

Deconstructing Trustworthiness in Interfaith Dialogue with a Pedagogy for Liberation

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What are the words you do not have yet? What do you need to say? What are the tyrannies you swallow day by day and attempt to make your own, until you will sicken and die of them, still in silence? We have been socialized to respect fear more than our own need for language.

—Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider*

The power dynamics of dialogue and learning can reinforce oppressive values and beliefs, such as racism, sexism, homophobia, religious marginalization, and classism. This is particularly the case when dialoguing takes place in a context or manner in which the power dynamics are not equal, which can lead to exacerbated intolerance and further injustice and oppression. This is most visible when taking into consideration the marginalization of minority faith perspectives, and the role that colonialism plays in constructing and shaping norms that ultimately determine whose truth claim is of more value. Even when dialoguing takes place amongst people of the same faith, people do not all “share the same hope or speak the same language.”¹ The hope and language of the oppressor differs greatly from that of the oppressed, and prejudices can dominate discourse—leading to the marginalization of the beliefs and experiences of already subjugated communities. A dialoguing that does not address such issues can lead to the

1. James Baldwin, *Dark Days* (London: Penguin Books, 1985), 38.

internalization of imposed norms, in which people are socialized to accept dominant structures of authority and belief, and may ultimately result in self-loathing, fear, spiritual subjugation, and silencing.

Embedded within such social constructs and learning processes is the concept of trustworthiness, as trust is central to all social interactions. Trustworthiness is often determined by implicitly held attitudes towards the “other,” and therefore impacts dialogue and pedagogy, as well as the ways we attain and comprehend knowledge and truth. Our implicitly and explicitly held beliefs regarding trustworthiness have been impacted by accepted norms that have been strongly influenced by dominant powers. These in turn have created trustworthiness in their image. The most obvious example of this is the pervasive depiction of the Christian God as a white man, which as the psychologist Steven O. Roberts notes, “has important consequences for who we think should and should not be in charge.”² Christians are told of the importance of putting our trust in God; if such dominant imagery and ideology is left unchallenged, is it any wonder why so much trust has been put in the hands of white men at the expense of all others? Dismantling “trustworthiness” and power is therefore vital if interfaith dialoguing is to bring about transformation for those who have been afraid to speak their truth, silenced by those who have made God in their image.

This chapter will explore the role of power and trustworthiness in interfaith dialogue in order to address the complexities of silenced stories of oppression apparent within all communities. Influenced by the works of Paulo Freire and bell hooks, focus is given to the role of education as a tool for dismantling hegemonies of oppression and challenging dominant ideologies that have created a hierarchy of truth claims and knowledge. Attention is given to the way in which “trust” has been granted and assumed by the ruling classes or dominant powers, and the extent to which colonialism, racism, sexism, and interreligious intolerance have been used to determine who is trustworthy and who is not. It calls for greater critical thinking and mutual learning whilst uncovering the ways in which privileges, power, and inequality have created unequal spaces of dialogue. Left unexposed, these risks further ingraining cultures of oppression in the

2. Melissa De Witte, “Who People Believe Rules in Heaven Influences Their Beliefs about Who Rules on Earth, Stanford Scholars Find,” *Stanford News*, 31 January 2020, <https://news.stanford.edu/2020/01/31/consequences-perceiving-god-white-man/>.

social, political, religious, and educational realms. A rereading of the story of the Canaanite woman in the Gospel of Matthew will be considered an example of liberative pedagogy, where the woman of the text breaks the silence and challenges the power dynamics, and in doing so exposes a model of dialoguing that is engaged and liberative. It therefore leads to a critical exploration of a pedagogy for liberation, born out of transformative dialogue that requires praxis, and challenges dominant notions of trustworthiness. It calls for people of multiple faith traditions to collaborate, learn, and journey together in order to address shared problems and break the silence of narratives of oppression apparent in all faith communities.

Deconstructing "Trustworthiness" in Interfaith Dialogue

Contemplating the role of trust in interfaith dialogue is complex, as trust is relational and often impacted by social constructs of power and vulnerability. According to Govier, "trust is an attitude based on beliefs and expectation about what others are likely to do. . . . When we trust we are vulnerable, but we accept our vulnerability."³ Determining who we trust can be dependent upon who we deem to be most like ourselves, which can be influenced by social categories such as ethnicity, religion, and class status. This is a type of trust that creates moral communities based upon who individuals or groups assume to be most like themselves.⁴ For example, in the case of religious groups, religious leaders are often accepted as "bearers and interpreters of true knowledge and therefore granted significant authority, which is undermined by sovereign power."⁵ Trust can also be assumed and determined by dominant hegemonies; for example, in most religions, men are deemed as more trustworthy than women. Within Christianity, women have been informed by the Church fathers, inclusive of Tertullian, that we "are the gate of hell . . . the temptress of the forbidden tree . . . the

3. Trudy Govier, "Trust, Distrust, and Feminist Theory," *Hypatia* 7, no. 1 (Winter 1992), 17–18.

4. See Sandra Susan Smith, "Race and Trust," *Annual Review of Sociology* 36 (August 2010): 453–75.

5. Steven G. Ogden, *The Church, Authority, and Foucault: Imagining the Church as Open Space of Freedom* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 28.

first deserter of the divine law . . . the devil's doorway."⁶ Biblical imagery depicting women as whores, sinners, and temptresses has been used to deem women untrustworthy sinners and therefore not worthy of authority. In Hinduism, the *Manusmriti* has also declared women to be untrustworthy, suggesting that a woman's "father controls her in childhood, her husband guards her in youth," as "a woman is not fit for independence."⁷ In the majority of world religions, men hold authority. Consequently, as Catherine Cornille remarks, "dialogue between religions is conducted mainly by and between men."⁸

Therefore, in contrast to trust is distrust: "when we distrust, we fear that others may act in ways that are immoral or harmful to us; we are vulnerable to them and take the risk seriously; we do not see them as well-motivated persons of integrity, and we interpret their further actions and statements consistently with these negative expectations."⁹ Distrust is often associated with difference, and has been used as a mechanism for racial stereotyping in order to justify discrimination and xenophobia.¹⁰ This is apparent in Smith's sociological study of race and trust, which finds that the social construct of "race is the most important determinant of trust."¹¹ Distrust is often granted to opinions that risk dismantling the dominant belief system or ideology, and therefore may act as a challenge to cultures and systems that are oppressive to the views and beliefs of the minority. A recent study into the experience of Muslim students in higher education institutes in the UK, for example, found that British Muslim students there have experienced racism that has been "reinforced by a narrative of suspicion, rooted in a presumed alignment between Islam and violent extremism." Consequently, Muslim students reportedly felt that they were subjected to "heightened surveillance

6. Tertullian, *On the Apparel of Women*, 1, 1–2.

7. *Manusmriti* 9.2–3, quoted in *Women in India: A Social and Cultural History*, vol. 1, ed. Sita Anantha Raman (Oxford: Praeger, 2009), 60.

8. Catherine Cornille, "Introduction," in *Women and Interreligious Dialogue*, eds. Catherine Cornille and Jillian Maxey (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2013), 1.

9. Trudy Govier, "Trust, Distrust, and Feminist Theory," *Hypatia* 7, no. 1 (1992), 17–18.

10. See Nelani Lombaard and Luzelle Naude, "Breaking the Cycle: Black Adolescents' Experiences of Being Stereotyped during Identity Development," *Journal of Psychology in Africa* 27, no.2 (2017), 185.

11. Smith, "Race and Trust," 470.

that presumes them to be suspicious on account of their faith.”¹² Social and political prejudices have a significant impact on lived experiences of trustworthiness and therefore impact one’s sense of belonging and self-worth. Stereotypes are often used as a means of reinforcing such prejudices, and to “monitor” the behaviour of minority and oppressed groups. As Guest et al. note, this is made visible by the interventions of existing power structures inclusive of government and university management “that reinforce a general perception that freedom of speech and freedom of religion are being infringed,” particularly for Muslims in higher education.¹³ In bell hooks’s work on *Teaching to Transgress*, she notes that “any attempt on the part of the individual students to critique the bourgeois biases that shape pedagogical process, particularly as they relate to epistemological perspectives (the points from which information is shared) will, in most cases, no doubt, be viewed as negative and disruptive.”¹⁴ Trustworthiness of epistemologies is therefore maintained through the censorship of opinions and dialogue. It is impacted by gender, ethnicity, sexuality, class, and caste. This is visible in the way in which white, male, and middle/upper class Christianity dominates in many spheres of dialoguing and has been normalised as a result of colonialism. Trust in knowledge must therefore be understood in relation to power, because as we discern what truths we believe and disbelieve, our insights are shaped by certain contexts, languages, and epistemologies. It is the power holders who determine the way in which truths or knowledges are taught, discerned, and accepted, and they[?] “assume that their self-interests speak for God.”¹⁵

In addressing the complexities of the power dynamics in interfaith dialogue, Kwok Pui-Lan notes that “interfaith dialogue should not aim

12. See Mathew Guest, “The Limits of Inclusivity: Islamophobia in Higher Education,” *OpenDemocracy*, 14 July 2020, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/transformation/limits-inclusivity-islamophobia-higher-education/>.

13. See Mathew Guest, Alison Scott-Baumann, Sariya Cheruvallil-Contractor, Shuruq Naguib, Aisha Phoenix, Yenn Lee, and Tarek Al Baghal, *Islam and Muslims on UK University Campuses: Perceptions and Challenges* (Durham: Durham University, London: SOAS, Coventry: Coventry University, and Lancaster: Lancaster University, 2020), 10.

14. hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 184.

15. Rosemary Radford Ruether, “Women and Interfaith Relations: Toward a Transnational Feminism,” in *Women and Interreligious Dialogue*, 13.

to convert or proselytize with the assumption that Christianity is superior to other religions.”¹⁶ Instead it should be a space for critical thinking and mutual questioning between people of different faiths, whose differences are embraced, and in which people are “ready to learn from one another in a spirit of mutuality and reciprocity.”¹⁷ To do so requires critical engagement with our own cultural frames, beliefs, and worldviews. Those in dialogue must trust others, and in doing so, be respectful and loving and willing to be challenged by new knowledge. Yet in order to have trust in dialogue, interfaith spaces of dialogue must address existing power imbalances, so as to prevent what Moyaert has referred to as “testimonial injustice.” She notes that “testimonial injustice is about not accrediting the appropriate credibility to someone’s testimonial activity, not because the speaker has nothing meaningful to say or contribute to the conversation but because she is simply not recognized as a credible source of knowledge.”¹⁸ The centrality of trust in contexts of testimony and authority is vital in situating unequal power dynamics, as integrity has been assumed and granted to white, male, and middle/upper class people as a consequence of the dominance of colonialism that has sought to control knowledge and worldviews. This has come at the expense of the faith truths, beliefs, and perspectives offered by women, people of colour, indigenous communities, and the working classes, whose testimonies have often been ignored or marginalized by the dominant discourses that have been deemed more trustworthy as a consequence of the way in which imperialism has enabled knowledge and religion to be constructed and controlled. Further critique must, therefore, be applied to the hegemony of knowledge, and to the political and religious framework of trust that has been used to maintain such knowledge through imposed norms.

For Paulo Freire, in order to achieve liberative dialogue, those involved must be “ideologically committed to equality, to the abolition of privilege.”¹⁹ Freire talks of the need to be cautious of the ruling oppressive class when they are inclined to join the struggle for liberation, noting that they “always bring

16. Kwok Pui-Lan, *Globalization, Gender, and Peacebuilding: The Interfaith Dialogue* (New York: Paulist Press, 2012), 21.

17. Kwok, *Globalization, Gender, and Peacebuilding*, 22.

18. Marianne Moyaert, “Interreligious Hermeneutics, Prejudice, and the Problem of Testimonial Injustice,” *Religious Education* 114, no. 5 (2019), 616.

19. Freire, Paulo, *Pedagogy of freedom: Ethics, democracy and civic courage* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), x.

with them the marks of their origin: their prejudices and their deformations, which include a lack of confidence in the people's ability to think, to want, and to know. . . . They talk about the people, but they do not trust them; and trusting the people is the indispensable precondition for revolutionary change."²⁰ Such trust is consciously reserved for the dominant groups who do not want revolutionary change as change would impact their own position and privileges. This is how colonialism operates. It divides nations and peoples into trustworthy and untrustworthy, deserving and undeserving, worthy and unworthy; and religion plays an important role in maintaining this status quo when it is used as an instrument against the oppressed people. Frantz Fanon supports this notion, noting that "religion splits up the people into different spiritual communities, all of them kept up and stiffened by colonialism."²¹ A critical interfaith dialoguing therefore requires addressing colonialism and imperialism as the root cause of that which divides us, and imposes ideologies of racism, sexism, classism, and religious persecution. It allows for the exploitation of entire communities, and breeds fascism.

Today, this is visible in the rise of far-right nationalist politics that often propagate Islamophobia and racism. Britain, for example, has witnessed a rise in such discourses since the Brexit referendum. As racism and race-related hate crimes have risen dramatically, political discourse that is anti-immigrant, racist, xenophobic and Islamophobic has become mainstream. It has been legitimized by Prime Minister Boris Johnson, whose Conservative Party won the general election with a significant majority, despite public awareness of his racist, classist, misogynistic, interreligiously-intolerant rhetoric—examples of which include comparing Muslim women to letter boxes,²² using racial slurs against black people, and arguing that Islam has caused the "Muslim world to be literally centuries behind the West."²³ The

20. Freire, Paulo, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 2000), 60.

21. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (London: Penguin Books, 2001), 129.

22. See Lizzie Dearden, "Islamophobic Incidents Rose 375% after Boris Johnson Compared Muslim Women to 'Letterboxes,' Figures Show," *Independent*, 2 September 2019, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/boris-johnson-muslim-women-letterboxes-burqa-islamphobia-rise-a9088476.html>.

23. See Frances Perraudin, "New Controversial Comments Uncovered in Historical Boris Johnson Articles," *The Guardian*, 9 December 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/dec/09/new-controversial-comments-uncovered-in-historical-boris-johnson-articles>.

Conservative Party “talked of the spirit of Protestantism as the inspiration for Britain to go at it alone and leave the EU.”²⁴ The messaging was simple: “Get Brexit done,” and restore Britain to an age of empire, Christian traditionalism, and white national pride. The US Republican pundit Ed Martin spouted the same propaganda when speaking at a conservative Christian conference in Verona last year, stating that “the Bible, borders, and Brexit will make Europe great again.”²⁵ This suggests that the greatness of a nation or continent is determined by its ability to exclude all others—where only Christianity prospers, and where strength is realised in a national pride shaped by racism, xenophobia, and empire. The demonization of minority ethnic and faith groups is a powerful tool used by the ruling classes in order to embed distrust, fear, and otherness amongst communities, and promote a myth of peace that they profess is maintainable only with policies of exclusion and marginalization. Difficulties in dialoguing often arise as a consequence of exclusivist truth claims that can lead to prejudice, intolerance, and ultimately violence. Trusting the person(s) we are in dialogue with also requires trusting truth claims that will be different than our own. It requires the dismantling of oppressive power dynamics, which are often determined by race, caste, class, gender, and sexuality.

Dialogue as Transformative Pedagogy: Christ and the Canaanite Woman

In the Gospel of Matthew, we hear how a nameless Canaanite woman comes to Jesus, “shouting,” as she is in need of help for her daughter who is “tormented by a demon.”²⁶ However, Jesus seemingly ignores her, and his disciples tell him to “send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.” Jesus answers, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” But the

24. Maria Exall, “Brexit and Christian Identity: A Challenge for Political Theology,” Centre for Catholic Social Thought and Practice, 22 October 2019, <http://ccstp.org.uk/articles/2019/10/22/brexit-and-christian-identity-a-challenge-for-political-theology>.

25. Mary Fitzgerald, “What the Far-Right Really Mean When They Talk of ‘Taking Back Christian Europe,’” *Independent*, 24 May 2019, <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/european-elections-far-right-christian-europe-religious-us-hungary-italy-spain-a8928376.html>.

26. The story of the Canaanite woman is found in Matthew 15:21–28. The NRSV translation was used for this adaptation of the story.

woman is persistent, and she kneels before him, saying, "Lord, help me." Jesus answers in a seemingly rude manner, saying, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." But the woman is quick in her response: "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." The story concludes with Jesus acknowledging the great faith of the woman and healing her daughter.

This narrative has significant implications for contemplating interfaith dialogue and pedagogy. Whilst many interpretations declare it to be a passage on the importance of faith, when read through feminist, postcolonial, interfaith, and liberative perspectives, the text offers a critique of dominant models of dialogue and trust. Matthew gives a great deal of attention to the interventions of the woman in the narrative and offers fascinating insights into power dynamics, gender, ethnicity, and agency. The Canaanite woman is instantly positioned as an outsider with "the specific reference to the place as Tyre and Sidon (Gentile territories) and the designation of the woman as Canaanite (indigenous people of Canaan and ancient enemies of Israel)."²⁷ The text also offers the opportunity to challenge dominant models of learning and pedagogy, especially when read in relation to theory surrounding engaged and transformative pedagogy and dialogue.

The unnamed Canaanite woman appears on the scene in this narrative as someone who has been marginalized in the public sphere; as a woman, foreigner, and Gentile, there are expected social, cultural, religious, and political norms that she should adhere to. Situating her body in the framework of existing social norms is important in understanding the dynamics of dialogue. As Elizabeth Peterson, a black female educator in North America, states, "I am aware of how I have to be in the world, how I have to act, and the things I have to say in order to support others around me."²⁸ Peterson is critically aware of her own body, as a black woman in a society where racism is rampant and is further aware of how she is perceived by others. The Canaanite woman is aware of her body and social position, yet "she as an anonymous woman had to

27. Mookgo S. Kgatele, "Crossing Boundaries: Social-Scientific Reading of the Faith of a Canaanite Woman (Matthew 15:21–28), *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 4, no. 2 (2018), 596.

28. Elizabeth A. Peterson and Stephen D. Brookfield, "Race and Racism: A Critical Dialogue," (Dialogue at the Adult Education Research Conference, Kansas State University), *New Prairie Press* (2007), 2.

approach a distinguished man with her problem. She didn't even have a son to pray for, just a daughter."²⁹ The body is central to dialogue: how we witness, understand, and comprehend our own body and the bodies of others determines how we are positioned and how we position others in the dialogue. The body is itself political, as is made apparent in the policing of women's bodies in public and religious contexts. Women's bodies have consequently had to learn how to navigate the politics of dialogue, including interfaith dialogues, often though their lived religiosity, bodily resistance, and daily experiences enable a crossing of the imposed boundaries and a challenging of the norms. When the Canaanite woman puts her body before Jesus and the disciples, she makes herself visible but vulnerable. She raises her voice to Jesus, yet she is ignored, and the disciples tell Jesus to send her away. The silencing and sending away of women who seek to express their experiences, and who challenge imposed norms is a common occurrence. Women's asylum cases serve as good examples of such processes of oppression. In Canada, a Saudi woman named Nada sought political asylum for refusing to wear the veil and protesting enforced laws that she maintained "were oppressive to women." The courts, however, did not trust her word or experiences: "Nada's claim was rejected on the ground that it was not credible that an Arab Muslim woman would disagree with the authorities of a Muslim state."³⁰ The false characterization of women, particularly women from minority faiths or women of colour, is often used as a mechanism for silencing, shaming, and denying the truth of their religious, cultural, social, and political experiences. Those who hold the power often have little interest in the experiences or insights of the oppressed, and it is here that we see the way in which social constructs of trustworthiness are used as a means of further silencing the oppressed by denying them a voice.

Michelle Voss Roberts states that "being a body means that emotion is an important aspect of human experience, that we communicate through

29. S. K. Saga, "Theology for the Dogs? An Intersectional and Contextual Analysis of Interpretation of Matthew 15:21–29 'The Canaanite Woman,'" (unpublished master's thesis, University of Oslo, 2009), 34.

30. Susan Musarrat Akram, "Orientalism Revisited in Asylum and Refugee Claims," in *Moral Imperialism: A Critical Anthropology*, eds. Berta Esperanza and Hernandez-Truyol (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 70.

these embodied emotions, and that we meet God there as well.”³¹ When the Canaanite woman falls to the floor, she communicates her passion, desire, need, and vulnerability. She puts herself forward in her entirety before Jesus. She displays trust in Jesus, and yet initially this trust is not reciprocated. For Michelle Voss Roberts, this is because Jesus “perceives the markers of her dress, facial features, and comportment as code for ‘Canaanite,’ and by extension, someone to be ignored and despised.”³² For the Dalit feminist theologian Surekha Nelavala, “Jesus does not reject her directly, but responds to her, saying: ‘Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs’ (v. 27). In what Jesus says, there is a notion of insufficiency, and perhaps also a motive of selfishness.”³³ She notes that Jesus has the resources to help but instead chooses to be dismissive.

Jesus’s actions towards the woman display the power dynamics that dominate discourses of education and interfaith dialogue. Understanding the identity politics and power relations of those present in the dialoguing is vital, because as hooks notes, “once we start talking in the classroom about the body and about how we live in our bodies, we’re automatically challenging the way power has orchestrated itself in that particular institutionalised space. The person who is most powerful has the privilege of denying their body.”³⁴ The same applies for all interfaith dialoguing outside of the classroom. Jesus and the Canaanite woman appear to be situated in “a struggle of engagement,”³⁵ where in order to progress they will have to become critically aware of their own social positioning, and the person with power (in this case Jesus) must choose to either continue to act in an oppressive manner or participate fully in the dialogue.

31. Michelle Voss Roberts, “Discerning Doctrine: Interreligious Dialogue as Experiential Source of Theology,” in *The Past, Present, and Future of Theologies of Interreligious Dialogue*, eds. Terrence Merrigan and John Friday (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 137.

32. Michelle Voss Roberts, “Discerning Doctrine,” 137.

33. Surekha Nelavala, “Smart Syrophoenician Woman: A Dalit Feminist Reading of Mark 7:24–31,” *The Expository Times* 118, no. 2 (2006), 68.

34. hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 137.

35. Michael Atkinson, “Interfaith Dialogue and Comparative Theology: A Theoretical Approach to a Practical Dilemma,” *The Journal of Social Encounters* 3, no. 1 (2019), 49.

The woman seeks to gain the trust of Jesus in order for him to hear her pleas. To do so, she must make him conscious of the untrustworthiness with which she has been stigmatized as a result of dominant ideologies of racism and exclusion. Trust will be pertinent to the dialogue if it is to ultimately lead to transformation. In order to achieve this, the unnamed woman displays righteous anger and protests her situation. She makes herself visible, she laments, she shouts; she then refuses to be removed and silenced, and she challenges embedded assumptions. The woman is clearly aware of the injustices of the system that has marginalized her. In her awareness, she is able to be critical and display resistance as she is confronted with the necessity to struggle for self-affirmation, and she responds accordingly. According to Freire, “only dialogue, which requires critical thinking, is also capable of generating critical thinking”³⁶, both the woman and Jesus display such critical thinking, as is visible in Jesus’ final response, that ultimately leads to transformative action. bell hooks notes that “when unexpected perspectives are heard, this subverts the tendency to focus only on the thoughts, attitudes and experiences of the privileged.”³⁷ The woman’s challenging of Jesus, and her refusal to be ignored is an important aspect of the dialogue, as it can be considered as a “site of religious epistemic disagreement.” According to Brecht, disagreement is inevitable in true dialogue, but also critical, in that disagreements “raise fundamental questions about notions of epistemic reliability, standards for belief justification, and the concepts of rationality and truth.”³⁸ It is, therefore, vital that voices and experiences of those who have been marginalized are heard within dialogue, as to silence such experiences denies epistemologies that enable us to develop a greater faith understanding.

In Marianne Moyaert’s exploration of the power dynamics in the classroom when facilitating interfaith dialogue, she comments that what “some students bring to the conversation is simply not taken seriously—not because they do not have anything significant to say or because their contribution would be of no value but because what they say does not fit the

36. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 92–93.

37. hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 185.

38. Mara Brecht, “Epistemology and Embodiment in Women’s Interreligious Dialogue,” in *Women and Interreligious Dialogue*, 50.

dominant (often implicit) hermeneutical framework of the majority.”³⁹ We see this in the way the Canaanite woman is treated by the disciples who instantly dismiss her and appear irritated by her presence and shouting. Moyaert further notes that “some students resist critical self-reflection and simply remain deaf to counterevidence.”⁴⁰ As they silence the experiences of the woman and her daughter, the disciples in the text can be compared to students who resist critical self-reflection. The power imbalances are also clearly visible in the narrative, particularly when Jesus insults the woman, seemingly referring to her as a “dog.” In response, according to Nelavala, “the woman did not make an intelligent remark but surely a wise one, emerging from her experience of being rejected. By saying, ‘Lord, even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs’ she defeats Jesus in two ways: first, by pretending she was accepting what Jesus said and using his argument to her own advantage; second, by paying no attention to whether Jesus wanted to insult her, while playing smart.”⁴¹ The woman enables Jesus to become aware of the false consciousness that leads to his dehumanization of her. Education involves self-criticism and the need to interrogate our own assumptions, especially when we are in positions of privilege. Consequently, Jesus is transformed through his interaction with the woman, going from being dismissive to ultimately acknowledging the importance of her experience and insights. As Nelevala highlights, “without his transformation the woman’s situation would have remained unchanged, her bold protests against injustice in vain.”⁴² Jesus’s acknowledgment of the woman and her faith comes after the woman has corrected his positioning through her response. For Freire, “the oppressed must see examples of the vulnerability of the oppressor so that a contrary conviction can begin to grow within them.”⁴³ Such vulnerability is therefore vital in interfaith dialoguing if it is to enable truthful and transformative action. Also essential is critical thinking, as “true dialogue cannot exist unless the dialoguers engage in critical thinking—thinking which discerns an indivisible solidarity between the world and the people and admits of

39. Moyaert, “Interreligious Hermeneutics,” 615.

40. Moyaert, “Interreligious Hermeneutics,” 615.

41. Nelavala, “Smart Syrophoenician Woman,” 68.

42. Ibid., 64.

43. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 64.

no dichotomy between them.”⁴⁴ Critical dialogue involves an awakening of consciousness in dialogue. According to Elaine Wainwright, the story narrates “an opportunity for Jesus to move from the central, male world to the periphery where he encounters an important dimension of his basileia vision.”⁴⁵ What is visible within the text is the conscientization of both Jesus and the woman that ultimately leads to social transformation and the healing of the woman’s daughter.

Interfaith Dialogue as Transformative Critical Pedagogy

Transformative dialogue requires mutual trust and the ability to reflect and think critically about one’s faith and identity. According to Freire, this requires “a thinking which discerns an indivisible solidarity between the world and people and admits of no dichotomy between them—thinking which perceives reality as process, as transformation, rather than as a static entity—thinking which does not separate itself from action, but constantly immerses itself without fear of the risks involved.”⁴⁶ Such critical thinking embraces difference; it does not see diversity as a cause for separation but rather acknowledges that dialogue and learning take place in community, and that without community, liberation is not possible. Furthermore, it calls for action, noting as Kwok Pui-Lan has highlighted, that “action may take different forms, such as witnessing to the structural and social manifestations of injustice, political advocacy for policy changes, and caring for the poor through feeding programs and food pantries.”⁴⁷ An inter-religious dialoguing that is shaped by liberative pedagogy challenges the ways in which existing models of dialogue have objectified women and other oppressed groups, where “women have been used as pawns in the exchange between male religious leaders, and male leaders continue to display agreement and solidarity in matters that deeply affect women but over

44. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 92.

45. Elaine M. Wainwright, “A Voice from the Margin: Reading Matthew 15:21–28 in an Australian Feminist Key, in *Reading from this Place*, Vol. 2. eds. Fernando Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1995), 150–53.

46. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 81.

47. Kwok, *Globalization, Gender, and Peacebuilding*, 22–23.

which they have no say.”⁴⁸ Interfaith dialogue as a pedagogy for liberation therefore requires a “climate of mutual trust, which leads the dialoguers into ever closer partnership in the naming of the world.”⁴⁹ This is, therefore, a dialoguing of interreligious solidarity in which the truths of all are equally accepted, where the power dynamics have been recognized and dialogue has moved beyond “tolerance” to solidarity. Such an interfaith dialogue enables critical and transformative movements for justice, where daily struggles of faith communities become the starting point of dialogue as opposed to dialogues constructed over doctrine and debate. Central to such conversations is the requirement for a deeper understanding and appreciation of the socio-political location of those in dialogue. This is necessary for building trust, creating emotional space, and bringing about a unified political solidarity.⁵⁰

The story of the Canaanite woman in Matthew exposes a model of dialoguing that is possible when power structures are addressed, and a process of embodied resistance occurs against systems of oppression. This requires an engaged dialogue that seeks transformation for the oppressed within our communities. An interfaith dialoguing that is developed through a pedagogy of the oppressed therefore takes education seriously, in that education becomes the practice of liberty where those in dialogue are liberated as they learn. In the process, they develop what Freire refers to as “critical consciousness,” as when Jesus and the Canaanite woman are in dialogue. There, the woman becomes aware of her own social positioning and challenges it by questioning the dismissiveness of Jesus and the disciples, demanding change for her daughter’s condition that she knows Jesus can deliver. According to Nilan Yu, “for the disadvantaged, an important step toward empowerment and liberation is achievement of critical consciousness: the recognition of inequality and oppression that shape their lived experience.”⁵¹ The individual who is oppressed has to trust in their own embodied experience in order to resist the imposed oppression. In interfaith dialogue, this requires a learning process where all parties must be

48. See, Cornille, “Introduction”, 4.

49. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 91.

50. See hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 132.

51. Seem Nilan Yu, “Consciousness-Raising and Critical Practice,” in *Consciousness-Raising: Critical Pedagogy and Practice for Social Change*, ed. Nilan Yu (London: Routledge, 2018), 1.

vulnerable in order to enable their own bodily experiences and socio-political positioning to be exposed, as a means of uncovering and challenging the power dynamics present. Such a dialoguing would challenge oppressive structures of cultural exchange and dominance. By “founding itself upon love, humility, and faith, dialogue becomes a horizontal relationship of which mutual trust between the dialogues is the logical consequence.”⁵² As bell hooks states, “to engage in dialogue is one of the simplest ways we can begin as teachers, scholars, and critical thinkers to cross boundaries, the barriers that may or may not be erected by race, class, professional standing, and a host of other differences.”⁵³ Jesus was transformed as a result of his dialogue with the woman; the woman’s trust in Jesus determined her willingness to fully engage. Her trust, resilience, consciousness, and engagement enabled Jesus to join her in her struggles, and in the process become conscious of his own privilege and the need for transformation.

Conclusion

In agreement with Marianne Moyaert, “to live one’s life as a human person is to be involved in a never-ending hermeneutical process” that demands of each of us a need to ask the question “Where do we speak from?”⁵⁴ For those of us who speak from positions of privilege, it requires being conscious of such privileges and challenging the cultures of impunity that enable these privileges to oppress. It demands of us the need to reflect critically on own religious identity and traditions in order to enable an engaged and transformative interfaith dialogue that focuses on the needs of the oppressed. In doing so, our trust is placed in the truths and experiences of those who have been marginalized. As the revolution of the oppressed will not be possible without the people, it can only be achieved with the people, people of all faiths united against the oppressor. Therefore, an interfaith dialogue that works towards liberation for the downtrodden demands that together in solidarity we address the power dynamics, we trust and value each other, we refuse to accept systems and cultures of marginalization, and that, ultimately, we seek to transform the world.

52. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 91.

53. hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 130.

54. Moyaert, “Interreligious Hermeneutics,” 612.