Nunes To Direct Undergraduate Program

The Institute for Research on Women and Gender is pleased to announce the appointment of Professor Zita Nunes of the Department of English and Comparative Literature as Director of Undergraduate Studies for the academic year 1997-98 while Professor Maggie Sale is on leave. Professor Nunes will be in charge of coordinating the undergraduate curriculum, advising majors, and teaching the senior seminar for those writing theses in Women’s and Gender Studies.

Professor Nunes’ research focuses on the literatures of South America and the Caribbean. A comparativist, she reads and speaks Spanish, Portuguese, French, and Yoruba. At Berkeley, where she received her Ph.D., Professor Nunes’s dissertation focused on the literatures of South America and the Caribbean. A comparativist, she reads and speaks Spanish, Portuguese, French, and Yoruba. At Berkeley, where she received her Ph.D., Professor Nunes’s dissertation focuses on the literatures of South America and the Caribbean. A comparativist, she reads and speaks Spanish, Portuguese, French, and Yoruba. At Berkeley, where she received her Ph.D., Professor Nunes’s dissertation focuses on the literatures of South America and the Caribbean. A comparativist, she reads and speaks Spanish, Portuguese, French, and Yoruba. At Berkeley, where she received her Ph.D., Professor Nunes’s dissertation focuses on the literatures of South America and the Caribbean. A comparativist, she reads and speaks Spanish, Portuguese, French, and Yoruba. At Berkeley, where she received her Ph.D., Professor Nunes’s dissertation focuses on the literatures of South America and the Caribbean.
Conferences, continued from page 1
shops at the two-day event will focus on a range of issues relevant to feminist theory and practice within and outside the academy. In addition to considering the political direction of feminism in class/race dynamics, global perspectives and international relations. Topics will include campus activism, feminist art in theory and practice, the language of feminism and humor. Speakers will include graduate students from Columbia and from other universities in the United States, Europe, and South America, as well as feminists from outside of academia. The plenary panel will focus on the interface between activist and feminist projects.

All events will be held at Columbia University. For further information, contact Tara Susman at tms12@columbia.edu or c/o the Institute for Research on Women and Gender, 763 Schermerhorn Extension, Columbia University, New York, NY 10027.

Domestic Violence and Immigrant Communities

The Institute for Research on Women and Gender (IRWAG) and the Columbia University School of Social Work's Social Intervention Group (SIG) will co-sponsor a one-day conference on 17 October 1997, with the support of Dean Ronald Feldman of the School of Social Work. Titled Domestic Violence among South Asian, East Asian, and Arab Immigrant Women: Challenges and Solutions, the conference is being organized by Kathryn Gravdal (IRWAG), Barbara Simon (School of Social Work), and the five core funding members of SIG’s Research Project on Immigrant Women’s Health: Nabila El-Bassel, Malahat Baig-Amin, Louisa Gilbert, Anne Waters, and Marianne Yoshioka.

Conference discussion will focus on a cross-cultural perspective on domestic violence in order to examine the impact of acculturation and immigration on particular groups of women. While domestic violence is hardly restricted to immigrant groups, the conference will focus on the particular problems of immigrant women and will explore better ways to solve these. For the organizers, coalition building among groups drawn from academia, community-based organizations, and larger government and institutional agencies would offer a way to assist immigrant women.

The conference is motivated by both research and policy agendas. For example, although Asian populations are among the fastest growing in the United States, the lack of statistics on domestic violence within these communities hinders the ability of various organizations to provide appropriate services. Speakers will explore ways in which academic research and community-based organizations can collaborate to document and provide for the needs of particular groups of immigrant women.

The conference will be opened by Professor Nabila El-Bassel along with Professor Barbara Simon and Dean Feldman. They will discuss the conceptualization of domestic violence within the social sciences and among social work scholars and the relevance of this research to practical attempts to prevent such violence. Keynote speaker Professor Jacqueline Campell, from the Department of Nursing at Johns Hopkins University, will discuss cultural variations in attitudes toward and definitions of domestic violence, and how these affect services and efforts to deal with such abuse.

Other speakers include those associated with women’s studies, social work, anthropology, sociology, law, and nursing, as well as representatives from community-based organizations which specialize in the prevention of domestic violence. The three main sessions of the conference will address how to define the...
The conference is open to the general public, free of charge, with buffet lunch and a wine reception provided. Pre-registration is required. All events will be held in the Dag Hammarskjöld Lounge in the International and Public Affairs Building at Columbia University, from 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. on October 17th, 1997. For further information, please contact the Institute for Research on Women and Gender at 212-854-3277.
The State, Religion, and the Veil: An Interview with Hamideh Sedghi

Professor Hamideh Sedghi has been a Visiting Scholar at the Institute for Research on Women for the past two years. A recipient of numerous honors and awards, she has helped to pioneer research on Iranian women’s studies as she was the first Iranian woman to write on the subject in the United States. A political scientist, she has published on gender and development, gender and world politics, and women in Iran and the Middle East.

Professor Sedghi came to the United States for higher education. After her B.A. at U.C. Berkeley, she focused on comparative politics and developmental studies at the C.U.N.Y. Graduate Center. Her political science department had no offerings on women and gender studies nor had it produced any dissertations on women, let alone on Iran, the focus of her interest. At the time, her dissertation adviser thought it more appropriate for a political science candidate to write on petroleum in the Middle East.

Professor Sedghi persisted and wrote a dissertation entitled ‘Women and Class in Iran: 1900-1978’. The study relies heavily on material gathered from field research as well as primary and secondary sources in several languages. It is a theoretical and empirical study of the interaction of class and gender with a focus on Iran’s secularization and Westernization from the 1950s to the late 1970s. The early twentieth century was the period of ‘veiling’ in both the literal and metaphorical sense. The state and economic structures were relatively weak, whereas the power of religious institutions and the clergy was substantial. In part they extended their power through the control of women’s sexuality. Nevertheless, women at this time began to organize and to articulate their interests, mostly within the context of their own secret societies. Their struggles were enormous, yet they managed to give voice to themselves through lobbying activities, through the journals that they initiated and edited, and through the women’s schools that they slowly began to institute. Some women even wore men’s clothes as a form of disguise, a symbolic veiling of femininity, in order to enable them to attend school, to ride horses, and to organize. For the most part, however, as in early women’s movements in other parts of the world, the women who participated were primarily from the elite and upper classes.

About ten percent of the material for the second period, the period of ‘unveiling,’ is based on Professor Sedghi’s dissertation, but she also uses much new material that few people have tapped. From 1925 to 1979, the state went through tremendous economic growth due to oil, which enabled the state to expand and strengthen its power relative to the clergy. But the stronger the state became, the more empowered it became over women’s activities and organizations, even as the state trumpeted modernization, Westernization, and secularization.

“There is a direct relationship between the strength or the weakness of the state, and women’s autonomy and emancipatory measures,” Professor Sedghi explained.

“Westernization seemed in some sense synonymous with the emancipation of women, because with Westernization women became quite visible in society. The state urged people to take the veil off women’s hair, with the intention that unveiling would become a manifestation of Iran’s newly westernized international image. However, unveiling per se did not mean the emancipation of women.”

“Unveiling was, for one thing, a state attempt to become westernized and modernized, not necessarily an instrument for the benefit and advancement of women and the articulation of their needs and their desires.”

“For another thing, it was an instrument by which the state tried...
Yvette Christiansë is currently a Visiting Scholar at the Institute for Research on Women and Gender and will take up a position as Assistant Professor of African-American literature at Fordham University’s English Department in the fall of this year.

Professor Christiansë was born and raised in South Africa and moved to Australia in the late 1970s when her family chose voluntary exile from the apartheid regime. She graduated from teacher’s college and then from the University of Sydney. Her dissertation, titled ‘Arguments with Apocalypse in the Work of Toni Morrison, Derek Walcott and Leslie Marmon Silko,’ interrogated apocalypse as a trope of dominant representation which slave-descendent and postcolonial writers appropriate and explode.

“From their positions in history, they reveal that ‘an’ apocalypse has taken place, in the hull of a slave ship, in the confrontation with colonialism. They show the apocalyptic rhetoric of the Enlightenment and its latter day tremors to be obfuscating, rather than revelatory; anxious about the excess of Others, rather than ‘benignly’ universalist; and extraordinarily violent, rather than ‘naturally’ utopic. Moreover, each reveals that memory is antithetical to apocalypse and its desire for a single discourse with an assimilationist view of the world.”

“To remember things outside of this vision is to argue for simultaneity, to speak in other tongues and to haunt the walls of utopias from the dystopic shadows of their castaways. This demands of a scholar a consideration of some of the ‘amnesiac’ or veiling devices of colonial and slaving bureaucracy, including the notion of race itself since slavery and colonialism, like apocalypse, stretched the limits of meaning. While Blanchot and Adorno asked if disaster can be written, Morrison, Silko and Walcott demonstrate that there is no option but to try.”

Professor Christiansë has taught in schools in Swaziland—as a teenager teaching at a school which accepted students from across the South African border—and Australia. She has worked as a journalist, a crisis communications consultant, a volunteer counselor, and has edited literary magazines as well as an engineering magazine. Having published extensively in Australia as a poet and prose writer, she is the recipient of numerous awards for her poetry, including Australia’s prestigious Harry Jones Memorial Prize for Poetry.

Her latest manuscript, currently under review at Duke University Press, is titled Castaway. It is a hybrid text, encompassing poetry, history, oral narrative, and myth. It centers on the island of St. Helena, where Napoleon was exiled, and the broader issues of racial displacement and identity.

“This tiny island was important in the maritime slaving empire for a brief critical time. It was a place of multiple exiles, and Castaway writes the petite histoires of those exiles—from home, from language, from freedom, from the future. In fact, my grandmother was born there, one of five or six children to a man who was first or second generation freed slave and a woman supposedly from the Cape Colony and whose status is unknown to us. The inspiration for the book is, in part, a need to counter the larger histories which erase such people.”

Issues central to this book are also at the heart of Professor Christiansë’s scholarly work. Her grandmother’s position as a woman designated second class by racism and who worked as a domestic servant in South Africa, forced upon her the realization that the issues of gender, race and class can never be separate matters—either as dimensions of lived experience, or as theoretical categories.

“In South Africa, apartheid assumed race to be the primary locus of difference and truth. There was an automatic class designation for race. It read skin for class. This is in spite of the fact that the existence of poorer whites was a troubling fact for the minority government which could not afford class divisions amongst its own, and in spite of the fact that there were middle and even so-called upper class ‘non-whites.’ Apartheid thought in those lumpen categories even as it stratified the country into over thirteen racial categories.”

“This kind of pigmentocracy also lived out the legacy of that spurious biology of nineteenth century anatomists which claimed to pass...
bring candidates to campus in October and to complete its search by Christmas. The second search, run in conjunction with the Department of Political Science and chaired by Martha Howell of the Department of History, advertised for a senior scholar with expertise in the field of Women's Studies and American or comparative politics. That committee also hopes to complete its work this semester.

The scholars appointed to these positions will teach half time in their home departments, where they will hold tenure, and half time in the Gender Institute. This arrangement will allow curricular growth and administrative community at the Institute, while continuing to insure that the faculty affiliated with the Institute are leaders in their own disciplines. Updates on these searches will be published in the next issue of Feminist News.

I am also very pleased to announce that Professor Zita Nunes of the Department of English and Comparative Literature has agreed to serve as Director of Undergraduate Studies at the Institute this year (see article on page 1 of this newsletter) while Maggie Sale is on a well-deserved research leave. We are extremely glad to have Professor Nunes with us and to benefit from her considerable expertise in the field of Women’s and Gender Studies. The undergraduates are delighted that she will be directing the senior seminar for our majors in which they prepare their thesis projects.

Finally—we have finished refurbishing our offices and seminar room so that we now have a bit more space and a much more inviting work environment. Drop by 763 Schermerhorn Extension and check out the color scheme! And have a productive semester.

Jean E. Howard

Director, continued from page 1

Nunes, continued from page 1

focused on the problematic role of miscegenation in the formation of Brazilian national identity during the 1920s and 1930s. That dissertation provided the framework for her newly-completed book manuscript, provisionally titled Who is eating whom? Cannibalism and the Production of Whiteness. This book takes up the question of how metaphors of cannibalism and miscegenation map the complex processes of incorporation, exclusion, and resistance that help to form Brazilian national identity in the modernist moment.

A skilled translator as well as critic, Professor Nunes has several other projects in progress. At the request of the prize-winning Brazilian author Marilene Felinto, she is preparing a translation and critical introduction to Felinto’s book of short stories, titled Postcard. She is also at work on Hybrid Nation: Nationalism and Transnationalism in the Americas, a broad-ranging study of concepts of hybridity and miscegenation in a variety of South American and Caribbean contexts including Cuba, Brazil, Peru, Guayana, and Martinique. In this work, Professor Nunes intervenes in theoretical debates about transculturation and the formation of national identity, while examining the impact on personal subjectivities of historical processes of loss and assimilation. Central to all of her work is a focus on the role of women, the maternal body, and women’s “secrets” in the formation of national identities.

For her research in Brazil in 1989, Professor Nunes received both Fulbright and Social Science Research Fellowships and in 1996 she was received The Philip and Ruth Hettlemen Award for teaching. Active on a number of university policy-making bodies, Professor Nunes also finds time to serve as a licensed volunteer advocate in the Crime Victim’s Support Program at St. Luke’s-Roosevelt Hospital where she helps women who have been the victims of domestic abuse or rape. She brings an impressive range of expertise and experiences to her new position at the Gender Institute, and we welcome her with enthusiasm.

Professor Nunes can be reached at 763 Schermerhorn Extension, (854-7090).

Core Courses in Women’s and Gender Studies, Fall Term

W1001—Introduction to Women’s and Gender Studies, Professors Linda Green and Angela Zito
V3116—Feminist Texts I, Professor Elizabeth Castelli
V3117—Feminist Texts II, Professor Kathryn Gravdal
V3112—Colloquium in Feminist Theory, Professor Afsaneh Najmabadi
V3520—Senior Seminar, Professor Zita Nunes
G4000—Genealogies of Feminism, Professors Kathryn Gravdal and Atina Grossmann

For a complete list of affiliated courses offered for the Fall 1997 term, call or write The Institute for Research on Women and Gender, 763 Schermerhorn Extension, 1200 Amsterdam Avenue, Mail Code 5510, Columbia University, New York, New York 10027, telephone 212-854-3277.
Sedghi, continued from page 4

to reclaim power, or emasculate the clergy. There is continuous strife between the state and religion over gender and over the control of women.”

Previously, the clergy had manifested its power in part through control of women’s sexuality in marriage, in law, in motherhood, and in work. When the state became preeminent, one of the first tasks was to supplant its rival, the clergy, in the arena of women’s lives and labor.

Professor Sedghi argues that in the 1930s when the first secular Pahlave monarch, Reza Shah, decreed that no woman could go outside while veiled, he was largely motivated by the above concerns. At the same time, the state also tried to promote women’s organizations, education, and paid labor, thereby mingling the state’s modernizing and westernizing ambitions with repression and authoritarianism. Many women used public baths and would sometimes stay at home for weeks in order to avoid being stopped and forcibly unveiled by agents of the state. Even so, police would conduct surprise searches in order to insure that each house contained unveiled women. Some women supported this program, but most, even those with secularizing tendencies, protested.

During the period of the ‘weak state’ of the 1940s and early 1950s, independent and professional women began their own autonomous activities, claiming their own space. However the succeeding period of the “strong state” of the 1960s and 1970s saw contradictory tendencies among ‘conformist’ and ‘nonconformist’ women.

With the Islamic revolution in 1979, the period of ‘reveiling’ began when the state coerced women to wear the veil once again as a symbol of the newly Islamicized society. Professor Sedghi argues that women have been tremendously active during and since the revolution, especially in writing, editing, filming, and teaching, but all within a limited framework. The state is interested in promoting women in government services, institutions, and agencies, but most of this support is mere facade. For example, while there are now more women in parliament than during the secular period, a woman cannot travel out of the country without a hand-written letter from her husband.

“Women remain divided as either ‘opponents’ or ‘proponents’ of the state, each group with its own objectives and agendas. Depending on their goals, each group exerts pressure on the system, although in different ways and to different degrees.”

“In 1936, you were told you could not go out unless you were unveiled. Today you cannot go to the street unless you are veiled. And they may still knock at your door. It is women who are caught in the intersection where the state and religion meet, where women are used as an instrument of public policy. How women are represented is extremely important for the legitimacy of the state, in international eyes and domestic. If the state identifies itself as an Islamic one, it should have Islamic women.”

“The symbols change, but the tactics, the targets, and the power struggle seem to remain the same. The future challenge comes not from the top, but from women who are defying and subverting the system,” Professor Sedghi concluded.

Christiansë, continued from page 5

through the skin to know what lies within, morally and intellectually. This is the kind of knowing which Foucault draws attention to as aspiring to sever the subject from self-knowledge.

“Being a Colored woman — apartheid’s designation for mixed race status, the ‘mix’ referring to incursions across the space so care-fully but unsuccessfully guarded by the Immorality Act to prevent misce-genation — it was not uncommon to be read as the sign of bestiality or as having a propensity for clandestine sex. This kind of racism incites truancy amongst all ranks, especially its own, and so the monotonously regular encounters with would-be transgressors taught me offense in the most profound sense of the word. As a teenager being asked to live and having to reject such an enormously burdensome stereotype, one was filled with self-doubt, shame, fear. But also anger, rage even.”

Professor Christiansë acknowledges her debt to women who were not always writers, academics or even politicians, but who possessed what Toni Morrison calls ‘discredited knowledge.’ While it was in Australia that she felt free and mature enough to address the nexus between race, gender and class in her writing, she returned to South Africa regularly for family and research reasons. Now in the United States, she still returns and is working on projects in which she revisits the histories of slavery, South Africa and St. Helena.

“Constitutional apartheid may have been eliminated in South Africa, but its legacies will linger and inform people’s consciousness for some time. This needs to be confronted directly.”

“It is an unpalatable thing to think that apartheid — racism — will continue to shape so many lives, including mine, even in its absence because the real challenge which came with its official end is the need to say: now that this ‘thing’ has been officially removed and now that its full ridiculousness and spectral constitution is revealed, how do I define myself when I have defined myself in opposition to it for so long? Have I succeeded in finding another space for myself to exist in which apartheid does not have this founding, fathering role? A very unpalatable legacy to clean up after.”
Feminisms in Egypt

In May of this year Jean Howard, Director of the Institute for Research on Women and Gender, attended a conference hosted by the American University of Cairo. Titled “Cross Cultural Encounters in the Mediterranean,” the conference focused in part on the diverse feminist traditions that have emerged in a country crisscrossed by a variety of cultural and religious traditions. From a series of interviews with conference participants and with other feminist writers, activists, and academics, Professor Howard reports on the complicated but vigorous state of feminism in Egypt.

Cairo has been the principal site in Egypt where, at least since the first part of the twentieth century, feminism has flourished. Colonialism, however, has made the history of that feminist tradition particularly complex. In the twenties and thirties, for example, many Egyptian feminists modeled themselves after the French, even producing a highly successful magazine L’Egyptienne, that featured work—in French—by Arab women. To write in French was seen as a mode of resistance to the British domination of Egyptian life. The magazine flourished for fifteen years, but by 1940 it no longer seemed appropriate to publish the work of Egyptian feminists in anything but Arabic. L’Egyptienne ceased publication.

In contemporary Egypt, questions about the kind of feminism appropriate to the national context continue. While many academic feminists read Western feminist theory, all are quick to point out that it cannot simply be imported wholesale into an Arab context.

“The real danger is that reading Western texts, especially heavily theoretical ones, will simply prove a distraction from the activist work we should be doing. We have problems to solve regarding women’s literacy and reproductive health, for example, that can’t be put off,” one woman remarked.

In certain areas such as the feminist campaign to stop female genital mutilation (so-called female circumcision), Egyptian feminists seem uniformly agreed that any implication of an agenda being set by Western organizations will only make it more difficult to change state and religious policy.

“What’s really effective is having a Muslim mullah say in public that female circumcision is not an Islamic practice,” an experienced activist reported.

“That’s hard to achieve, but it is twenty times more useful than having a Western feminist lecture us about victims’ rights.”

In fact, the most spirited debates among Cairo feminists seem to be over the extent to which Egyptian feminism can be effective if it separates itself from Islam and tries to find a third way between Western and Islamic paradigms. To one feminist novelist the answer was clear. With a knowing allusion to Audre Lorde, she said: “You can’t destroy the master’s house with the master’s tools; and you can’t improve the position of women in Arab societies if you work within the patriarchal assumptions of Islam.” Other women contest this position strongly, arguing that Islam in not inherently more patriarchal than another religion, but provides a set of cultural assumptions and practices that can be modified and can be used to feminist ends.

While there are many feminist activists and novelists in Cairo, academic feminism has not really taken root in the university. Even the American University, more influenced by Western paradigms than many other institutions, is just now proposing a minor in Gender Studies and is far from thinking about a full-fledged Women’s and Gender Studies major. At the moment there are eight undergraduate courses in the entire university that deal with gender issues, and the philosophy department is thinking of abolishing its one offering in that area. When asked why gender studies have such a weak institutional profile, faculty and administration provided a number of explanations. The most important seemed to be the fear of provoking an anti-Western backlash.

“In much of Egyptian society, the word ‘feminism’ conjures up the image of strident, anti-religious, overly materialistic Western women. There is a general worry that families won’t send their daughters, in particular, to a place that would turn them against their culture,” one commentator said.

Yet the students themselves are asking for more courses in this area. It is their activism that has prompted the proposal for an organized minor in Gender Studies and that also prompted the American University to host a regional workshop in May of this year to find out what other universities in Morocco, Lebanon, Palestine, Algeria and other Arab states are doing in regard to setting up Women’s and Gender Studies programs appropriate to and effective in the Arab context. This initiative has been highly applauded by feminist writers and activists who are eager for an academic feminism that will provide another base of support for their work.

“There’s no real protection from the backlash, even in the University, but at least one has a platform there to call the world’s attention to the problems we face. Even in Cairo, which is a pretty cosmopolitan place, women are increasingly feeling the pressure to cover their heads in public and to restrict their movements. If ever we need to preserve and expand our feminist resources, now is the time,” one writer said.
International Women’s Day

International Women’s Day was celebrated against a colorful backdrop of quilts on loan from the Manhattan’s Quilters Guild when the Institute for Research on Women and Gender (IRWAG) hosted a gathering of faculty and friends at Philosophy Hall on 7 March. Professor Jonathan Cole, Provost (center), joined Professor Jean Howard, IRWAG (left) and Professor Elaine Combs-Schilling of the Anthropology Department, at the gathering which was held in Philosophy Hall.

“In the more than ten years since its founding, the Institute has proven that the idea of feminism does not belong to any single department or discipline. Similarly, while International Women’s Day marks both the past and present struggles of women, the ways we choose to address women’s issues has a direct bearing on everyone, men as well as women,” Professor Howard said.

Six members of the Manhattan Quilters Guild — six women and one man — loaned eight quilts for the event. Professor Howard said the Institute was fortunate to receive the Guild’s support and that its work was a reminder that the skill and artistry involved in what is now regarded as socially and artistically valuable art has its foundations in the everyday work of people, mostly women engaged privately and professionally in the making of garments.

Swedish, continued from page 12

Swedish colleague have proposed a change which would equalize gender relations both within the family and on the labor market.

“What we are proposing is that they treat the parental leave as all other forms of welfare policy in Sweden and simply say that instead of a family having fifteen months, each parent has seven and a half months. As with any other such right it shouldn’t be transferable either, even if you choose not to use it.”

Professor Trägårdh sees this as generating two beneficial effects. Within the family the father’s position would be strengthened, offsetting lingering essentialist notions such as that of the ‘nurturing mother’. In the labor market, the law “would make matters gender blind from the point of view of the employers who currently can be statistically certain that women of a certain age will get pregnant and take time off from work, with devastating consequences for women who choose to pursue careers while also having children.”

Professor Trägårdh noted that the reception of his proposal by some feminists indicated that “many women seem to feel that the parental leave is in fact their right, rather than the right of mothers and fathers.” For him, this suggests the need for new research which moves away from a priori assumptions of women’s powerlessness. Professor Trägårdh has called instead for an examination of the powers that Swedish women do have and exercise on a daily basis.

This issue becomes particularly clear in child custody cases. Given the predominance of women in the public sector, most of the social workers on whose advice judges make their custody decisions are women. Coupled with sexist assumptions that mothers are better parents, Professor Trägårdh sees this as prejudicial against the growing number of ‘new fathers’ in modern Sweden. It has helped inspire a budding pan-Scandinavian men’s movement, strongest in Norway but also developing in Sweden during the last few years. This network tries to provide an
African Gender Institute

This is the first in a series of articles dealing with the work of Gender Institutes outside the U.S. and Europe.

Established in 1996 at the University of Cape Town, the African Gender Institute (AGI) is a research and policy development unit whose mission is to further gender equity in Africa.

The initiative for the AGI came in 1993 from Dr. Mamphele Ramphele, the University’s Vice Chancellor who was Director of the Equal Opportunity Research Project (EORP) at the time. Dr. Ramphele saw the need for a supportive intellectual space primarily for African women, but also for women and men who have the potential to influence and change unequal gender-related attitudes and practices. Her model was Harvard's Bunting Institute where she had studied.

Still in its inaugural years, the African Gender Institute is currently focusing on five priority areas, the first of which is the development of integrated strategies for transformative policy research and intervention in gender sensitive issues. The other areas of focus are: an Associate program; an educational program dealing with gender-based violence; the development of gender studies programs; and the development and maintenance of a documentation and information center.

The recently initiated Associate Program will create opportunities for discussion and exchange between African women working at the intersections of research, activism and policy development. Five participants take up their associateships this fall. They are: Dr. Mary Kolawole a senior lecturer in African Women’s Literature and Culture at the Obafemi Awolowo University in Nigeria; Dr. Mansah Prah, a sociologist at Ghana’s Cape Coast University; Ms. Likhapha Mbatha, a Research Officer at the Centre for Applied Legal Studies at the University of Witwatersrand in South Africa; Professor Julie Stewart, Course Leader of the Women’s Law Program in the Department of Private Law at the University of Zimbabwe; and Ms. May Sengendo, from the Department of Women’s Studies at Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda.

Dr. Kolawole, for example, is doing research and original fieldwork on African women’s culture and gender theories. She works with and for NGOs and will be completing a book on African gender myths while at the AGI. Dr. Prah is currently writing a resource book for students in gender-related courses, to be used when women’s studies are fully established in Ghana’s universities and research institutions. Ms. Mbatha’s research is primarily in land reform, particularly that concerning women’s experiences in accessing property in rural areas where customary laws may present barriers to them.

Similarly, Professor Stewart’s current work emphasizes the role of custom in mediating women’s access to, and control over, resources. During her stay at the AGI she will consolidate her prior nine years of research in order to reconceptualize gender rights in Zimbabwe. Ms. Sengendo is directly involved in gender training for policy-makers in Uganda’s government ministries. Her work targets planners, NGOs and agents engaged in rural development. Her current project considers the gender dimensions of markets for non-traditional agricultural crops in Uganda. She is hopeful that her results will be used as a base-line from which to assist rural communities in gaining access to markets.

The other programs centered at the African Gender Institute are also concerned with affecting social policy. The AGI’s gender-based violence and education program focuses on tertiary and secondary education. In this program, the Institute works with current national and regional networks to collate and disseminate educational materials and information about sexual harassment and sexual violence. The Gender Studies program fosters the production of indigenous knowledges relating to gender equity across the continent and attempts to bridge distances between the academy and communities in general.

As the fifth of the AGI’s priority areas, the Documentation and Information Centre links the Institute to intercontinental networks of researchers and institutions. This information and communication system, together with a data base of gender contacts, is a valuable aid to the work of staff, associates, affiliates, institutional partners and visitors. Through this Centre, the AGI is quickly becoming a nexus for researchers, policy makers, analysts, and practitioners engaged in the promotion of gender equity. The Centre has already initiated a pan-African information working group which has established the Gender in Africa Information Network (GAIN).

Amongst its affiliations, the AGI has strong ties with the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) which is a partnership of African women cabinet ministers, university chancellors, and other senior women in policy making. The FAWE launched its South African chapter at the UCT earlier this year.

The AGI also has ties with South African Women in Science and Engineering (SAWISE). In addition to holding joint workshops, the AGI and SAWISE have discussed the latter’s desire to run an attitude survey to understand problems confronting women in science and engineering.

In June this year, the AGI received a grant of $450,000 (R2 million) from the Rockefeller Foundation.

African, continued on page 11
Speaking at the time, Dr. Ramphele said the Foundation’s support would enable the AGI, in partnership with other institutions, to promote intellectual capital development on the African continent.

**Fall Events**

**Advising:**
- **Undergraduates:** Tuesday, September 2, 3-5 and Thursday, September 4, 12-1;
- **Graduates:** Wednesday, August 27, 10-12 and Thursday, August 28, 1:30-3:30.

**September 5**—Undergraduate Reception, 754 Schermerhorn Extension, 4-6

**September 5**—Walking tour hosted by Daniel Hurwitz, Professor of History, UCLA, author of *Stepping Out: Ten Gay and Lesbian Walks in New York*, immediately following undergraduate reception. Meet in 754 Schermerhorn Extension.

**September 10**—Graduate Students Reception, 754 Schermerhorn Extension, 4:30-6:30

**September 12**—Aaron Shurin, 4-6, co-sponsored by The Queer Studies Group, 754 Schermerhorn Extension.

**September 16**—Women and Gender Studies Majors Forum, 7:30 p.m., location to be announced.

**October 17**—“Domestic Violence among South Asian, East Asian, and Arab Immigrant Women: Challenges and Solutions,” Conference co-sponsored with the Social Intervention Group of the School of Social Work, Dag Hammarskjöld Lounge, School of International and Public Affairs, 9-4:30

**October 23**—“Making the Modern Reader: Women and Early Modern Literary Anthologies,” Professor Barbara Benedict, Trinity College, 754 Schermerhorn Extension, 4-6

**October 24-25**—“Feminism and the Academy: Building Bridges to the World Outside,” conference sponsored by the Coalition of Feminist Graduate Students

**November 7**—“Interdisciplinarity and Graduate women’s Studies Programs,” conference sponsored by the Coalition for Graduate Programs in Women’s and Gender Studies in Greater New York.

**December 5**—Senior Thesis Celebration, 1-4, 754 Schermerhorn Extension.

---

**African, continued from page 10**

Speaking at the time, Dr. Ramphele said the Foundation’s support would enable the AGI, in partnership with other institutions, to promote intellectual capital development on the African continent.

**Swedish, continued from page 9**

organized voice to the first generation of men who were brought up as part of the gender equality revolution in the 1970’s, the first one likely to fight for their rights as fathers-as-care-givers. According to Professor Trägårdh, it is especially amidst the heated debates concerning child abuse and purported ‘repressed memories’ that many men feel the necessity of political action to ensure themselves of a fair hearing at a time when they are likely to be labeled as inadequate, even dangerous parents until proven otherwise.

For Professor Trägårdh, Swedish women benefit and suffer from the legacy of Swedish state-feminism. Gender equality has been the result of a general emphasis by the Social Democrats on equality and the financial autonomy of all individuals and classes. Thus class, not gender, has been the key category.

“That’s the great strength of Scandinavia,” Professor Trägårdh said. “Whatever feminism has achieved, it has achieved within the broader context of class and economic issues which in the U.S. have been drowned out by other categories like gender, race, and sexual preferences which are, I would insist still secondary to class.

What has been missing is the kind of bourgeois identity feminism typical of the U.S. Thus where the U.S. has a weak working-class feminism, Sweden has a weak middle-class feminism and fewer role models for female authority in the academic and private sectors. However, now that gender seems to be establishing itself as a legitimate—if subordinated—category of analysis, and with men actually engaging and demanding rights, men and women are finally talking about the same things. There is a long way to go, but in many ways I think there is more room for optimism than in the United States.”
Swedish Gender Politics

Within the last decade and a half increasing awareness of the historical and cultural specificity of different forms of feminism has led to more nuanced theoretical and political projects. Lars Trägårdh, Assistant Professor of Modern European History at Barnard, has long studied these issues in Sweden, and his conclusions reveal some key differences between the Swedish and American experiences.

“The main emphasis should still be on the fact that the Swedish welfare state has liberated women to an incredible extent,” Professor Trägårdh said.

Nonetheless, key differences between men and women’s behavior remain. Thus women choose jobs within the public sector—nursing, teaching, the care-giving professions—while men dominate in the private sector where pay is higher, jobs more prestigious, career opportunities better. Furthermore, while the state has freed all individuals from traditional chores by providing for the care of children and the elderly, women still do much more of the residual work. In theory, that shouldn’t have to be the case; in practice it is. Indeed, according to Professor Trägårdh, the persistence of such differences in Sweden is hard to grasp in terms of traditional feminist categories.

“It is becoming difficult to make the argument that there is discrimination against women because it’s been such a long time now that the state and the media have actively promoted equality.”

For Professor Trägårdh, the experience of Sweden’s parental leave insurance a good place to look for new explanations for the lingering differences between men and women. By law, parents of newborns are provided with a fifteen months’ paid leave at 80% of the salary. While this is intended as a gender-blind benefit, it is usually taken by the mother. An addendum to the law, now almost four years old, has stipulated that the parent not claiming the majority of the leave, typically the father, must take at least one month. While the short-term positive effect of this has been that men have been forced to participate more in the family, Professor Trägårdh notes that the ostensibly progressive one-month provision has actually institutionalized a de facto gender difference. To address this problem, he and a

Swedish, continued on page 9