For the past four years, I have been lucky enough to be invited as a journalist to sit in on discussions by scholars-in-residence at the Center of Theological Inquiry. To write for the Center is always a rewarding challenge. This year, however, my task was made more challenging because of the degree of complexity of the subject matter and the range of expertise and sheer diversity of the participating scholars.

CTI is currently embarked on a five-year series of seminars focused on “Religion and Global Concerns.” For the first of these, “Religion and Migration,” a dozen men and women from across the globe—theologians and scholars in the social sciences and humanities (anthropology, ecology, economics, politics, sociology, theology and law)—are tackling issues of immediate import for today’s world. Not since the Copernican Revolution has there been a time when our conception of our place in the world has been so shaken. Long-held traditions, even our use of language, have fallen into question in an existential age of global uncertainty. With everything up for grabs in what is being dubbed “The Age of Migration,” no wonder there is worry on a global scale. What is happening?
CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT:
Saskia Sassen and William Storrar,
David Hollenbach and Ulrich Schmiedel,
John Ahn, Kathrin Winkler and
Hendrik Bosman, Seforosa Carroll
A culture of debate among diverse opinions is increasingly rare today, with entrenchment on all sides and a selective regard for truth. It seems increasingly difficult for people to talk to one another in any meaningful way. What if you could really say what’s on your mind? What if you could ask someone a question without fear of your words being misinterpreted or your motives impuned? In true dialogue, it is possible to say: oh I see you took my question in a way that I hadn’t realized it could be interpreted and that reveals to me something about my question of which I wasn’t aware: a hidden assumption, a cultural or traditional difference, a term with a special meaning in my field, or my own personal prejudice/worldview. Such a response would make you feel you were truly being listened to and would, I think, make you want to listen with equal sensitivity.

THE ART OF DIALOGUE

This is dialogue as the late scientist and philosopher David Bohm conceived it; a multi-faceted process that goes beyond typical conversation. It lies at the heart of the CTI methodology that Director William Storrar succinctly calls “Thinking Aloud Together.”

According to this way of working, dialogue is a process of discovery. Rather than the kind of point-scoring discussion all too prevalent in academia, genuine dialogue is not a game of ping-pong to be won, it is a game played with rather than against one another. Furthermore, in the discovery of subtle differences in meaning lies new content. “In a dialogue, each person does not attempt to make common certain ideas or items of information that are already known to him,” says Bohm. “Rather, it may be said that the two people are making something in common, i.e. creating something
WILLIAM BARBIERI

William Barbieri hails from “a typical Catholic melting pot family from the New York region with Irish and Italian grandparents on one side and English on the other.” His personal history has shaped his attitudes, interests and sensibilities. But it was in secondary school during the height of the anti-nuclear movement that his interest in social justice really took root. Subsequent study abroad in England, China, Taiwan and Europe ultimately led him to study comparative ethics and he now teaches in the Religion and Culture and Moral Theology/Ethics programs in the School of Theology and Religious Studies at the Catholic University of America. He also directs the Peace and Justice Studies Program there.

At CTI for the first time, Barbieri brings his training and sensibility in social ethics to bear on the residential seminar on Religion & Migration. Highly attuned to questions of moral agency and how issues of freedom, choice, psychology and group dynamics play into the political and social dynamics involved in migration, he has also had a long involvement with theoretical issues to do with boundaries. His Constitutive Justice (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015) is the result, he says, of many years of thinking on questions to do with boundaries and the way in which communities shape themselves. Widely published, Barbieri’s books include Ethics of Citizenship: Immigration and Group Rights in Germany (Duke University Press, 1998). He has written numerous articles in the areas of human rights, comparative ethics, peace studies, Catholic social teaching, and German studies and has edited From Just War to Modern Peace Ethics (with Heinz-Gerhard Justenhoven; De Gruyter, 2012) and At the Limits of the Secular: Reflections on Faith and Public Life (Eerdmans, 2014).

Barbieri approaches migration as a case study in the ethics and politics of human dignity. His interests range over labor migration, detention, sanctuary movements, DACA, unaccompanied minors and families, and humanitarian and political refugees. With the cultural anthropologist and social scientist Valentina Napolitano, he shares an interest in Michel de Certeau, as well as in the function of language and decolonization. “The intersection of language and power is a part of the dialogue that we will have to hold in view, as is the fact that there are real people behind the statistics and concepts,” he says. “Migration is a fascinating theoretical topic but at root it is a very urgent problem with real victims of sex trafficking, war and environmental catastrophe.”

As a fellow of several institutes and academies—Institute for Policy Research and Catholic Studies and Center for the Study of Culture and Values—and as a member of the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Christian Ethics—Barbieri has “a special appreciation” for CTI. “It’s rare to find the right conditions and the right chemistry and the right environment, and I’m familiar with those challenges from my own work, sometimes more successful than others. This is a truly residential project that uses space to foster ongoing exchange. CTI builds on the insight that the arrangement of space and the arrangement of routines is a crucial substrate for effective intellectual collaboration.”

And as a scholar, Barbieri knows that “conversation is always going to be a source of insights that we cannot generate ourselves. At CTI I can count on finding new impulses for prompting my own thinking on these questions and to advance my project on human dignity and migration.”
new together.” Such dialogue, says Bohm, “goes into the process of thought behind the assumptions, not just the assumptions themselves.” And, as Bohm points out, its creative potential depends upon sustained, serious application by participants able “freely to listen to each other, without prejudice, and without trying to influence each other.” In other words it requires a willingness to be open and vulnerable.

Over a long weekend in October when the participants met face to face for the first time, I saw this agenda-free dialogue develop. Incidentally, when you find yourself sitting next to a German theologian who offers his take on “Fortress Europe” and the ways in which theology features in contemporary discussions on migration; a South African expert on the book of Exodus and the Bible in 19th century colonial contexts; a Korean-American New Yorker reframing the Wilderness Wandering Tradition; and a Fiji-born Rotuman who tells you of rising sea-levels that are an imminent threat to island peoples of the Pacific; you know you must be at CTI. Nowhere else brings together people, as broadcaster Krista Tippett has said, in such “seemingly unlikely combinations.” The word “seemingly” there is crucial, for as I discover there is much that unites these scholars.

Among others, I meet leading theologian Peter Phan, himself a refugee from Vietnam (see “The Accidental Theologian,” page 24); Daniel Ramírez, a fourth generation Latino Pentecostal; Kanan Kitani, a Japanese scholar of theology and popular culture; ethicist William Barbieri; and the Italian cultural anthropologist Valentina Napolitano. (For more on each of these scholars, see sidebars). As one would expect in such an advanced level resident research seminar, most are established scholars; two are in the early stages of their careers. Napolitano expresses the general feeling of excitement at the “wonderful combination of different life histories, disciplinary backgrounds and stages in careers.”

For Phan, such diversity is necessary to grasp what is going on in the world. It isn’t long before these multiple strands intersect in a web of connections. Individual scholars become the go-to experts for Old Testament scholarship; several are called upon to clarify points of ethics or share insights drawn from experience; others introduce aspects of space, analyses of empirical data, interreligious encounters; several draw upon their knowledge of human rights, human dignity, ecology, evangelical and practical theologies. A dizzying range of concepts and questions arise and several different perspectives emerge in
KANAN KITANI

Kanan Kitani is an early career scholar from Japan’s Christian minority who followed her heart into theology over parental objections and worked several jobs to support her theological studies. In Japan only 0.8 percent of the population is Christian and although she grew up in the Congregationalist tradition, Kitani’s career path took some thought. Her family has come around since her appointment as an assistant professor of theology at Doshisha University in Kyoto but her decision to become a pastor remains unconventional.

In today’s highly competitive Japan there is pressure to get into a good university and become a doctor, a lawyer or a professor. Kitani felt that pressure, especially as her father is a medical doctor whom she was expected to succeed. During her high school years, as a devout Christian, she felt something was missing from her life; she decided to study theology. She finds inspiration in the life of Joseph Nishima, the Samurai who became a Christian in 1862 at a time when Japan was isolated from the rest of the world and Christianity was banned. Nishima, who went on to found Doshisha University, risked his life when he put down his sword and picked up the Bible. After traveling as far as Boston where he was taken in by a ship’s captain in 1865, he ultimately returned to Japan as a Christian missionary.

On her first visit to CTI, Kitani says she feels like she’s in “academic Disneyland,” especially after visiting the Princeton Seminary Library. With few resources for studying theology in Japan, being at CTI is “a dream come true.” In addition, she finds that she is learning a lot from the high level of discourse and the interdisciplinary nature of the program and its participants. She expects to expand her ideas and advance her greatest challenge of doing theology interreligiously. “As a Japanese woman, this kind of collaboration is very unusual,” she says. “In the Japanese educational system we do not usually have conversations; professors give lectures and students listen and do not question. So we do not have this kind of rich conversation, even in graduate school; it is very stimulating and a little intimidating.”

At CTI, Kitani is challenged to overcome some of her own cultural training. As a Japanese woman she was taught not to speak until men had finished talking. She also has to overcome a traditional reverence for seniority—she was once told by a senior (male) colleague in Japan that if she wanted respect from her colleagues she should not speak at all! At CTI, she is learning to find the right moment as well as the nerve to jump into the conversation.

As for the issue of religion and migration, she notes that in contemporary Japan, the migrant population has doubled in the last decade. The 20,000 migrants currently coming into Japan each year are mostly women from the Philippines, Korea, Brazil, Vietnam, South America and Peru. They find work in the sex-trade or as domestics. Since most immigrants are Christian or Muslim, their presence is bringing change to Japanese society. Migration is a “sign of the time,” says Kitani, whose current research is a theological interpretation of Jesus as the Paradigmatic Migrant.
their treatment with theological, global, interdisciplinary, and ethical viewpoints melding in some surprising ways.

Seforosa Carroll shares details of the “Rainbow Theology and Noah’s Covenant” that stands in the way of people handling an imminent problem. In this instance, faith has led to false hope, an anchor that inhibits engagement with reality. With identity connected to land, how do we help such displaced people re-imagine home? It’s just one of many questions Carroll asks. Ciprian Burlaciou engages with Hendrik Bosman on the impact of industrial and urban life on indigenous Christianity in Southern Africa at the turn of the 20th century and with Daniel Ramírez on labor migration in the Americas.

As the seminar participants discover overlapping research interests, I can’t help wondering about the personal qualities that unite them. What they have in common, I realize, is attentiveness, an ability to listen and to question; to bring their own life experiences as well as their knowledge to a creative process that involves a significant degree of reflection and I might add, intellectual risk. They share that openness to creative collaboration that is necessary for the “Thinking Aloud Together” of which Storrar speaks.

Still it’s the early stages of the seminar. Let’s see what happens. This is where leading ethicist David Hollenbach of Georgetown University and eminent sociologist Saskia Sassen of Columbia University step in.

DEEPENING THE CONVERSATION
Hollenbach and Sassen get it all rolling, the former with an ethical perspective on human rights and the latter with a sociological perspective on migration and globalization. Their papers have been distributed in advance and read by all for the discussions that follow.

Hollenbach is a longstanding friend of CTI—he took part in the Religion & International Law Inquiry in 2010 and the Law & Religious Freedom Inquiry in 2015. But it’s his work on refugees and human rights that is pertinent now. While acknowledging religion as a cause of conflict (citing instances of Catholic/Protestant Christianity; ISIS and Islam, Myanmar and Buddhism) he notes the normative tradition of concern for the displaced in these religions. His talk elicits questions about human rights and the definition of “refugee;” issues concerning borders; responsibilities of citizens, non-citizens; and, perhaps not surprisingly, since Hollenbach is a Jesuit priest, about the meaning of his order’s motto “For the Greater Glory of God” in the context of migration.

Phan comments that religious faith can sustain refugees in the midst of their suffering (citing examples) and is significant in energizing the response to humanitarian crises. Several participants point to the danger of statistics, noting that behind every statistic is an individual human story. “Religion should be part of the solution,” says CTI’s Distinguished Global Fellow Philip McDonagh. “How do we share the goods of this world? We must transfer our thinking from the nation-state to the world.” (For more on McDonagh, see “The Gentle Ambassador,” page 20.)

World statistics provided by Sassen bring the crisis into context. Sassen looks at how migrations begin and, given all the poverty and inequality in the world, she asks Why aren’t there more? War has changed, she says and whatever is done to promote irregular combatants will keep war going. Sassen works at what she calls, “the fuzzy edges of paradigmatic knowledge”—“in the shadows of powerful explanations when territory exits conventional framings.” In the social sciences, “existing paradigms served us well until globalization,” she says and goes on to describe her interest in new migration flows that “signal the making of new histories.”

Her presentation is profoundly informative and challenging. Where is the church in all this, asks Phan, launching a conversation that takes in current migrant churches in California; unaccompanied minors crossing borders; the concept of dead land; and the systemic causes of instability in the world and the role of large corporations.
VALENTINA NAPOLITANO

Valentina Napolitano became a cultural anthropologist because of an interest in Latin America and indigenous people in Central Mexico. “Divergent ontologies have been key to my anthropological research and I am particularly taken by the long history of the colonial Americas, and so to histories rather than history,” she says. “Affective histories have often been forgotten or repressed but they re-emerge with much potency and my work has been trying to understand some of these returns.”

A professor of anthropology at the University of Toronto, Napolitano is the author, among other works, of Migrant Hearts and the Atlantic Return: Transnationalism and the Roman Catholic Church (2016). The book’s focus is people—mostly women—from Latin America and their experiences in Italy. Many work as domestics; some are sisters in Roman convents. While giving voice to individual histories, Migrant Hearts speaks to the complicated interaction of migrant experience, national politics, humanitarian discourse, and contemporary theology.

Napolitano has an idiosyncratic approach to conversation. “Sometimes I’m not very linear in my thinking; I am moved by ideas as fields of forces and I hope to bring to the conversation elements to do with migration, home, politics of dwellings, ideas of liturgical and affective labors, anthropology of Catholicism toward a broader discussion of the relation between migration, religion and society.” Keen on new research methods that involve advocacy, she sees her work not only in the library but “very much out in the world with a particular awareness to social justice.”

Her current research is on the Catholic Church as a living religious infrastructure. She studies waves of migration along the Windsor/Detroit corridor where different dioceses across the Canadian/U.S. border are dealing with changing migrant landscapes. She is particularly interested in the ways in which current migrants inhabit spaces previously animated by Polish and Italian migrants, and the emergence of new practices and rituals in churches that host Latino migrants.

“My research focuses on migrant religious orientations in space, the ecological life of religious buildings and the gendered liturgical labor that is (re)produced differently across this corridor space.”

To CTI, Napolitano brings an awareness of the process of decolonization as a complex and important matter with which to engage. “We know that the history of Christianity, in different forms, has been the unacknowledged underpinning of colonial histories. This is not to say that Christianity has only been that, but that there is a systemic relation to Christianity and histories of oppression that cannot be only confronted by personal and intersubjective spaces of communitas/eclesiastic and ecumenical encounters.” In other words: “There is work to be done on the entanglements of different worlds that have created systemic inequality; Christianity, in some of its forms, is entangled in these worlds. This is difficult work as it involves all of us and is at the core not only of our work but of our being.”

The notion of vulnerability, says Napolitano, “is a good point of departure to work with the unacknowledged realm of privilege that we take for granted and that forms the platform from which we do our analysis.”
For one participant, Sassen is providing tools to think with; another notes that our ethics rarely descends to the level of what to do for the very poor. Seforosa Carroll describes rising sea levels in the Pacific and Bangladesh, shrinking habitat and new helpful and hopeful technologies and architectures: projects that use brown water to make biodegradable plastic, paint that cleans the air. McDonagh offers insights on geopolitics and migration as a business with criminal elements. Bosman offers the delightfully visual: “Knowledge is like a big Baobab tree, you need a community to embrace it.”

DEEPENING INSIGHT

The idea of examining a particular subject through different lenses inevitably leads one to take a close look at the lenses one has acquired or adopted or has used for so long one has become unaware of them, for whatever reasons. What happens when you adopt a different set of lenses? Clearly this is a fruitful process for promoting thought, discussion, and discovery; at CTI it opens new lines of investigation.

In previous years, it seems, CTI’s scholars-in-residence had more ground to travel in the opening stages of their inquiry when, for example, theologians sat down with scholars in the hard sciences to introduce themselves to one another, share and explain their concepts and their projects. In this instance, although the subject matter is so very intractable (what in social planning jargon are referred to as “wicked” problems of complex interdependencies), the participants start with more of a shared understanding. As soon as introductions were made, they were in the thick of intellectual dialogue. They jumped right in. For me, it was a dizzying experience.

There is nowhere that makes me think more deeply than CTI. Even with all of the resources available to the lay person in Princeton (talks at the Institute, the University, the Seminary, Princeton Public Library and so on), it is at this small institution where I am provoked into my deepest thinking.

Referencing the founding vision of CTI as a global and ecumenical center, Storrar says: “This is perhaps the most global and ecumenical group of scholars we have had here in my 13 years as Director; and since these topics are deeply connected, this group is laying the groundwork for what is to come.”

With this seminar, CTI has its finger firmly on the pulse of what is happening in the world today.

And an eye on its mission to contribute to positive change in the world.
Daniel Ramírez is a religious historian with training in Latin American Cultural Studies and ethnomusicology. He describes himself as a fourth generation Mexican American-Chicano from Los Angeles. His career path was not straightforward: “This is my third career after Yale; I was in international banking and then spent a good number of years in Student Services at Stanford University, where higher education was demystified for me,” he says. The premature deaths of two of his uncles who were preachers in the Pentecostal Church compelled him to set about recovering and preserving their stories and, with the support of senior leaders in the Pentecostal Movement, he interviewed their peers. “Also called the Apostolic Movement, the Latino Pentecostal Movement is a heterodox variant that is non-trinitarian; it is very special,” says Ramírez.

Now Associate Professor of American Religions at Claremont Graduate University, Ramírez is developing a theology of migration. He explores the theological and political implications of transnational and migratory experience among Mexican, Central American and indigenous Pentecostals. “Latin American Pentecostalism is still in its adolescence,” he says, noting that early church members were without the where-with-all to write theology so that the history of the church comes from “testimonies, stories, and a beautiful musical archive which was framed in all of the popular cultural idioms of their time—folk music hymns with doctrinal content, testimonial content, existential sorrow, framed in such a way that they would speak to popular culture.” It’s a remarkable story that Ramírez wrote about in his 2015 monograph, *Migrating Faith: Pentecostalism in the United States and Mexico in the Twentieth Century*.

Many such songs have a sojourning motif. “When sung in moments of surrounding xenophobia, these acquire a multi-layered significance much akin to the slave spirituals that took on a whole different meaning on the eve of emancipation. Black Pentecostalism is the mother of Latino Pentecostalism and it was the great migration of blacks from south to north that carried rural Pentecostalism to the urban north.” One particular hymn that Ramírez is fond of (and will sing if asked) emerged from Puerto Rico in the 1950s and took deep root in Central America and the Mexican Southwest. “The Bible is the Flag” uses the stars and stripes as a metaphor. “When sung by a congregation of undocumented people avoiding raids such as took place during Operation Wetback of 1954, and after the anti-immigrant Proposition 187 in California in 1994, it acquired a different significance,” he says.

At CTI for the first time, Ramírez is addressing questions such as: How do ostensibly subordinated migrants view themselves as citizens of the world, the nation, and heaven, as they transit back-and-forth? What do their stories and songs reveal? And what historical and other resources and insights can be used to translate and systematize incipient theological self-understanding into a Pentecostal Social Doctrine? As a model of how he might undertake the latter, Ramírez looks to David Hollenbach, whose “clarity of method and cogency of argument” in translating Catholic Social Doctrine he admires.

With the “many systematic minds” he encounters at CTI, Ramírez finds multiple resonances: with Napolitano’s social science method, for example, and her postcolonial critiques of communication that Ramírez believes must be borne in mind, especially when speaking on behalf of people who would never be able to hold forth in an academic environment. He was moved to hear of the almost fatalistic and melancholy response to existential destruction of island inhabitants in the Pacific. “I have seen some of that in places where people have been uprooted by violence or ecological damage, the poorest of the poor—how do they articulate a theology that is Job-like in its approach, when it’s bleak and dark and you have to have faith that ‘things will get better by and by.’ That reminder from the peripheries of our modern world was striking.”