

TRANSNATIONAL CATHOLICITIES: FAITH AND POPULAR
CULTURE IN GLOBAL DIALOGUE – INTEREST GROUP

Topic: Transnational Catholicities: Faith & Popular Culture in Global Dialogue
 Conveners: Linh Hoang O.F.M., Siena College
 Sophia Park S.N.J.M., Holy Names University
 Moderator: Kevin P Considine, Catholic Theological Union (in absentia)
 Presenters: Julia D.E. Prinz, V.D.M.F., Santa Clara University
 Linh Hoang O.F.M., Siena College
 Sophia Park S.N.J.M., Holy Names University

Julia D.E. Prinz, V.D.M.F., in her presentation entitled “Shadows: Photography as a Global Medium in Theological Discourse,” parted from Johann Baptist Metz’s formulation “the shortest definition of religion is interruption” by using photography to unfold the religious-spiritual meaning of global images. She followed the Jewish-Christian biblical and revelatory trajectory of “interruption” by carefully demonstrating photographs that changed the world in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries leading into the question of which kind of photographs hold the capacity of carrying unforgettable memories and, precisely because of that, are carrying hope for the future. Juxtaposing stock images with contemplative photographs she questioned the capacity of global church culture for creating visuals that are carrying hope and transformation, since the very use of stock images only labels concepts rather than seducing by their content, which is opposite to the mystagogical character of the church.

The presentation, “Food as Immigrant Experiences in a Transnational Catholic Context.” by Linh Hoang, O.F.M., explored the ways in which food is pivotal to how immigrant communities negotiated their resettlement as well as their Catholic identity in a transnational context. Taking the Eucharist as the starting point to understanding Christian foodway, the invitatory action of Jesus is the exemplary dietary practice of sharing food and of engaging with others in social settings. The Eucharistic table continues both to inform how Christian communities define their role and to bring awareness to issues around food such as scarcity, insecurity, abundance, and taboos. Focusing on the Asian immigrants in America, he discussed how Asian food slowly started to blend into the American landscape and became an easy means of discrimination. For instance, food smells such as kim chi, fish sauce, and South Asian curries operate both as a sense of cultural remembrance and embarrassment when discriminatory gestures are lobbed against Asians based on pungent odors rather than considering the tastes of these foods. Nevertheless, these foods are now prevalent through the thousands of Asian restaurants, noodle houses, fusion food trucks, and banquet halls across the United States. The discussion turned also to the types of meat eaten throughout Christian history. Certain meats were prohibited because they were thought to have been previously offered to pagan idols. This is mirrored by how certain animals in Asian cuisine are acceptable edible delicacies but are looked with disdain by the larger American society. Thus, pungent odors and food types are used to lodge racist attitudes against Asians in their efforts to resettle in their new home. Food provides a rich object and environment to engage in theological reflection in a transnational catholic context.

Sophia Park, S.N.J.M., in her presentation entitled “Murals: Expressing Ordinary Catholic-(c)ities,” explored the function of walls as space for posting communication through messages, drawings, or graffiti, which mirrors how the images represent the groups. Park argued that the locations of the wall determine the manner of communication. The interior walls operate as a space of remaining identity and expressing inner or core values, specifically for insiders. Messages on the interior wall assume agreement on the given knowledge or ideas among insiders. Thus, it emphasizes the universality of the group. The exterior wall demarcates the inside from the outside, protecting the building, house, and church. As a liminal space, the exterior wall is where the inside and the outside encounter one another or disintegrate. For example, the murals on the exterior wall of St. Peter parish at the Mission area of San Francisco side with the immigrants and the urban poor, advocating social justice by articulating and addressing their experience of suffering. Furthermore, Park showed murals on the street walls more directly engaging with the people, with images of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the suffering Jesus, or Oscar Romero, one of the most famous figures among murals in the Mission. People offer candles and flowers with sticky prayer notes around the murals. She indicated that the people of God find sacredness and expressions of their suffering and possible transformation on the street murals, and, perhaps, murals show where the church, the people of God, stands and worships.

The subsequent discussion noted the often-surprising intersections revealed by these presentations.

KEVIN P. CONSIDINE
Catholic Theological Union
Chicago, Illinois