

Review of Stephen D. Moore and Mayra Rivera, eds.,
Planetary Loves: Spivak, Postcoloniality, and Theology.
 New York: Fordham University Press, 2011.

Christina Petterson, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

I apologise for being the reviewer of this book. I do not know much about Spivak, I have lost faith in the Postcolonial to be able say anything politically meaningful in today's world, and I am not committed to Theology as a viable project for today. So why on earth did I end up reviewing this book? (I actually did try to pawn it off to a couple of other people ... obviously without success). I am, however, pleased that I did. I found it very thought provoking and instructive on many levels.

The anthology is the result of a colloquium at Drew University in 2007, the seventh Transdisciplinary Theological Colloquium, attended by, among others, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak of Columbia University. The colloquium appears, in transcript, in the second section of the book: "Conversations," which begins with "Love - a conversation" between Spivak, Serene Jones, Catherine Keller, Kwok Pui-Lan, and Stephen D. Moore. This is followed by articles by Susan Abraham, "The Pterodactyl in the Margins: Detranscendentalizing Postcolonial Theology"; Tat-siong Benny Liew, "Lost in Translation? Tracing Linguistic and Economic Transactions"; and Mayra Rivera, "Ghostly Encounters: Spirits, Memory and the Holy Ghost," to which Spivak responds *ex tempore*. I must say that I really enjoyed the conversation with Spivak, partly because of her, as Stephen Moore notes, "utter comprehensibility" (p. 143).

Framing "Conversations" we find "Introductions" and "Appropriations." "Introductions" includes three articles: an introduction to the book and its becoming by the editors; an introduction to Spivak by Stephen Moore, or rather a situating of Spivak within Postcolonial Studies; and an article canvassing the reception of Spivak in Theology by Kwok Pui-Lan. These articles provide a solid foundation for the following conversations.

"Appropriations" is the longest section in the book and is comprised of 9 articles from scholars based in North America. The articles differ in their use of Spivak, with a couple of articles deploying central concepts apart from the planetary: W. Anne Joh's attempt at framing Spivak's "love" through the Korean concept of Jeong; invagination and feminism in Lydia York's article, the crisis of knowledge and self/other; Erin Runions on detranscendentalizing, radical alterity and the racialized, sexualized antichrist; and globalisation as urbanisation in Sharon V. Betcher's article. Slightly outside the Spivak circuit, but in the vein of Joh's article, stands John J. Thatamanil's piece on comparative theology, creative multiplicity, and Madhyamaka Buddhism. We then have articles on, with, and about the "planetary": Jenna Tiitsman's critique of Spivak's proposed move from globalisation to planetarity; Ellen Armour's use of planetarity to analyse the controversy within the Anglican church over homosexuality; and Namsoon Kang's argument for cosmopolitanism as a way of "capturing" what Spivak means by a "mind-changing love for the planet."

Kwok Pui-Lan's essay from the introductory section helpfully outlines this concept of planetarity and that to which it responds:

Spivak's move toward 'plantetarity' is a self-critique of 'postcoloniality,' because the old postcolonial model is 'very much "India" plus the Sartrian "Fanon,"' and cannot help us address globalized neo-colonialism. Current imperial designs, such as the

European Union, NAFTA, and GATT, are not mapped out according to national and geographical boundaries, and require a new imaginary in order to develop an appropriate ethics of resistance. She exhorts us: 'If we imagine ourselves as planetary subjects rather than global agents, planetary creatures rather than global entities, alterity remains underived from us.' (p. 33)

To me it seems that planetarity-as-resistance addresses globalisation-as-imperialism. If so, is planetarity then akin to Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's multitude as resistance, as developed in *Empire* and *Multitude*? I am thinking also in terms of Hardt and Negri's tracing of Spinoza's immanence and Spivak's detranscendentalising. Erin Runions, you would be the best person to answer this question.

The relationship between planetarity and globalisation is thus an important one, as is the distinction between them. At times, I find it difficult to grasp the difference, perhaps due to the level of abstraction. For example, Ellen Armour's article advocates a "progressive planetary Christian sexual politics" (p. 224). In the Introduction, this is described as a way of disturbing "theological and political centres and dominant orthodoxies and seeks to undo colonial inscriptions" (p. 7). To what extent is this theological and political decentering different from globalisation? And is the concept of planetarity in danger of taking over some of the very problematic aspects of globalisation, one of which is abstraction?

The most helpful article in addressing this issue is Jenna Tiitsman, "Planetary Subjects after the Death of Geography," which is the only article really to engage planetarity vis-à-vis globalisation, and the role of technology in constituting the globe, as well as the planet/ary. Tiitsman shows the very material underbelly of "globalisation's promise of the death of geography" by excavating "a geography of cyberspace" that follows the patterns of early colonialism. While some of the other contributors jump at the fortuitous connection between theology and planetarity, Tiitsman does not envision planetarity as a *Deus ex machina*. Rather, she notes its participation in the global, and argues that a recognition of this, as well as engaging concretely with material conditions and embodied reality, are crucial steps towards entering the planetary. I would have loved to see this article as point of departure for a planetary theology.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/)