

*Summoning the Saints:
Cross-Cultural Analysis of Aesthetic Teaching and Histories of Violence*
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Abstract:

This presentation takes a cross-cultural approach to the question of how a liturgical art installation helps Christians in a Japanese American church in Sacramento, California grapple with current and past experiences of violence and marginalization by evoking memory, creativity, and imagination. In order to illumine this question, a second case that shares some resemblances will provide a basis for making comparisons, while recognizing the limitations of cross-cultural analysis. The church's observance of All Saints' Day through liturgical art will be compared to Lithuanian cemetery practices of All Saints' Day. Because both communities have experienced the trauma of "social death" during World War II, inferences can be made about similarities and differences between the cases so as to reveal more clearly how aesthetic teaching is working for liberation and healing in the Japanese American church case.

- I. Framing the question
 - a. How is aesthetic teaching helping the members of my community (the Sacramento Japanese American United Methodist Church [SJUMC]) to grapple with current and past experiences of violence and marginalization?
 - b. What I mean by aesthetic teaching
 - i. Teaching defined in the context of religious education
 - ii. Understanding "natural aesthetics" and "artificial aesthetics" (Baumgarten)¹
 - iii. Aesthetic teaching addresses the nature of human being as fundamentally aesthetic (Farley)²
 - c. Significance of inheriting a legacy of violence and marginalization
 - i. Transgenerational trauma (Schwab)³
 - ii. Effect of Japanese American internment camps on descendants (Ina and Nagata)⁴
 - iii. The need for dealing with trauma and healing aesthetically
- II. Approach
 - a. Exploring one community's experience of violence and marginalization
 - i. Through memory and memorialization
 - ii. Through comparison with another community that shares resemblances, including memorializing its own history of victimization
 - b. Two communities share resemblances, having experienced a form of "social death"
 - i. Orlando Patterson's notion of "social death"⁵
 - ii. Lisa Marie Cacho's analysis of "social death"⁶
 - iii. Comparisons
 1. Thorpe's discussion of social death as it applies to Lithuanian context
 2. Analyzing Japanese American internment in terms of social death,
 - a. "Quarantine" as a form of social death in JA experience (Lee)⁷
 - b. "Exile" as a form of social death in Asian American

- experience (Ruiz)⁸
3. Similarities and key differences
 - c. Two communities practices of All Saints' Day, which are forms of aesthetic teaching
 - i. "Floating Saints" – an art installation at SJUMC commemorating the 26 Martyrs of Nagasaki, Japan
 - ii. Velines (cemetery practices) in Lithuania (Thorpe)⁹
 - iii. All Saints' Day – historical context
 1. The veneration of saints in a Roman Catholic community
 2. Significance of ancestor veneration in Asian and Asian American spirituality¹⁰
 - d. Comparative analysis
 - i. Using aesthetics as an axis for comparison
 - ii. Liabilities, challenges, and potential of making comparisons
- III. New aesthetic renditions of Easter
- a. My own notion of renditions
 - b. Thorpe's discussion of Velines cemeteries as "Saturday spaces" (Rambo)¹¹
 - i. through the use of space and material culture
 - c. SJUMC's "Floating Saints" and "haunting" (Gordon)¹²
 - i. Resurrection as homecoming
 - ii. Variation on a theme: Ghosts as seeking justice and reunion, not only justice
 - d. Comparisons between the two cases
- IV. Insights about my own community –its experience of violence and its struggle toward transformation, particularly through using aesthetic means
- a. How violence has been internalized in my own community, in comparison to the Lithuanian case
 - b. The role of the liturgical art in fostering creativity, imagination, and critique among church members
 - i. Nurturing "postcolonial imagination" (Kwok)¹³
 - ii. Challenging colonial theologies of domination
 1. African American artists rendering "recrucified Christ" (Cone)
 - iii. Expressing narratives of the community (C.S. Song)
 - iv. Comparisons with Velines practices
 - c. Education that draws from the "theological aesthetics of liberation" (Goizuetta)

¹ Baumgarten is discussed in Terry Eagleton, *Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991). Cited in S. Brent Plate, "The Skin of Religion: Aesthetic Mediations of the Sacred," *Cross Currents* 62, no. 2 (June, 2012).

² Farley, Edward. *Practicing Gospel: Unconventional Thoughts on the Church's Ministry*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003).

³ Schwab, Gabriele. *Haunting Legacies: Violent Histories and Transgenerational Trauma*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010.

⁴ Donna K. Nagata, *Legacy of Injustice: Exploring the Cross-generational Impact of the Japanese American Internment*. (New York: Plenum, 1993); Ina, Satsuki. "Counseling Japanese Americans: From Internment to Reparations," in *Multicultural issues in Counseling: New Approaches to Diversity*. Courtland C. Lee, ed. (Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association, 1997), 2nd ed., 189-206.

⁵ Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*. (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1982).

⁶ Lisa Marie Cacho, *Social Death: Racialized Rightlessness and the Criminalization of the Unprotected*. (New York: New York University Press, 2012).

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- ⁷ James Kyung-Jin Lee. "Elegies of Social Life: The Wounded Asian American." *Journal of Race Ethnicity and Religion*. Vol. 3, No. 2.7, 1-21.
http://www.raceandreligion.com/JRER/Volume_3_%282012%29_files/2%2013%207%20J%20Lee.pdf
- ⁸ Lester Edwin J. Ruiz, "The Stranger in Our Midst: Diaspora, Ethics, Transformation." In *Realizing the America of Our Hearts: Theological Voices of Asian Americans*. (Danvers, MA: Chalice, 2003), 217-241.
- ⁹ Denise Thorpe, "Memory on Fire: The Re-Membering of the Lithuanian Body (Politic)," PhD Dissertation, Duke University, 2013.
- ¹⁰ Jane Naomi Iwamura, "Ancestral Returns: Re-examining the Horizons of Asian American Religious Practice" in *Off the Menu: Asian and Asian North American Women's Theology and Religion*. Rita Nakashima Brock, et. al, eds. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007).
- ¹¹ Thorpe; Rambo, Shelly. *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010.
- ¹² Gordon, Avery. *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1997.
- ¹³ Kowk, Pui-lan. *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005.