

PROGRAM GROUPS

WOMEN'S SEMINAR IN CONSTRUCTIVE THEOLOGY

Topic: Undomestic Conversations: Women Talking across Borders
Coconveners: Elaine Catherine MacMillan, University of San Diego
Dawn M. Nothwehr, Catholic Theological Union
Moderator: Phyllis H. Kaminski, St. Mary's College, Indiana
Presenters: Milagros Peña, University of Florida
Carolyn L. Sharp, Saint Paul University

Milagros Peña spoke about her work with grassroots women in the El Paso, Texas and Juarez, Mexico borderlands. In her view, the crossing of borders includes crossing the artificial boundaries of the academy as a feminist scholar, and not only passing over the geographical borders encountered in the lived reality of the women with whom she works. One of her concerns as a feminist sociologist is to move beyond patriarchy as a marker and to root women's community work for social transformation in race, class, and gender. Even as she noted a certain disconnect between the women's groups she works with and mainstream feminism, she spoke about the multidimensional strategies of grassroots women's groups for achieving social change. Her book *Latinas Beyond Borders: Grassroots Women's Organizing in Mexico and the U.S. Southwest* is due out in February 2007.

Carolyn L. Sharp addressed the topic from her perspective as a Canadian theologian and activist living in Quebec and working in Ottawa. She spoke about privilege and what it means to dialogue in contested territories. Drawing on the work of Dorothy E. Smith and others, Carolyn addressed the importance of language in maintaining minority cultural identity as well as its role in establishing dominant power. Sharp discussed the particular situation of people of French Canadian and Native Canadian heritage. The imperative imposed on these people of mixed heritage is to "Speak White"—that is, to speak English—the language of the colonizers and the empire. That obligation forced upon so many minority peoples in Canada resonated with African and African Americans as well as Latino/as in the audience. In addition to national borders, Carolyn also raised questions about academic disciplinary borders in the determination of what kind of work utilizing the knowledge of one's discipline counts and who is worthy of recognition by the academy. Sharp drew out the similarities between minorities dealing with the requirement to "Speak White," and feminist scholars resisting assimilation in the academy by juggling the requirements for publishing in refereed academic journals, for example, while staying engaged with the grassroots women's

movement and working for social change. Both speakers pointed to the necessity of moving beyond inclusion to a politics of nonsubordination.

A dynamic discussion followed these two challenging presentations.

The 2006 Ann O'Hara Graff Memorial Award was then presented to María Pilar Aquino of the University of San Diego.

During the business meeting that followed, seminar participants were reminded that this convention marked the twentieth anniversary of the founding of the seminar and the fortieth anniversary of the gender integration of the CTSA convention by Elizabeth Farians. A special luncheon celebrating these events was held on June 10, 2006 at the convention, with Elizabeth Farians in attendance as the seminar's honored guest. At the luncheon, Anne E. Patrick and Elizabeth A. Johnson presented their "CTSA Women's Seminar in Constructive Theology: A Thumbnail History in Three Acts."

DAWN M. NOTHWEHR
Catholic Theological Union
Chicago, Illinois