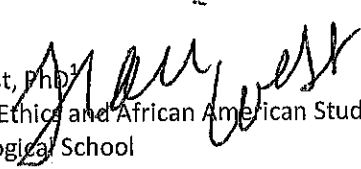


# DREW UNIVERSITY

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THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL

To: Project Coordinator  
Women in Science Awards  
Department of Science and Technology  
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From: Traci C. West, PhD   
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## **Endorsement of Nomination of Sarojini Nadar as "Distinguished Researcher: The Role of Science and Research in Overcoming Violence against Women"**

To whom it may concern

I wish to endorse the nomination of Prof. Nadar for the above-mentioned award. I have known Professor Sarojini Nadar as a colleague in the field of gender violence and religion for the past several years. I have attended lectures she has given at international academic conferences, utilized her articles and co-authored books with students in my women's studies in religion courses, and interviewed her for my own research.

Three years ago, I travelled to South Africa to meet anti-violence scholars and activist leaders in Pietermaritzburg, Durban, and Johannesburg, as I wished to research their constructive responses to violence against black women. My project was methodological. I was interested in how "we" in the U.S. context can learn ideas about addressing violence against women from scholars, activists, and activist/scholars in Africa and African diaspora. How do we learn in a way that fosters a critique of the anti-black racist, U.S. imperialist political and Christian assumptions that U.S. scholar/activists bring? How do we discuss realities of violence against women, in Africa, for example, in a way that does not reinforce U.S. cultural superiority, even among U.S. feminist/womanist allies?

One of the people I wished to meet was Sarojini Nadar as I had read much of her research on religion, sacred texts and violence against women particularly in the context of race, culture and

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<sup>1</sup> Rev. Dr. Traci C. West is Professor of Ethics and African American Studies at Drew University Theological School (Madison, NJ). She received her BA from Yale University (New Haven, CT), her MDiv. from Pacific School of Religion (Berkeley, CA), and her PhD from Union Theological Seminary (New York, New York). She is the author of *Disruptive Christian Ethics: When Racism and Women's Lives Matter* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), *Wounds of the Spirit: Black Women, Violence, and Resistance Ethics* (New York University Press, 1999), and the editor of *Our Family Values: Same-sex Marriage and Religion* (Praeger, 2006). She has also written several articles on violence against women, racism, clergy ethics, sexuality and other justice issues in church and society.

ethnicity. I had also heard of the community work that she was engaging in using workshops and contextual bible studies to raise consciousness about the issue.

I first met her in the Tea Room of the erstwhile School of Religion and Theology in Pietermaritzburg.

This is what I penned in my journal concerning this first meeting:

*... On the other side of the room I noticed an especially animated conversation with lots of pointing at a newspaper on the table. I heard the word "racist". Immediately alert, I craned my neck to see more. The South African Mail and Guardian newspaper opened to a cartoon<sup>2</sup> drawing that lay on the table.*

*"Sarojini, is this sexist? Come on, tell us what you think?" A white male faculty member said. The room suddenly quieted. A tall slender young woman who appeared to me to be a South Asian South African leaned over the table. Her racially mixed, male and female, religion faculty colleagues focused respectful attention on her. She took a moment to look at the political cartoon and then gave her opinion.*

*When I heard Sarojini Nadar's name, I moved closer to see her. She directed the Gender and Religion program. I had contacted her before I left home and already noticed the outside of her office door with the clipping of her opinion-editorial on religion and violence against women recently published in the Mail and Guardian. I went to that faculty gathering with the hope of confirming a date to talk with Nadar and others here at the University that I knew had developed anti-rape Christian Bible study materials.*

From the above reflection and my subsequent meeting with Sarojini I can confirm at least three reasons why she deserves this award:

I have found her research to be extremely meaningful for my work and that of my graduate students. I sought analysis such as hers that insists upon a critique of communal patriarchal norms that support violence against women and incorporates a thoroughly anti-racist approach. In addition, her publications such as her co-edited volume *Ragbag Theologies* directly engage community practices that are relevant to scholarly critiques of violence-supporting norms. Most importantly, Professor Nadar never allows her readers to retain a simplistic notion of community struggle for social justice nor a naïve view of the tenacity of communal traditions that support the violence.

I have also been deeply impressed by her demonstrated commitment to assuming the role of public intellectual. Her leadership ranges from facilitating consistent, detailed dialogues in grassroots settings to her politically astute and courageously critical article in the *Mail and Guardian*. Professor Nadar engages local groups in constructive, though difficult conversations about deeply held beliefs that foster both gender violence and racial animosities.

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<sup>2</sup> The drawing by the newspaper's cartoonist Zapiro (Jonathan Shapiro) depicted one of the country's major political leaders, the head of the ruling party, Jacob Zuma with his pants unzipped. It showed a side view of him with one hand holding his pants wide open. A dripping shower was above his head attached to a pole that seemed to grow up out of the back of his lumpy, bald head. He had a smirk on his face and stood over a blind-folded, screaming woman.

Finally, I want to offer my testimony to her profound impact upon my work by virtue of the privilege that I received of conducting an in-depth interview with her about the violence in South Africa, specifically some of the forms of sexual violence against women and girls. She gave me details about activist and governmental efforts to counter it. Her candor and insight about the racial and gendered politics of organizing resistance helped me to appreciate the multi-layered dynamics of dismantling systemic support for gender violence like few other scholars and activists in my research have done.

I offer my most enthusiastic recommendation of this brilliant and courageous scholar for this award. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or need additional information.