

WOMEN'S CONSULTATION ON CONSTRUCTIVE THEOLOGY –
CONSULTATION

- Topic: Resisting Apathy and Silence: Theology, Women, and Social Movement
Conveners: Elizabeth L. Antus, Boston College
Kathryn Lilla Cox, University of San Diego
Colleen M. Carpenter, St. Catherine University
Treasurer: Jessica Coblentz, Saint Mary's College (Notre Dame, Indiana)
Secretary: Cristina Lledo Gomez, Charles Sturt University
Moderator: Jennifer Owens-Jofré, Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary
Presenters: Kimberly Humphrey, Boston College
Christina A. Astorga, University of Portland
Respondent: Christine Firer Hinze, Fordham University

The Women's Consultation began with Kimberly Humphrey's presentation on "Contesting Apathy: Sin and the Emotional Politics of Backlash." She explored emotions' role in our current social environment with its heightened political affect. Beginning with apathy, Humphrey argued that the work on overcoming bystander apathy looks at a pattern of behavior and how to change it, yet does not address the affective dimension of certain emotions that become rarified in social settings and responses to groups seeking justice in the face of injustice. She focused on the point where pressure builds and eventually oppressed persons or groups have a moment where they "snap." The "snap" fosters a response to injustice, for example in the form of protest movements functioning as a collective snap. Examples of a collective snap include Black Lives Matter and #MeToo. Both movements have met with backlash, which Humphrey examined as the "emotional politics of backlash." She argued that underneath the "politics of backlash" lies the emotion, white rage. Rage not only wreaks havoc subtly on attempts to overcome injustice, it also functions as punishment for progress towards justice and equality. Using theologian Kelly Brown Douglas' work on a theology of sin, Humphrey names backlash as constitutive of whiteness. She concluded her presentation by arguing that in the face of injustice whites not only need to deal with the emotion of apathy, they must collectively deal with rage, hatred, and antipathy.

Christina Astorga argued in her presentation, "Behind the Veil: The Asian Face of Gender Resistance," that gender inequality requires gender justice. Focusing on the Filipino and Indian contexts using novels, women's theological writing, Hindu rites for widows, and social movements she examined the way women critique and resist elements in both Asian culture and religion to resist gender violence and inequality while seeking justice. One of her key arguments was the need to recognize resistance's two overarching forms—hidden transcripts and public transcripts. Hidden transcripts are tools used by the oppressed to resist the oppressors, whereas public transcripts are public collective actions of resistance usually as socio-political movements. Using theologian Gemma Cruz's work, Astorga developed a theological framework of hidden transcripts, which include laughter, stories, humor, song, and dance. These actions provide sustenance, and encouragement for women in the struggle for justice, thus, acting as tools of resistance. Astorga, using narrative, described public transcripts of

Consultation: Women's Consultation on Constructive Theology

resistances by Filipino and Indian women. She cited, for example, “the legendary protest of the Cordillera women” in defending their ancestral land against the government’s plan for a nuclear power plant. She also talked of the first phase of the women’s fight for gender equality in the 1920’s and 30’s with the suffrage movement and a second phase in the 1970’s and 80’s. She briefly touched on the use of technology and cyber-space as a tool for resistance. Astorga concluded by contending that gender resistance is multi-layered, with culture and religion providing roots for gender justice. Astorga importantly called for women, especially colonized women, to reclaim their early cultural identities and stories which speak of strong women and women who resist patriarchy, oppression, and gender inequality—a call she modelled in her presentation.

Christine Firer Hinze, in her response, noted the papers’ distinctive features and points of contact related to gender inequality and gender injustice. She raised several questions for all to consider: What is the relationship between hidden and public transcripts? How do the transcripts relate or connect to the notion of *snaps* as described by Humphrey? What is the role of fear in the public function of emotion? Since both apathy and backlash function to reinforce the *status quo*, where or how does moral callousness factor into Humphrey’s consideration of backlash? Given that there exists little apathy on the internet, where does backlash fit with Astorga’s notion of social media as a form of resistance? Does the internet blur the line between hidden and public transcripts? A robust discussion followed Hinze’s response.

Finally, the Women’s Consultation turned to the presentation of the Ann O’Hara Graff Award to Mary Rose D’Angelo, Professor Emerita of New Testament, Christian Origins and Women’s Studies at Notre Dame University. The award honored her work focusing on gender, women’s questions, and support of women in theological studies.

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