asian American Women in Religion and Theology*.

¹⁶ Patchen Markell, "The Moment Has Passed: Power after Arendt," in *Radical Future Pasts: Untimely Political Theory*, eds. Romand Cole, Mark Reinhardt, and George Shulman (Lexington: University of Kentucky, 2014), 113–43.

¹⁷ Cited in Markell, "The Moment Has Passed," 127.

uprisings have long periods of formation through community relationships that precede a public movement, relationships that James C. Scott calls “infrapolitics,” which prepare the way for the uprisings, sometimes over generations. After an uprising they persist to inspire new strategies in the face of official resistance as “hidden discourses of resistance.”¹⁸ He asserts that oppressed groups cannot be explained or understood in the discourses of ruling powers, which remain ignorant of what is deliberately hidden beneath public acts of acquiescence and accommodation. Hidden and enduring transcripts of resistance transmitted through community relationships sustain energies for mobilization that can rapidly build capacity, form, and move multitudes—what Hardt and Negri call “constituent power.”¹⁹ We see this in the Asian American Movement. Although *Gidra*, the monthly newspaper known as the “Voice of the Asian American Movement,” only ran for five years (1969-1974),²⁰ Asian American activism did not become voiceless and cease in 1974. Instead, it continues to flourish half a century later, just as it was made possible by earlier activism that led to its emergence.²¹

Kwok Pui Lan has been a crucial, “power to” scholar who emerged in the early 1990s to lift up hidden discourses of Chinese women and who opened avenues for Asian and Asian American women to build new theologies, many of whom are contributors to this festschrift. Helen Kim anticipates the possibilities of Kwok’s “power after” in her essay when she calls for archival documentation of the contributions that Asian American female intellectuals and ministers produce as a follow-up to this Festschrift. We see examples of both “power to” and “power after” in other contributions to this Festschrift. Grace Kao in her essay talks about 12 Black US women who, after coining the term “reproductive justice” in 1994, formed the “Women of African Descent for Reproductive Justice” (WADRJ), which generated the SisterSong

¹⁸ James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

¹⁹ Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 22.

²⁰ Cathy J. Schlund-Vials, “Introduction: Crisis, Conundrum, and Critique,” in *Flashpoints for Asian American Studies*, ed. Cathy J. Schlund-Vials (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018), 1.

²¹ William Gow, “Renee Tajima-Pena, Series Producer. *Asian Americans*,” *The American Historical Review* 126, no. 1 (March 2021): 227–229, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/rhab069>.

Women of Color Reproductive Justice collective in 1997, formed by 16 organizations representing not only African American, but also Asian American, Latina, and Native American women. The shift from reproductive “choice” to “justice” was a significant “power to” moment that has had a significant “power after” impact.²² In his Asian American Muslim theology essay, Martin Nguyen proposes the power “of the after,” using his mother’s story to read Hagar’s story in a way that does not focus on the displacement of Hagar or what she lost when she left Abraham’s household but on what she achieved. Just as Nguyen’s mother is able to live a full life and raise a family after her arrival in the US, Hagar, according to Islamic literature, also established a flourishing settlement in Mecca. The process of “power to” as a resource for “power after” is, Anne Joh suggests in her essay for this Festschrift, “not just discovering suppressed voices; it is the work of reaching into unofficial and often forgotten archives of our peoples and also the archives of lost dreams and hopes” that can guide the intentions of our work. With “power to” we never know exactly what our attempts, intentions, or actions may bring about, or how and when such work can turn into “power after” for multitudinous movements.

Theologies of the Multitude

This Festschrift honors Kwok Pui Lan for her prescient, pioneering, critical, and constructive work for the multitude. We have assembled scholars of that multitude, connected by liberative, democratic, justice-oriented relationships and work, who have engaged with and learned from Kwok’s scholarship. They represent not only various disciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches and theological views in their work but also different genders, races, and religious traditions. This complexity, we suggest, both allows for incongruencies and intersecting collaborations. By incongruencies, we assert that multitude does not mean privileges, prejudices, or power differentials disappear; by collaborations, we mean reading these essays as an opportunity to consider theological propositions

²² Danielle M. Pacia, “Reproductive Rights vs. Reproductive Justice: Why the Difference Matters in Bioethics,” *Harvard Law Petrie-Flom Center Bill of Health* 3 (November 2020), <https://blog.petrieflom.law.harvard.edu/2020/11/03/reproductive-rights-justice-bioethics/#:~:text=Essentially%2C%20the%20reproductive%20rights%20framework,expansive%2C%20intersectional%2C%20and%20holistic>.

in relation to multiple understandings that stretch us to further work across differences to disrupt settled positions, to dismantle systems of oppression, and to enable work that supports justice and the flourishing of multitudes.

This collection is organized in reverse alphabetical English order by family name—beginning with Y—since the essays can be read in a variety of orders, such as by traditional academic fields, primary foci, or dominant themes that link certain essays together. In this introduction, we will note some of these linkages via their contributions about race, gender, and religion/theology for the multitude as a way to think about how they intersect, challenge, and reinforce each other and multiply theologies of the multitude for multitudes.

Race/Ethnicity, Binaries, and Boundaries

Two significant issues appear repeatedly within this Festschrift: the problem of binary thinking and the instability of boundary, especially, though not exclusively, regarding racial/ethnic relations in the US. In her essay, Gale A. Yee argues that one has to go beyond a binary framework of ancient Babylonia and Yehud to realize in one's reading of the exilic history of the Jewish people the existence of not only greater ethnic and geographical diversities but also different understandings of Jewishness. Her essay illuminates how readings of the Hebrew Bible reveal our contemporary struggles with narrow limits that confine complex identities.

While most of the contributors to this Festschrift are of Asian descent, they are well aware that Asia or Asian is a manifold umbrella term, or, in Nguyen's essay, a "bricolage." William Yoo points out in his contribution, by way of Erika Lee, that Asian America represents 24 ethnic groups, not to mention differences in things such as national origin and immigration status. Nami Kim's understanding of Asian/American theology also points to a multitude with internal diversities in terms of what Mary Foskett calls "the discursive network of multiple Asian American scholarly voices." Kim also acknowledges the problematic dominance of East Asians in Asian America. An emphasis on Asian American panethnicity may, for Peter Phan, readily cover over too much at

times.²³ Age also involves difference, as Christine Hong asserts in her essay about how the intentional cultivation of an intergenerational community among Asian and Asian North American women takes “blood, sweat, and tears.” Jung Ha Kim recounts in her “letter” to Kwok how differences in ethnicity and nativity generated distrust and distance in their early interactions. Michele A. Gonzalez reminds us that Latinx, like Asian, is also a pan-ethnic term that includes a multitude of cultures, languages, and national origins. She capitalizes on the conglomerate and, at times, conflictual construction of these pan-ethnic groups to push for a greater connection between Asian Americans and Latinx, pointing out in the process that there are Latin American and Caribbean people of Asian descent as well as many parallel experiences that Asian Americans and Latinx share.

Various diversities within a pan-ethnic group signals that different assemblages are not only possible and probable, but also inevitable. Joh in her essay notes, “We cannot in all honesty speak of the “West” or the “East” precisely because geopolitical histories cannot be so easily sliced and diced.” Mrinalini Sebastian and J. Jayakaran Sebastian in their contribution offer A. T. P. Williams’ insight that “wide divergence is not the same as radical contradiction.” We see this distinction between incongruence and contradiction being played out in this Festschrift, when, for example, Joh and Yoo share Gonzalez’s problematization of the black-and-white racial framework of the US; Yoo focuses on how Asian Americans often find themselves in the “cracks and fissures” of that binary racial framework and hence face the need to develop a “triple-consciousness.” Rather than pursuing whiteness by participating in anti-Black racism, Yoo follows the examples of Grace Lee Boggs and Syngman Rhee of standing in solidarity with Blacks in a primarily white-dominant society for greater justice. In fact, Jung Ha Kim and Keun-joo Christine Pae refer to African American scholars as particularly influential to their scholarship—what Kim, following Cathy Park Hong, calls “family trade.” Kim turns to W. E. B. Du Bois while Pae finds important Layli Maparyan’s assertion that various feminisms, for example, Asian American, Black, Latinx, and

²³ As Nami Kim makes clear in her essay to this Festschrift, she is following David Palumbo-Liu in using the solidus between “Asian” and “American” to highlight the unstable relations between these two terms.

Indigenous feminisms, are a "colonial legacy of compartmentalization" and "false demarcation." Joh and Pae argue for a transnational feminist network that recognizes how various racialized and genderized identities are co-constitutive and intersecting.

These internal intersections among contributors to this Festschrift raise many provocative questions, including the suggestion that even Yoo's "*triple consciousness*" is still too limiting. For example, why, Gonzalez wonders, have Latinx scholars not written much about Latinx of African and indigenous mixed descent (*zambos*)? We may also wonder what the adjacent whiteness of Asian Americans may imply for solidarity with other communities of color.

If intra-group diversities and "racial triangulation," a term Nguyen borrows from Claire Jean Kim, can encourage both competitions and connections, assumed differentiations among various races or various ethnicities *and* between race and ethnicity become fluid. This is indeed what Gonzalez advocates in her use of Linda Martín Alcoff's category of "ethnorace." However, ethnorace still does not address Jung Ha Kim's concerns. Out of her experience directing an "Asian American" community service center, which included Somali refugee youth, she suggests that our "experiential" or "embodied knowledge" can help us "organize and work together" on the basis of "commonly shared cause(s)" without the limitation of racial, ethnic, or ethnoracial categories. Kim's specific mention of Yuri Kochiyama and Grace Lee Boggs shows that movements of multitudes are seldom racially monolithic, even if a movement is galvanized by a specific race. This became obvious during the pandemic as Black Lives Matter burgeoned into a multiracial movement.

Contributors to this volume are well aware that race, ethnicity, or ethnorace cannot be considered in isolation from other identity factors. Adopting Lisa Schirch's use of the word "ecology" to talk about the problem of violent extremism, Eleazar Fernandez captures the need for holistic evaluation. To be holistic, we cannot talk simply about interconnections despite difference. We must also talk about the interlocking dynamics of oppression, which, as Rose Wu reminds us, also exists in a multitude. Nami Kim discusses, therefore, how those of religious traditions outside of Protestantism

are often feminized and racialized as in need of “missionary reform” (read: colonization). What Pae calls “relations of ruling” in her essay are identified in Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza’s essay as “kyriarchy,” because terms such as patriarchy or racism do not necessarily draw attention to interlocking oppressions and fail to capture how people are differently located on a power-laden “pyramid of interwoven structural discriminations and oppressions.”

Surrounding all these suggestions to rearrange the deck, reassemble the groups, or rename the dynamics is the issue of boundary. The troubling of boundaries may have something to do with the fact that Kwok has not only called religion the “original globalizer,” as Nami Kim points out, but is herself a trailblazer in ways that go beyond crossing geography.²⁴ As Hong observes in her essay, Kwok’s interdisciplinary scholarship “effectively dialogues with partners across different traditions, generations, racializations, and histories.” Referring to a 1987 article in which Kwok claims for herself and Hong Kong (her place of birth) a “boundary existence,” M. Shawn Copeland describes boundary in her contribution to this volume as a place of both limit and vitality—and an explicit methodology where Kwok chooses to remain always open to “whomever is ‘unintelligible’ in a given cultural, religious, socio-political context.” In using Kwok’s transnational, interdisciplinary lens, Boyung Lee challenges the use of white Christian church practices as the primary context for practical theology: “The rise in opioid addiction, poverty, and gun violence, and the lowering of life expectancy for the American white population is a sign that [the context of our work] may be drifting toward something closer to the Global South as globalization has exported most of the jobs.” A failure to shift our context and framework, Lee continues, “has made [practical theology] seriously out of strategies and ideas for an increasingly globalized, technological, environmentally threatened, post-colonial world.”

Whether it is Wu’s challenge that we transgress traditional theological assumptions and norms of gender and sexuality or

²⁴ See, for example, Kwok Pui-lan, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1995); Kwok Pui-lan, Don H. Compier, and Joerg Rieger, eds., *Empire and the Christian Tradition: New Readings of Classical Theologians* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007); Kwok Pui-lan, Cecilia González-Andrieu, and Dwight N. Hopkins, eds., *Teaching Global Theologies: Power and Praxis* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2015).

Russell Jeung's blurring of sociology and theology, we sense an energy driving many contributors to want to burst through existing confines and explore new ground. Like Pae, Hong sees catalogs and categories as an imperial impetus in order to establish norms and hierarchies, even if "[o]ur lived experiences are not neatly categorized and bordered" but "messy and beautiful." Perhaps the most vivid image of this boundary transgression is found in Rudy Busto and Jane Iwamura's essay, which literally talks about space travel and planetary citizenship. It should be noted, however, that Busto and Iwamura are careful to point out that boundary transgressions may also be a colonial project for power and financial profit, especially since the history of space travel has not only been deeply motivated by imperial competitions between empires but also racially inflected, so we must balance the urge to transcend and the need to historicize. After all, in the US context, the word "alien" has often been used to refer to immigrants and "undocumented" migrant workers of color, as well as to imaginary life forms from other planets. We can think of the nineteenth-century orientalist, Percival Lowell, who, after moving from a career in Asian Studies to astronomy, used Asians, in particular Japanese, to talk about the aliens that he believed could be found on Mars as if the two were parallel or similar.²⁵ In Lowell's mind, Asia and space were both exotic places to romanticize and Orientalize.

Fernandez, in his essay on violent extremism, issues a call for balance similar to the one delivered by Busto and Iwamura. Although he lists an insistence on "sharp boundaries" as a characteristic of religious fundamentalism, he also critiques globalization for moving the world into a "global pillage" rather than a "global village." As we have learned from the multitude that stormed and pillaged the US Capitol on 6 January 2021, the desire for "liberty" without constraint can actually turn into a lust for domination that hinders the democratic future of US society. During the pandemic of COVID-19, we learned that understanding democratic freedom as the absence of limits on when and where one wants to go can be lethally problematic, just as the absence of limits

²⁵ Timothy J. Yamamura, "Fictions of Science, American Orientalism, and the Alien/Asian of Percival Lowell," in *Dis-Orienting Planets: Racial Representation of Asia in Science Fiction*, ed. Isiah Lavender III (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2017), 89-101.

on wealth generates global suffering. During the pandemic, we saw massive increases of wealth in the superrich and the creation of new billionaires. Joh observes, “As massive devastation is wreaked upon vulnerable people and creation by a privileged few who accumulate unimaginable wealth and resources, we are faced with an unprecedented crisis of hunger, forced migration, disease, and death, and – out of this mix – defiance and violence.”

At the same time, people’s need to immigrate or to seek asylum as refugees is a reality explicitly mentioned in some essays and implicitly assumed in others within this volume. Both of Kwok’s sermons analyzed in Helen Kim’s essay, based respectively on Luke 10 and Acts 2, and both of the narratives that Nguyen provides about his parents, as well as his use of Hagar’s “exilic journey,” have to do with people journeying and moving to a place where they don’t find welcoming hospitality. Gonzalez quotes Alcoff that “‘Immigrants are today the most reviled group in America.’” Nami Kim suggests that such an intense focus against immigrants enables the expunging from US history of its settler colonialism, including the genocide of indigenous inhabitants and the enslavement of black bodies. Grace Kao’s contribution on “rethinking surrogacy” is helpful in unpacking these multitudinous complexities of boundary, agency, and exploited labor. Kao points out that any ethical consideration of this complicated issue requires careful contextualization that attends to the specificity of the involved parties (including their socioeconomic status, race, and sexuality). Without this kind of careful contextualization, one will not be able to parse the power differential and to assess properly if a boundary is there for exclusionary or protective purposes.

Worlds of Religion and “World Religions”

One of the boundary issues that a number of essays pursue concerns the categorization of what counts as “religion.” Kwok charged western imperialism with limiting the study of religion by isolating or atomizing it as an object of study, as Phan notes in his essay about her “theology of religious difference.” Questions about religion as a category and about religious plurality are raised, for example, by both Gonzalez and Hong when they observe that Kwok

has long critiqued theological education as “a colonial project.”²⁶ Likewise, Sebastian and Sebastian discuss the need to evaluate the politics of knowledge: namely, “how do we know what we know and what are the connections between knowledge?” What Pae says about transnational feminist knowledge is also applicable to religious and theological knowledge: the entire process of production and dissemination must be critically analyzed. Phan observes, “Kwok moves the discussion of religious pluralism away from the well-worn triple paradigm of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism and focuses rather on the plight of women all over the world as the starting point for a theology of religion.”

Russell Jeung in his essay provides an Asian American understanding of religion as “familism” and faults the narrowing of religion to a matter of personal belief that is set over and against “secular.” We would also note that religion is set over and against “superstition,” which is how Asian ancestral veneration has often been described. Nami Kim, in addition to sharing some of Jeung’s concerns, brings up the problematic Christian construction of “world religions” as a form of othering. This interrogation of terms for religious pluralism is seen in several essays: Nguyen’s query about the almost complete monopolization of the term “theology” by Christian scholars; Lee’s challenge to the white Christian hegemony that defines the context of practical theology; and Hong’s concern with “interreligious solidarities.” In Busto and Iwamura’s protest against the Christian domination of astrotheology and their talk about space travel, they seek to expose and explode a western—aka white—definition of religion.

The questions the authors in this collection raise about categorizing religions and avoiding complicity with the colonial religion project challenge scholars of religion and theology to reconsider our resources, repertoire, and objects, as well as the directions for and intentions of our work. Out of her commitment to disrupt both East Asian domination and Christian hegemony, Nami Kim argues in her essay that Asian/American scholars of theology must come to see the connections between anti-Asian and anti-Muslim practices and sentiments. She advocates a “relational”

²⁶ See especially Kwok Pui-lan, “2011 Presidential Address: Empire and the Study of Religion,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 80 (2012): 285–303.

approach to broaden the scope of our study to research and write about Islam and Islamophobia, Palestine, Zionism, and settler colonialism. Her argument is persuasive because the country with the largest Muslim population, Indonesia, is in Asia, and similar developments are already taking place in Asian American studies.²⁷ Similar calls for greater connections are made by Gonzalez between Latinx and Asian Americans; by Hong across various generations, religions, and minoritized communities of color; by Yoo between African Americans and Asian Americans; and by Pae on behalf of a transnational and transgenerational feminist network of solidarity.

Contributors attend also to particular ethical issues that challenge the multitude: violent extremism by Fernandez; surrogacy by Kao; and matters of sex and sexuality by Wu. Nyugen's Asian American Muslim theology is a challenge to the Euro-American academy's "traditional" disciplinary classifications and a call to expand scholarly work in religion and theology in different directions. To resist or undo kyriarchy, Schüssler-Fiorenza talks about the need for interpreters to draw from the experiences, wisdoms, and intellectual traditions of women.

Re-imagining and Storytelling

Without denying that religion can be one of the many driving forces that lead to violent extremism, Fernandez underscores that religion "provides transcendent orientation and 'antisystemic' force" that, borrowing Paul Knitter's words, can offer "vision and energy" to build a "global civil society." Vision is, of course, about creativity to imagine and re-imagine. The importance of "re-imagining" – a term first coined for a World Council of Churches 1993 global conference held in Minneapolis of 2000 attendees from an emerging global feminist multitude²⁸ – can be seen in Copeland's choice to highlight three markers in Kwok's theological method: "resignifying gender, requeering sexuality, and redoing theology."

²⁷ Evyn Lê Espiritu, "Vexed Solidarities: Vietnamese Israelis and the Question of Palestine," *Literature Interpretation Theory* 29 (2018): 8-28; Quynh Nhu Le, *Unsettled Solidarities: Asian and Indigenous Cross-Representations in the Americas* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2019).

²⁸ Ha_Qohelet, "Re-Imagining, or, The Face of God," The Women's Center at Louisville Seminary, March 29, 2011, <https://wimminwiselpts.wordpress.com/tag/re-imagining-1993/>. Both Kwok and Rita Nakashima Brock spoke at the event.

As shown in Phan's careful tracing of the development of Kwok's "theology of religious difference," re-imagining is actually a rather constant emphasis in Kwok's theology. Besides Phan, other contributors to this Festschrift—including Copeland, Jeung, and Pae—have referred to Kwok's 2005 volume, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*, to talk about her threefold delineation of imagination (historical, dialogical, and diasporic). However, the centrality of imagination in Kwok's theological reflection, as Gonzalez points out, can already be seen in her 1989 article, "Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World."²⁹ Imagination is key to what Hong calls "theo-creativity," which she elucidates with the question, "What if?" As Sebastian and Sebastian's contribution on "occupy imagination" points out, imagination can be driven by various desires and emotions as well as driving different principles and projects. According to Gonzalez, Nami Kim, and Yoo, Kwok's emphasis on re-imagining is always and all about reordering the established order. If we want to follow Busto and Iwamura's discussion of space travel, we can say Kwok's re-imagining is occupied by a desire to reach for a different and better world.

Busto and Iwamura mention science fiction, which Donna J. Haraway refers to as "SF" (signifying "science fiction, speculative fabulation, string figures" and, even, "secret feminist") to talk about the importance of imagination in the study of both humanities and the sciences.³⁰ Closely linked to this emphasis on imagination is Nguyen's prioritizing of storytelling in his Asian American Muslim theology. For him, storytelling is "one particular expressive and experiential mode of the imagination." In addition, he proposes that there are a "multitude of stories" which can be shared to help constitute a multitude with a compiled dream. Nguyen is among several contributors who talk about the importance of stories. Just as Nguyen shares the stories of his parents, Gonzalez begins her essay with a story of her own experience and then goes on to remind us that "one of the many insights from Kwok Pui-lan's work is the importance of autobiography." Similarly, Pae credits Kwok for introducing "'the image of the storyteller who selects pieces,

²⁹ Kwok Pui-lan, "Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World," *Semeia* 47 (1989): 25–42.

³⁰ Donna J. Haraway, "SF: Science Fiction, Speculative Fabulation, String Figures, So Far," *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology* 3 (2013), <https://adanewmedia.org/2013/11/issue3-haraway/>.

fragments, and legends from her cultural and historical memory to weave together tales that are passed from generation to generation.” Like Nguyen, Pae also stresses the “interconnections” that stories can create within a person via heart, mind, and body, as well as among people. Pae is clear, however, that this happens because stories are affective and hence effective. It is by feeling stories that we become connected with ourselves and with others. We see this also in Wu’s contribution; the transformation of her own theological assumptions about sex and sexuality involved meeting the shemale escort called “Little White Fox” and then being moved by her hearing and reading of his/her stories.

Each of the authors utilize multiple means to address how they understand multitude and why they speak about and to multitudes, with some leaning more into story while others use the discourses of their guilds to challenge the hegemony of reigning white paradigms. We hope readers of this Festschrift will be moved when they read, for example, Jung Ha Kim’s “letter” to Kwok or Nyugen’s family stories, which explicitly interrogate the convention of defensive, abstract, wordy, academic writing styles and their fractionated guilds. In the tensions among the discursive strategies used by contributors in this collection are challenges not only to the intentions and audiences of writing strategies, but also to the limitations and hierarchies of how fields are understood. Busto and Iwamura, recalling the work of the late Steff San Buenaventura, declare that Asian American religious studies should “behold and capture . . . religious imagination across time and space.” If Nguyen is correct that “storytelling arguably lies at the heart of what it means to be human” and if storytelling is a particular mode and manifestation of imagination, would we not have to make some changes, for instance, to Pae’s employment of “God-talk” as the popular shorthand for theology? Hong asks, why is the focus on “the tangible and intangible experience of life lived together in messy and complicated ways” limited to the subdiscipline in *practical* theology, rather than on scholarly work in general.

For Multitudes

The words “for multitudes” in the title signifies that we affirm the power of people to grasp complex ideas and identities, including a capacity to receive and produce knowledge. There is no movement if we and the authors of these essays, as academic professionals, are

not moving with and in the multitudes. These two simple words, “for multitudes,” is our invitation, therefore, to our readers to join us in an on-going conversation, so that, as editors and contributors, we can learn from readers as they test what is being urged and enacted in this collection in their own lives. We are convinced as editors that theological work must be done alongside actual movements and the material struggles of multitudes.

After all, the idea of multitude(s) means, among other things, a shift from hierarchical to more horizontal relations.³¹ Our assumption is that contributors can learn not only from one another but also from readers, just as readers can learn from contributors and from one another. Writing to and for the multitude means to make connections, provide support, and establish friendships for engagement, so we can re-imagine and transform religions and theologies towards both democracy and justice. Our work and writing must attend to emotional and aesthetic dimensions, which are crucial to good story-telling and the engagement of imagination. Theologies of the multitude for multitudes must involve not only re-imagining but also relations of equity and compassionate connections. As Helen Kim reminds us, Kwok’s scholarship and teaching are inseparable from her commitments to mentoring students, speaking to diverse populations, and building community.

It is precisely for the purpose of capacity building that we hope this Festschrift will serve as a potential resource for teaching and learning. For the same reason, we chose a publisher that is committed to making this Festschrift available online via open access.

This Festschrift is a sample of the impact that the work of Kwok Pui Lan has contributed to the study of religion in theology. It is missing essays in two subjects that are important to Kwok which we hope will be taken up in future discussions of her work: ecology and technology.

Ecology

Kwok herself started writing about ecological concerns in the 1990s, and these concerns have only become even more urgent today.³² In their alternative definitions of “religion,” Busto and

³¹ Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 56, 75, 84–85, 345, 402n, 110.

³² See, for example, Kwok Pui-lan, “Ecology and the Recycling of Christianity,”

Iwamura mention Ted Chiang's "shifting boundary between known and unknown." In that sense, the knowns and unknowns of the ecological challenge we face today is really a deeply religious and theological issue. Given the emphasis on building connections in many of the contributions, addressing ecological concerns also requires us to re-imagine and re-vivify our connections with the natural and the non-human animal world. This work is indispensable if we are to stop misunderstanding and misusing "freedom" as freedom to use nature without cost. As scholars of religion and theology who emphasize the implications of our own embodiment in terms of race and gender, we must not forget that our very embodied existence is dependent on the ecosystem of *this* Earth.

If ecology is arguably the most pressing issue confronting all of humankind at this point in history, humanity has also simultaneously witnessed our greatest and fastest technological advancements. Virtual worlds are now among many worlds that one may inhabit, which may have caused some to devalue the physical Earth on which we live. Again, technology is an issue that Kwok is interested and invested in, even if "digital imagination" is one that she is just starting to examine.³³

Technology

As Busto and Iwamura suggest in this Festschrift, technology can be used as an assimilationist shield to cover up racial and gender difference. Questions regarding technology may be particularly important for Asian American scholars in religion and theology in light of what scholars in the wider field of Asian American studies in recent years have called "techno-Orientalism," which refers to "the phenomenon of imagining Asia and Asians in hypo- or hypertechnological terms in cultural productions and political

The Ecumenical Review 44 (1992): 304–307; Kwok Pui-lan, "Ecology and Christology," *Feminist Theology* 5 (1997): 113–25; Kwok Pui-lan, *Christology for an Ecological Age* (New York: Continuum, 1999); Kwok Pui-lan, "What Has Love to Do with It? Planetarity, Feminism, and Theology," in *Planetary Loves: Spivak, Postcoloniality, and Theology*, eds. Stephen D. Moore and Mayra Rivera (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 31–45.

³³ Kwok Pui-lan, "Play with Ideas!" interview by Dr. Nancy Lynne Westfield, *The Wabash Center's Dialogue on Teaching*, episode 29, April 22, 2020, <https://dialogueonteaching.buzzsprout.com/829600/3462778-episode-29-play-with-ideas-kwok-pui-lan>.

discourse.”³⁴ We are talking about repeated portrayals, especially in science fiction and other kinds of speculative fiction, of a simultaneously tantalizing and threatening Asian futurity, with Asia and Asian bodies being associated with superior technologies as well as with an immense capacity to produce and consume commodities. This issue is latent in Busto and Iwamura’s essay, which mentions not only science fiction but also the first Japanese American astronaut in the 1980s, exactly when Japan became “the original techno-Orient . . . with the help of the cyberpunk movement.”³⁵ The same is true of Kao’s essay on surrogacy and *in vitro* fertilization. While there has been no lack of attempts to theologize technology, just as there have been theological works on ecology, we think that Asian American scholars of religion and theology have further contributions to make on both of these issues.

Conclusion

Inspired by what Hong calls Kwok’s “communally bound” and “accountable” scholarship, we as a scholarly network or multitude must keep moving and keep moving multitudes towards Re-imagining new Im-possibilities All-together, all the while examining, engaging, and expostulating the historical and structural constraints in which we find ourselves and which Kwok has dedicated her life to moving and to movements beyond them. The worlds we are moving toward or into may exist only in our re-imaginings, but moments of such re-imagination may move multitudes and turn into movements and movements of multitudes. As Kwok has shown us over and over again, learning is relational. As we learn from one another and together, we “must transgress constricted boundaries and negotiate new possibilities for daring to think and act differently.”³⁶

³⁴ David S. Roh, Betsy Huang, and Greta A Niu, “Technologizing Orientalism: An Introduction,” in *Techno-Orientalism: Imagining Asia in Speculative Fiction*, eds. David S. Roh, Betsy Huang, and Greta A Niu (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 2.

³⁵ Roh, Huang, and Niu, “Technologizing Orientalism,” 3.

³⁶ Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*, 25.