

## *Introduction*

How do we become ourselves? What role do primary caregivers, social and political institutions, and religious communities play in shaping our becoming? What happens when our becoming conflicts with the ideal desires and norms of the people and institutions in which we live and move and have our being? What happens when our selves are formed in material and relational poverty? How do we begin to speak of these questions from a pastoral theological viewpoint? How do we enact a pastoral praxis that does justice while caring? These large and layered questions guide the development of my thought on the challenges of identity in constructing a feminist pastoral theology of subjectivity.

After twenty years of significant contribution—directly addressing issues from and for women in pastoral theologies of care—the field of feminist pastoral theology has not adequately reflected on the construction of its female subject and the role of identity in this task. The field has primarily offered pastoral theologies of care based on an identity framework. An identity framework, whether of single identity such as “women” or of intersecting identities such as “black women” or “lesbian women,” is problematic. First, identity alone cannot capture the full complexity of subjectivity. Second, identity can be used to disable the ability of a subject to give an account of herself. My goal in writing is to reflect on the challenges of identity in constructing theological anthropologies. I do so by examining theories of recognition drawn from psychoanalytic theory, social theory, and theology, and putting them into conversation with feminist pastoral theology.

## Motherhood, Revisited

This particular project began to take shape as I reflected on my commitment to bring a social justice lens to the discipline and practice of feminist pastoral theology. As a community-engaged feminist pastoral theologian and researcher, I believe that good theory is born from reflecting on the human condition in all its possibilities and limitations. Likewise pastoral practice demands engagement with theories and theologies in which challenges to care are identified. As such, I pay attention to material conditions and to the body to develop a feminist pastoral theology of recognition. In paying attention to the body and material conditions we ensure that the care of the soul is not rendered body-less. I understand this as a grounded pastoral theology which engages the complexity of human subjectivity. While lived experience and practical wisdom undergird this project, I also use interdisciplinary resources to reflect on human experience. I draw from psychoanalysis, critical social theory, and liberation theology to describe the limits of an identity framework in feminist pastoral theology. I argue that framing questions of subject formation in light of theories of recognition provides new avenues for conceptual and practical work in feminist pastoral theology.

Motherhood is one particular location where I encountered questions of social justice and subjectivity in feminist pastoral theology. My intellectual engagement on motherhood happened when I met Stephen. Stephen was an Episcopalian minister-theologian who described a central dilemma he faced while serving as a hospital chaplain. He narrated that a woman had given birth to a non-viable fetus at full-term. She asked for her daughter to be named and baptized in the Christian tradition. Stephen was conflicted. In one ear he heard his sacramental theology professor saying, "Baptism is for the living, not for the dead." In the other, he heard his pastoral care professor saying, "The sacraments are not ours to withhold." He was confronted with a moral and practical pastoral decision. How should he proceed in order to stay faithful to the tradition which recognized him as a minister and, at the same time, care for a woman who asked him to act as an agent of God in the world?

Stephen's experience is not unusual. Taking his experience at face value, I asked questions of how to teach students of ministry how to navigate this all too familiar terrain. As a theologian shaped by a highly sacramental and liturgical view of the world through Roman Catholicism, this practical question of ministry nagged at me. I went to the library stacks.

I read professional publications from chaplaincy associations. I dove deep into Catholic moral handbooks that were used to prepare priests for their pastoral vocation. I conducted an ethnographic study with hospital chaplains to gather their collective practical wisdom. I wrote pastoral prescriptions based on the research.

I found answers, but I remained unsatisfied. I wrote about “women,” essentializing a category of experience that I knew was far more complex. Although I heard stories of particularity in identity, and the repercussions of living in a world which is biased and unjust because of perceptions of who one is, my writing to the question of care in ministry did not take up the most complex pieces of the puzzle: the constellations of identity which we inhabit and which inhabit us; the relationship between personal and social suffering; and of course, the pastoral theological question of what caring ministries look like when they are justice oriented.

During the time that I was exploring this question intellectually, I found myself invited to become an other mother to my newborn niece. I dove heart first then head into co-parenting, traveling to Bolivia, a developing country in South America, where the questions of recognition, suffering, subjectivity, and social justice confronted me from all sides. Holding my niece, I waited to climb aboard the *S micro* (bus) from *la Zona Sur*, a poor, indigenous residential neighborhood with limited access to food, pharmacy, and healthcare, and ride 30 minutes to the city center of Cochabamba. During the ride we passed by a few vegetable stands, the *tiendita* where I walked to buy bread and chocolate from the storekeeper, Marcela, and a mural on cinderblock that declared “*No es un juego*”—“This is not a game”—and depicted people standing at attention at the end of a bomb.

My questions on recognition became visceral when I looked at my part Quechuan daughter—full head of brown hair, brown eyes, and brown skin, even at one month. I asked myself many questions as I reflected. How am I to care for this new life so as to create the intrasubjective and intersubjective conditions for her to thrive and flourish? As an indigenous mestizo and Euroamerican person, a female, a citizen of both Bolivia and the United States of America, what may she experience as a result of her visible and invisible identities which may cause her harm as a result of racism, colonialism, and sexism? How will she be perceived by religious or social communities in North America which uphold heteronormative and Western visions of marriage as a theological norm for parenthood and childrearing? Through no particular choice of my own,

except to respond as best as I was able in love and care to the vulnerable creatures who inhabited my life, including myself, I saw all that was at stake in the developmental task of recognition as well as the social and theological implications.

## Recognizing Other Subjects

Theories of recognition describe the psycho-social-theological process by which selves receive recognition. Recognition is the capacity, ability, and willingness to see another person as they are and as they hope to become. As an intersubjective process, asserting one's needs and receiving recognition of those needs is part of the work of guiding and nurturing human development for growth and transformation. Practicing assertion and recognizing another's assertions begins in primary relationships when as infants we must trust that those to whom we have been entrusted care for us and love us in all that we are and all that we hope to become, taking into account our unique personalities, our social identities, and circumstances and histories that we are born into without necessarily giving our consent. As a social process, recognition is critical to create a more just society. Recognition of one's identity through social and political systems is the means by which legal rights are advanced. Recognition as a theological process is grounded in the claim that every existence is a graced existence. As a graced existence, we claim that God is present with us and accompanies us in our journey as embodied spirits and inspirited bodies. Theologically, when we optimally recognize another self-in-relation, we practice how to love another in freedom.

Not all recognition is optimal. We are misrecognized or not recognized at all. As such, recognition is a risky task. At every turn, we must place ourselves in the hands of another and trust that they will respond in love and care oriented toward our maturation. Likewise, we reach our hands into other's lives. As infants and children, we have no choice but to trust that our primary caregivers want the best for us as they are able to imagine and see the world. As adults, placing ourselves in another's hands is terrifying particularly when we are people already hurt and frail, people who believe that we are not yet capable of cultivating wholeness. Healing from these wounds requires acknowledging our finitude and brokenness as well as imagining health in a register that includes failure to recognize. Margaret Kornfeld comments, "We are learning that

health is not just the opposite of illness: health is the consciousness of one's wholeness—and that means accepting one's limitations as well as one's strengths."<sup>1</sup>

Not only are we terrified of what might befall us through our personal relationships, as we mature we come to understand that what our bodies reveal—not always with our permission—may also bring us harm by larger society. We wear our social and theological identities on our person and ask that we be recognized as a self of value who ought to be free from violence and harm. Sometimes, our bodies betray us. The color of our skin and the swish of our hips makes our bodies legible to social, political, and religious institutions which can recognize us, misrecognize us, or not recognize us at all. We act to receive recognition, sometimes receiving misrecognition or non-recognition instead. We may contort our bodies and our self-perceptions as we search for or demand recognition. Contortions may become intersubjective disfigurements of domination and submission. We can come to love our oppression and subjugation because we also receive the very thing that we desire: recognition. We cast parts of ourselves outward, making them abject and other, including constructed but real social identities. We fear our embodiment. Institutions, including family and church, wield the tools of systems of power that brand us: flint knife, tattoo needle, billyclubs, handcuffs.<sup>2</sup> We may not remember being wounded until our scars pulse with pain, the skin inflamed, where misrecognition or non-recognition has inscribed itself and cast out our living flesh.

As the people of God, we need balms, sutures, and medicines of all types to heal the wounds. Recognition is one medicinal remedy in ministry. Ministry claims the goodness *and* the brokenness of the world. In pastoral recognition, we respond in care to repair, mend, and make whole while acknowledging both the goodness and brokenness. In the context of pastoral theology, theorizing about recognition assists us to more fully understand the complexity of subjectivity. From there, our pastoral tasks of healing and caring, and also resisting, liberating, transforming selves and community, and cultivating the capacity for self- and communal-determination, are grounded in a pastoral reflection which more adequately accounts for subject formation. Theorizing recognition

1. Kornfeld, *Cultivating Wholeness*, 8.

2. Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 141.

also implicates institutions in the maintenance of social injustices and petitions for prophetic action for social change.

Attending to theories of recognition is critical for the cultivation of pastoral wisdom on lived subjectivity. My argument begins by acknowledging that we live within a constellation of identities in which we may be recognized, misrecognized, or not recognized, both at all and at any given time. As such, we ought to examine the importance of recognition across the intersubjective, social, and theological spectrums. The problem of recognition which I describe is also its answer: recognition. Seeking pastoral wisdom on recognition draws us toward “a wider vision for the practice of love” in feminist pastoral theology.<sup>3</sup>

### Methodological Context

I situate this inquiry in the context of feminist pastoral theology. I examine theories of recognition from a feminist perspective, taking up questions of suffering, subjectivity, and social justice along the way. I also pay particular attention to gender and sexuality. As third wave feminists, womanists, and queer theorists have noted, typically paying attention to gender has assumed race (white) and class (middle, at least). Hence, my discussions within this book are situated in light of 3rd wave feminist critiques. As such, I attend to the importance of gender at the intersections of race, sexuality, coloniality, and ability as much as I am able, given the confines of the text and the hopes for communicating clearly. Methodologically, I utilize a revised critical correlational method where pastoral theology and resources from cognate disciplines are brought into dialogue with each other to theologically reflect on lived experience.<sup>4</sup> In this book, I am in conversation with three major figures to reflect on recognition: Jessica Benjamin who brings a feminist psychoanalytic perspective; Judith Butler who brings a critical social theory perspective; and Marcella Althaus-Reid who brings a liberation theology perspective. Additionally, I reflect on the lived experiences that I have encountered personally and in contexts of ministry.

3. Ramsay, “Contemporary Pastoral Theology” 155.

4. Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order*, 43. Within pastoral theology see also Browning, “The Past and Possible Future of Religion and Psychological Studies”; Doehring, “A Method of Feminist Pastoral Theology”; and Miller-McLemore, “Cognitive Science and the Question of Theological Method.”

As a feminist scholar-practitioner living at the porous peripheries of modernity and post-modernity, I am aware of the importance of inhabiting self-reflexivity as a situated knower. I have built a knowledge portfolio that has both strengths and weaknesses based on what I have experienced, what I have not experienced, what I will never experience, and what I can only imagine experiencing. I trade knowledge using currencies drawn from the modern ethos of universal emancipation and the postmodern ethos of asking which power and whose emancipation.

The particularity of postmodern knowledge claims is important to the enterprise of pastoral theology. Pastoral theologians are called to account for the power that they hold through social identities or locations, such as race and ethnicity, class, gender, ability, religion, sexuality, age, and education. Pastoral theologians must be explicit about how their locations impact the shape of the knowledge they build and acknowledge how their location is shaped by power.<sup>5</sup> One accepted way to be explicit is to name one's social location. I am deeply grateful for the fortitude and courage that women and men in pastoral theology have exhibited in proceeding in this manner,<sup>6</sup> especially when naming a location is also a "coming-out as" process.<sup>7</sup> However, I also resist this form. I am too wary of confessions that feel coerced, of new norms of liberative practice that enslave persons in old economies of knowledge, of difference that solidifies and mutates into deviance. I am wary of asking social locations to do too much work without questioning the shape of our revealed and revealing knowledge. Social theorists Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper comment, "If identity is everywhere, it is nowhere."<sup>8</sup> The onus is to communicate what might be conveyed through identity or social location without lapsing into extensive memoir or autobiography, while also acknowledging the incompleteness and tensions of every narrative. In fact, this observation is central to my argument.

5. Neuger, "Power and Difference," 66.

6. See the foreword to feminist pastoral theologian Joretta Marshall's *Counseling Lesbian Partners*, where Andrew Lester acknowledges his gratitude "to Joretta for taking the personal risk inherent in writing this book" (ix).

7. I use the phrase "coming-out as" to denote, first, that naming and claiming an identity is not a one-time process, but one in which a person comes out again and again. Second, I use this phrase to denote how an identity may become crystallized for us, even when we see our identity as something much more fractured.

8. Brubaker and Cooper, "Beyond 'identity,'" 1.

So, I tell you as I can, as succinctly as I can, of my social location and how it informs the shape of my research. I have no doubt that I have already revealed things about myself to you in writing thus far and also by what I have not written. No doubt, many more tensions in my personal narrative and my pastoral theological concerns will emerge. For now, I tell you the following formations: I am a white woman. I grew up without memorable ethnic influence in proximity to the Beltway, the major highway that encircles the District of Columbia, the capital of the United States of America. I am most familiar with the Roman Catholic religious tradition, and also find myself comfortable in many places beyond the ecclesial institutional church. I have been privileged to enjoy extensive education opportunities. I situate my research interests at the broad intersection of theories and practices of care and justice. I worry about domination and submission, subtle coercion, and psychological manipulation in everyday practices of caring because they are mistaken for love, for justice, for mercy, for healing. Working out of a feminist, pastoral, and theological framework, I intend to engage my sources with theological virtues of prudence, generosity, respect, and humility. I hope that those who engage this work will also act in the same spirit.

## Chapter Overviews

This book offers a way to understand the importance of recognition as a process central to human development and growth. Because of the importance of recognition, I argue that pastoral theologians must understand how recognition, misrecognition, and denial of recognition work on individual psyches, between people, in our social and political lives, and in our theologies and their praxis. As such, I have organized the book attentive to these locations of recognition.

In Chapter 1, “The Challenge of Identity,” I argue that recognizing another subject is difficult work but is central to pastoral praxis and theological reflection. Further, I show that the framework of identity, while helpful to a point, is also limiting. When pastoral theologians reflect on ministry, an uncritical use of identity can be used to mask experiences of oppression and subjugation, or to fix a subject’s experience by appealing to identity. Because feminist pastoral theologians care about justice and because we seek to act justly as we care, I argue that theories

of recognition offer a rich counterbalance to the limiting effects of an identity framework alone.

In Chapter 2, “Feminist Pastoral Theological Anthropology,” I argue that feminist pastoral theologians have laid the groundwork for rich engagement with theories of recognition as they relate to subject formation. I dialogue with Joretta L. Marshall, Carroll A. Watkins Ali, Elaine Graham, Barbara J. McClure, and Pamela Cooper-White as feminist pastoral theologians who articulate theologies of subject formation. They do so by attending to women’s experience and human experience from feminist commitments to enable human flourishing. I outline their work in order to systematize the significant depth and breadth of feminist theological anthropology attentive to lived experience. I am critical of the role of recognition in their narrative constructions and conclude that recognition is a critical framework for constructing subjectivity.

In Chapters 3, 4, and 5, I describe the capability and need for recognition, as well as the consequences for when those needs go unmet, through psychoanalytic theory, social theory, and liberation theology. In Chapter 3, “Intersubjective Recognition,” I argue that intersubjective recognition is a key need in human development and growth, providing strength that enables a self to be in relation with another self. When optimal recognition is unmet, selves-in-relation settle for counterfeits, including patterns of domination and submission. In this chapter, I use an extreme example, reading *The Story of O* with Jessica Benjamin, a feminist psychoanalyst. *The Story of O* is a story of sexual submission and domination in which the circuit of recognition and assertion is warped, having us mistake subjugation for love. Consequently, subjugation is reproduced within family life from generation to generation. I conclude that without attention to intersubjective processes of recognition hopes for social transformation will also remain unfulfilled.

In Chapter 4, “Social Recognition,” I argue that our complex identities also must be recognized by social and political systems. Like a constellation, our complex identities are distinct points that form something which is interpreted as being visible, and thus then cited. Citing our identities make us legible to others and to social and political systems. However, legibility can also include erasure or marginalization, making the way we and others cite our identities matters of life and death. Drawing from queer theorist and social critic Judith Butler, I argue that our performed identities are sites of both playfulness and potential hurt. When we play out our identified becoming, systems of power, and those subject

to them, can give us a yes, no, or maybe even as we assert ourselves. A yes, no, or maybe carries consequences both for the giver and the receiver. I offer the work of mourning as a practice that calls forth the conditions for intersubjective and social recognition.

In Chapter 5, “Theological Recognition,” I argue that subjectivities of persons outside the normative visions of sexual desire and gender performance are misrecognized or not recognized at all within theological discourse. Dialoguing with the provoking work of Marcella Althaus-Reid, a liberation theologian writing through a queer theory lens, I argue that sustained inattention to non-heteronormative lives damages our ability to develop adequate descriptions of subject formation. I describe Althaus-Reid’s unique contribution toward a methodology for a liberative epistemology of theological recognition, and conclude with her that learning to love indecently is critical to recognition of complex subjectivity.

In Chapters 6, 7, and 8, I develop pastoral theological responses to the challenge of identity in light of the problem and solution of recognition. In Chapter 6, “Recognizing Injustice,” I argue that enacting a just care practice attentive to identity requires us to develop the affective capabilities for lamentation and confrontation. I describe how structural violence and political repression are places where assertions of self and group identity are muffled and silenced. When this happens, pastoral theologians call on the embodied practices of lamentation and confrontation. Rather than introjecting our sorrow or aggression, we channel these reactions out of the body and into the public sphere so that the self and communal resilience is cultivated.

In Chapter 7, “Encountering Other Subjects,” I outline key facets of a feminist pastoral theology of recognition and describe a theo-praxis of encounter. Because we are habituated in our giving and receiving of accounts of ourselves and other selves, and because we are habituated in feeling and interpreting our situations and the situations of others, I argue that social geography is a critical tool for pastoral theology. Social geography calls theologians to account for what they hold to be physically and spatially off-limits. I argue that a failure to encounter those things which have been deemed off-limits is problematic in enacting a pastoral praxis of recognition. As such, I offer the image of the street journalist.

In Chapter 8, “Recognizing the Self-in-Relation,” I give my account of a self-in-relation constituted by co-becoming. Writing from my ground of experience, I reflect on giving untamed accounts in describing

subjects, and the role of blessing in the project of co-becoming. I close with a spirituality of mutual beholding through which we learn postures of receptive action where we might see the loveliness of another subject, and not a subject who is Other.

As a final introductory word, allow me to emphasize that recognition is a desire of the human heart. Recognition paves the way to love, which is a theological, spiritual, and pastoral good. Yet, we know that to simply claim love is not good enough for pastoral theology. In Christian theological language, we experience and participate in personal and social sin, both by omission and by commission. Claims of love, which have proven constrictive rather than liberative, have caused harm to the people of God and deformed selves. My goal in this book is to broaden perspectives of feminist pastoral theology in relationship to identity and recognition so that we continue to enable flourishing in our theologies and their praxis. I wish to advance a care that does justice. For what is theologically at stake in recognition is the question of how to participate in our graced becoming and the graced becoming of Others, even while acknowledging the vicissitudes of sin and suffering. In this book, I do hope that you find that I have taken up these questions as living questions. Further, I hope that you will do the same.