Conference Report: Intimacy, Postcolonialism, Postsecularism

IRWaG's annual conference held this April was titled "Intimacy, Postcolonialism, Postsecularism." Organized by Professor Povinelli for IRWaG and co-sponsored by the Center for the Study of Law and Culture, the Middle East Institute, and the Institute for Social and Economic Research and Policy, it examined diverse intersections between forms of love and forms of governance, and offered critiques of the governmentality typically associated with secularism and colonialism.

The opening event of the conference was a keynote address to a packed hall by Professor of Film James Schamus, who teaches at Columbia’s School of the Arts in addition to being president of Focus Features. Professor Lila Abu-Lughod noted in her introduction that Schamus’ position straddling the worlds of independent film and academia gave him a wonderful vantage from which to bring high theory and popular culture together.

Schamus began his talk on the film Munich with reflections on the central concepts of the conference. The concern with intimacy, he proposed, pointed to a dream of knowing the self in relation to ethics and to structures of domination. The postsecular and the postcolonial marked categories ambiguously different from that which they were “post,” that required a look at contemporary history. The film Munich, to which he now turned, was an example of how these concepts intersected in the cinematic reconstruction of an historical event. Schamus read the film’s staging of the debate in Zionism about diaspora, home, and national home (a long time concern of director Steven Spielberg) through the lens of the postcolonial, interrogated its presentation of Judaism as a set of ethical knowledge practices as postsecular, and used the concept of intimacy to examine the construction of national heroism and masculinity in the narrative of the Israeli revenge mission. He noted as well the film’s complex presentation of masculinity, reflecting scriptwriter Tony Kushner’s quest for an alternative to Aryan machismo. Schamus concluded that Munich had done more to question heteronormative masculinity than the celebrated film that he had produced, Brokeback Mountain.

The main conference day was divided into three panels and a concluding roundtable discussion. The audience consisted of Columbia faculty and graduate students but also feminist scholars from NYU, CUNY, and Rutgers. A series of films touching on the conference themes had been screened previously.

The morning panel featured Tricia Rose of UC Santa Cruz, Eric Fassin of the École Normale Supérieure, and Indrani Chatterjee of Rutgers University. Rose focused on the question of intimate justice in African-American cultural politics. Conference, continued on page 12
Queer Past, Queer Futures

On March 29, IRWaG hosted a special panel on Cuban-American poet Lourdes Casal, organized by Professor Frances Negrón-Muntaner of the Department of English and Comparative Literature and the Center for Study of Race and Ethnicity. The panel discussed a collaborative essay written by Professor Negrón-Muntaner and Professor Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel of the University of Pennsylvania to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of Casal's celebrated poem For Ana Veldford. The other participants on the panel were Casal's muse Anna Veltfort and NYU Professor of Comparative Literature Ana Maria Dopenco.

Professor Martínez-San Miguel began by recounting how the idea for the panel was sparked when Professor Negrón-Muntaner taught the poem in a class at Columbia, and a student happened to ask who Ana Veldford was. Both she and Professor Martínez-San Miguel, who also taught the poem, realized they had no answer. First published in the U.S. based journal Areíto, the poem itself was famous: it is recited in a Cuban film, included in compilations, and a line from it is used as the title of a collection of short stories. Yet there had been no discussion on its title. It is particularly remembered for its last five lines, which offer a critique of the binary identity constructions of being Cuban and foreign.

Asking far and wide about the poet's muse's identity, Negrón-Muntaner and Martínez-San Miguel surmised that she was a close friend or possibly a lover of Casal. Eventually they found that Veltfort lived right in New York, where she worked as a graphic designer and illustrator. Her German mother and American stepfather had immigrated to Cuba in 1962, the same year in which Casal's Cuban family left the island for the United States. They began to conduct interviews with Veltfort as part of their research to explore the sexual politics of Casal's text. In the essay that they co-authored, Negrón-Muntaner and Martínez-San Miguel concluded that Casal had recognized an affinity with Veltfort through their different experiences of displacement and exile. Veltfort was "a gringa who spoke like a cubana," and Casal was "a cubana who could speak like a gringa." When their lives intersected in New York, they would speak of being foreigners virtually everywhere.

Being lesbians alienated them further from the Cuban revolution with which both were concerned, even if Casal suppressed this part of herself to have a public political role. When Anna was a student at the University of Havana in 1967, she was verbally and physically attacked for being a lesbian. Eventually she left for New York in 1972. The homophobic aspects of revolutionary ideology generally targeted gay men. They were included among the "pederasts, prostitutes and pimps" rounded up in forced labor camps together with religious people who refused military service. Their status as criminalized subjects was inscribed in law and their employment prospects limited. Meanwhile, lesbianism was invisible to the revolutionary state, in part...
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RWaG is excited to introduce to
the community a new colleague in
the Department of Sociomedical
Sciences at the Mailman School of
Public Health. Professor Jennifer
Hirsch came in 2004 from Emory
University. Her research on gender
and public health focuses on love,
sexuality, and marriage in Mexico.

"I entered into public health
through an interest in gender," says
Associate Professor Hirsch, who
studied history and women's studies
in college. Her cross-disciplinary
interests led her to fieldwork on
sexuality in Mexico. "Along the way, I
became interested more broadly in
cultural factors shaping repro-
duction," Professor Hirsch relates. "I
realized that the aggressive sexual
jokes I heard in rural Mexico, for
instance, were all about culture,
power, and colonization." At the
same time, she grew interested in
the role of the state in mandating sex
education and public health
initiatives. She pursued these
questions during graduate studies in
the joint program in Population
Dynamics and Anthropology at Johns
Hopkins University.

"A whole series of anthropology
and demography programs were
founded at this time, in the early
nineties," Professor Hirsch relates.
The time was clearly ripe for a
more cultural analysis of
demography, and it was an exciting
time to be in this field." Her
transnational field site of Mexico and
Mexican migrants in the United
States was also at an
interesting phase. Due to the
Atlanta Olympics, the city
was seeing a large influx of
Mexican migrant laborers.
"There was a lot of talk
about transnationalism, but
no one had studied these
migrants in the southeastern
US," Professor Hirsch notes.
"I was in Atlanta at the time
since my husband worked at
the Center for Disease
Control. I started studying
Mexican women migrants, who were
generally in Atlanta with their
husbands. Then I did fieldwork with
their sisters and sisters-in-law in
Jalisco. The husbands of some of
these women were living in the U.S.
and others in Mexico. I started out
with a clear focus on examining
the different social contexts
produced by migration, but
found that both men and
women were actually more
involved in negotiating
ideologies of gender through
their views on marriage,
particularly with the change
of generations. I have written
about ideologies of
companionate marriage and
love. The discipline of public
health needs to encounter
these ideas more."

After publishing her first
book, A Courtship After
Marriage: Sexuality and Love
in Mexican Transnational
Families, and co-editing a
forthcoming volume titled
Modern Loves: The Anthropology of
Romantic Courtship and
Companionate Marriage, Professor
Hirsch embarked on a new
 collaborative project on married
women and HIV infection, funded by
the National Institute of Health. Her
study on companionate marriage and
HIV in Mexico complements those of
colleagues examining similar
phenomena in Nigeria, Uganda,
Vietnam and Papua New Guinea.
Three of these countries (Nigeria,
Uganda, and Vietnam) are major
recipients of funding for HIV
treatment and prevention under the
US President's Emergency Fund for
AIDS Relief (PEPFAR).

"In a shift to a companionate
ideology of marriage, women became even less
willing to acknowledge that their husbands
had other partners..."
Last year, the Department of French welcomed Elisabeth Ladenson back to Columbia. Ladenson, who completed her PhD in the department in 1994, returns as an Associate Professor after teaching for several years at the University of Virginia. At Columbia, she is teaching courses in nineteenth century French literature with a particular focus on love, sex and gender.

Professor Ladenson recalls that it was while teaching French at Columbia that her research interest in male representations of lesbianism was first sparked. In a story she tells in her introduction to a special issue of GLQ, she relates that while teaching “if” clauses in language classes, she often assigned the essay topic “If I were a man” or “If I were a woman.” The resulting essays on gender were amusing as well as revealing. A recurring theme in essays by male students was an autoerotic fantasy about having a woman’s breasts. The echoes between this fantasy and “the male relation to lesbianism à la Penthouse” intrigued Professor Ladenson. She noted a marked difference between this phenomenon and male identification with fictional women. Professor Ladenson eventually wrote her dissertation on the theme in Marcel Proust’s Remembrance of Times Past of a male narrator’s fascination with same-sex “love letters between mother and daughter.” She read this theme against the grain. Instead of treating lesbianism as a trope for displacing male homosexuality, she looked at how lesbian characters figured for these men an unknowable kind of femininity.

Professor Ladenson’s path to the French department at Columbia began when she was an English major at the University of Pennsylvania and “wandered into French” by way of a junior year abroad in Paris. “It seemed like the English department only studied Chaucer and Milton, or Hemingway and Fitzgerald,” she recalls, “while in the French department it was the moment of French theory. Freud, Foucault and Benjamin were in the air, as was film theory.” The classics of nineteenth-century literature were given inventive new readings. Professor Ladenson came to graduate school at Columbia with the intention of writing a dissertation in comparative literature and women’s studies. As the literature department then included Nancy Miller and Carolyn Heilbrun, it seemed the ideal place to combine these interests. Immersing herself in French literature in preparation for dissertation research, however, she grew entirely consumed by it.

The literary displacements and figurations of gender remained a central question in her eventual research on Proust. Professor Ladenson was intrigued by a neglected aspect of Proust’s Remembrance—the fact that the narrator’s grandmother carried a volume of Madame de Sévigné’s lesbian love letters, and quoted from these in her own letters to her daughter. Ladenson noted that since theory exploded onto the literary scene, “overtly heterosexual works have been re-read for their lesbian sub-plots” and authors “outed.” But the question of lesbianism in male-authored texts was never given academic attention. It was instead belittled as “a mythology to be debunked and superseded rather than examined.” Ladenson’s first book, Proust’s Lesbianism traced the different forms that lesbian representation took in Proust’s works, focusing on the way it traced a distinctively maternal figure in Remembrance, split between the narrator’s mother and grandmother. The suggestion in Proust’s earlier works of a “symmetry between Sodom and Gomorrah,” or male and female-identified homosexuality, gave way to distinctive differences. Ladenson discovered. Analyzing the trope of lesbianism in his works offered a framework in which to examine the more contemporary figure of “an eternally desirable, usually not quite attainable lesbian.” This was the fictional lesbian Ladenson had encountered in popular culture, and found echoed in student essays by men who imagined having a woman’s body.

Her research on Proust has led Professor Ladenson to teach a variety of classes focusing on, and extending beyond, nineteenth-century French literature. These include courses on “Love, Sex and Gender” and “Love in French Culture,” and fall semester courses on nineteenth-century French realism: “The Invention of the Real” and “The Nineteenth-Century French Mind.” Her courses have been enthusiastically oversubscribed.

“One class that I particularly look forward to teaching at Columbia is Literature Humanities,” Professor Ladenson, continued on page 10.
Female Friendships

On April 17, the second Feminist Interventions lecture of the spring semester, titled “Just Reading: Female Friendship and the Marriage Plot,” was given by Associate Professor of English, Sharon Marcus. IRWaG director Lila Abu-Lughod introduced Professor Marcus as a Victorianist who specializes in the nineteenth-century British and French novel. She gratefully noted that Professor Marcus was also Director of Graduate Studies at IRWaG. Her first book was Apartment Stories: City and Home in 19th Century Paris and London, and her forthcoming book is titled Between Women: Friendship, Desire and Marriage in Victorian England.

As Professor Marcus had severe laryngitis, her paper was read by Ellis Avery. The paper introduced her current book project as an intervention into the critical tradition of reading the Victorian novel as a form identified with heterosexuality and the marriage plot. Since many plots end in marriage and examples of adultery signify the breakdown of social order, Victorian novels have generally been understood to construct marriage as the only viable outlet for women’s erotic energies. Professor Marcus’ book analyzes friendship, desire and marriage in Victorian literature and in society at large, giving each aspect of women’s lives its due. Her goal in this talk was a “just reading” of novels that would give “a more accurate, complex account” of the surface of the texts themselves, rather than plumbing hidden depths to trace the repression of homoeroticism and other exclusions that a symptomatic reading might seek to uncover.

Noting that almost every Victorian novel supplied its heroine with a close female friend, Professor Marcus examined the ways in which female friendship was as much a component of normative femininity as courtship. Since many novels presented “the two currents of affiliation as interdependent,” and used friendship to advance the courtship, she reads female friendship as “the matrix of the marriage plot.”

Friendship “generates plot but is not the main subject of plot movement.” Because of its stability, female friendship is thus a source of narrative strength, one that makes things happen without itself undergoing drastic change.

In this paper, Professor Marcus focused on “the plot of female amity,” in which female friendship and the marriage plot operate in tandem. She offered Charles Dickens’ David Copperfield as an example of this plot, and Charlotte Bronte’s Villette as an exception that proved the general rule. In the former example, friendship offered a model for companionate marriage and was associated with altruistic bonds between women. With an emerging model of liberal personhood in capitalist democracy tending toward the individualistic, female friendship exemplified an alternative model for how men and women could resolve their differences.

The plot of remarriage in David Copperfield, where the eponymous protagonist marries first out of infatuation and next after a deep friendship, illustrated the multiple narrative uses of friendship in the Victorian novel. David’s first marriage to Dora is helped by her friendship with Agnes, a womanly counterpart to Dora’s feckless young girl. Both husband and wife rely upon Agnes’ boundless sympathy. This friendship plot not only helps the marriage, but also produces another marriage—that of David to Agnes upon Dora’s death. In fact, Professor Marcus noted, “Dora wills David to Agnes on her deathbed.” The connection between marriage and friendship is thus sealed. Moreover, she argued, the second marriage might also be read as a version of female friendship.

David is urged to be like a girl at several instances in the story of his childhood, and the companionate marriage that concludes his story realizes a feminized ideal of amity. “Sexual difference and sexual interchangeability” coexist, Professor Marcus noted, in this definition of companionate marriage.

The heroine of Charlotte Bronte’s Villette, meanwhile, is an exception within the normative “altruistic gift economy” of female friendship in the Victorian novel. Lucy Snowe’s queerness is on display when she performs in a school play cross-dressed as a man and flirting with another woman. However, Professor Marcus argued, her queerness inheres less in that gender inversion and more in her anomalous refusal of female friendship. Consistently rebuffing women and competing with them, Lucy Snowe contradicts the self-effacing model for married and marriageable Victorian females. This was likely a reason for the negative reception of her character when the novel was first published, Professor Marcus surmised.

Professor Marcus made brave use of her ailing voice to answer a series of questions from a large and lively audience after the paper had been read.
International Visitors “Doing Gender”

On February 27, IRWaG hosted the first spring semester Feminist Interventions, with a complementary double-bill by international visiting faculty. Eleni Varikas, a visiting scholar at the Program in Hellenic Studies, presented a paper titled “The Secret Life of Concepts: Gender Experience, Disidentification, Self-Definition,” and renée hoogland, visiting scholar at IRWaG and the Department of English and Comparative Literature, spoke on “Affective Un/Doing: Bodies, Art and De/Constructions of Gender.”

IRWaG director Professor Lila Abu-Lughod introduced the speakers. Professor Varikas, a political scientist teaching at the University of Paris VIII, has published many books in French and Greek. She is currently completing a book on the pariah as a figure of political modernity. Professor hoogland teaches Cultural, Sexuality, and American Studies at Radboud University in the Netherlands. Her books include Elizabeth Bowen: A Reputation in Writing and Lesbian Configurations. Her recent research explores the use of fantasy in processes of embodiment, though she has broader interests in the intertwining of ethics and aesthetics.

Varikas sketched the conflicts produced by definitions of gender in Europe, particularly France, with its recent controversies over same-sex civil unions and the question of the Islamic headscarf. The legal battles over the question of who qualified as a French woman, Varikas argued, revealed “no place for self-definition, self-determination and plurality.” Instead the power to define ‘man’ and ‘woman’ engendered concepts that demanded identity to their objects and entailed “the repression of elements not proper to the object.” Alluding to Judith Butler’s notion of the injunctive power of the address, for instance the act of identifying a baby by saying “It’s a girl!” Varikas suggested it would be fruitful to explore how identity is administered both positively, as in affirmative action programs, and restrictively, as in immigration and asylum regulations.

With regard to gender concepts, Varikas contended that it was crucial to “trace how what is has become,” and thus to reverse the amnesia that obscures the role of power in the crystallization of concepts. She proposed paying particular attention to “what does not fit into the concept.” Varikas remarked, in closing, that literature and narrative were rich materials in which to trace the heterogeneity of experience and should be used as resources by social scientists.

Hoogland began her talk by foregrounding a theme that ran through her previous research on Anglo-Irish poet Elizabeth Bowen as well as her current work on lesbian sexuality, namely the question of “fictional screens onto which factual desires and emotions can be projected.” Leaving aside the question of rewriting concepts, hoogland concentrated on how art and literature might be used to imagine subversive practices by reading against the grain. She invoked Marilyn Fry’s dramatistic image of lesbian audiences focusing on female characters in the back of a stage as an example of such reading practices, and asked what could provide “the motivating force of this unruly project of un/becoming.” Fry forged a link between the ontological event of becoming on the one hand, and play-acting, on the other. hoogland sought to extend this idea to art and literature in general, as sources of “alternative modes of being and becoming.”

hoogland noted that there is abundant evidence to suggest that literature is accorded such a transformative role, whether in the anxiety of censors or the commonplace assertion that a book changed someone’s life. hoogland gave the example of sexual minorities who claimed to have learned what they were through certain texts, using “a rift or fissure in the text to embody themselves.” The text might mediate the past of the reader and make it legible, or provide significant others against which to constitute the self. Aesthetic processes played such an important role in becoming, she proposed in conclusion, because “an unreal act can gather around it more emotion than a real act.”

International Visitors “Doing Gender”

IRWaG offers Ph.D. students the opportunity to earn a certificate in women’s studies.

Professors, please tell your students about it. Students, please contact the Director of Graduate Studies, Sharon Marcus, sm2247@columbia.edu, for more information.
On March 8, Brown University president Ruth Simmons delivered the second Columbia University Presidential Lecture of the academic year. Her talk titled Diversity in Higher Education: What Does It Mean? was sponsored by the university-wide diversity initiative headed by Vice Provost Jean Howard and was funded by the Mellon Foundation. Addressing a large audience in the rotunda of Low Library, Dr. Simmons was introduced by Columbia president Lee C. Bollinger and engaged after her talk in a lively question-and-answer session.

Prior to joining Brown University, where she became the first African-American to lead an Ivy League institution, Dr. Simmons was president of Smith College and taught French literature at Spelman College, Princeton University, and the University of Southern California. At Brown, she is also Professor of Comparative Literature and Africana Studies.

Introducing Dr. Simmons as "one of the most admired and successful leaders in higher education today," Bollinger noted that her many achievements as university president included diversity efforts, increased financial support for students, and an initiative for shared governance at Brown. She also was credited for launching the first engineering program at a women’s college at Smith.

Dr. Simmons began by thanking Columbia, tongue-in-cheek, for having lost to Brown at a recent football game, thereby granting her home institution the Ivy League cup for the very first time. Turning next to the academic concerns of Ivy League institutions, she described the widely-espoused goal of diversity in higher education since the 1960s as "a moving target."

"Four decades after affirmative action, the question of diversity still rages," she noted, "if not in a legal sense, then certainly in an ethical sense." In today’s academic world, diversity had to be approached, Dr. Simmons continued, in terms of "conceptual framework, community expectations, ethical and legal parameters of inclusion, implemented and managed on a quotidian basis." The demands of students with regard to diversity had changed considerably since the civil rights era.

Dr. Simmons offered examples from her experience at Brown. When she convened an early meeting on diversity in 2002, it was already clear that there was "no mythical gold standard for diversity." Rather, particular goals had to be affirmed by particular communities. Those attending offered opinions on criteria for inclusion ranging from race to various forms of disadvantage. Some raised the question of ethnic groups classified as white. Dr. Simmons mentioned that she had recently created a special program for conservatives on campus, as they perceived a need for one. Suggesting that these examples indicated "how robust the concept of diversity is," she proposed that "inclusion rather than merely equality was the hallmark of today’s civil society.

The focus of Dr. Simmons’ efforts at making diversity a structural part of the university has been on fostering "representative rather than token participation." Approaching diversity as inclusiveness of those who actually make up a community as well as the modes of inquiry upheld in it, Dr. Simmons contrasted the "forward-looking approach" of her vision of diversity with the narrower goals of affirmative action that focused on gaining numerical parity between groups. While she is a supporter of affirmative action, Dr. Simmons suggested that it was not sufficient as a policy for preserving a heterogenous environment. "One’s cultural heritage is but one of a number of valuable assets," she emphasized. "There should also be a commitment to learn something of what other cultures offer, and how to interact respectfully with their members—it is a duty of responsible citizenship."

Universities have a special responsibility to...
IRWaG’s majors presented findings from their senior theses in a well-attended event on April 27. Professor Lila Abu-Lughod introduced this favorite IRWaG end of year event by commending the seniors on the completion of their year’s work and acknowledging the help of their advisors and writing tutor, Lisa Uperesa.

The first presentation by Barret Bell, titled Where Humor Meets Critique: The Success, Failure and Function of Satire in Spike Lee’s ‘Bamboozled’, examined the formation of raced and gendered stereotypes through satire in Spike Lee’s film. The film itself focuses on the idea of satire in its story of a black television writer who decides to create a tongue-in-cheek modern-day minstrel show when asked to write a script about African-Americans that is “dope and fresh” and not set in the middle classes. The attempt at satire of racial stereotypes eventually loses out to social and economic forces that reaffirm these. Barret’s thesis is composed of a theoretical study of satire, a reading of Bamboozled which shows how it succeeds in balancing humor with critique, and an argument that the film uncritically employs gender stereotypes in order to enable race and class critique. Barret noted the “barrage of racist imagery” deployed critically in the film and its use of violence to sustain a critique despite its hilarity. She concluded, however, that there was a delicate line between deconstructing stereotypes and propagating them. Barret, who is from Louisville, KY, hopes to start her own business after she graduates. She will also look into graduate school in comparative literature.

Next, Eva Colen presented her thesis The Herstory of the Julio-Claudian Dynasty: A Look at the Feminine in Tacitus’ ‘Annals.’ A joint women’s studies and classics major, Colen studied the Annals of historian Tacitus, which attribute the decline of the Roman empire to the actions of women. Observing close ties between historical and literary genres, she analyzed the style, form, and content of the text in reading the historian’s moralistic construction of gender. She sketched a binary Roman concept of gender and noted the particular role of virtue within this concept. As Colen explored the text’s preoccupation with women and the feminine, she noted that separate spheres were assigned to men and women’s actions and that the improper presence of women in the public sphere was treated by the historian as the symptom and cause of civilizational decline. She concluded that this ancient conception of women in the public sphere resonated with contemporary ideas. Eva is from Norfolk, Virginia. After graduating, she will work for Teach for America in Camden, New Jersey.

Kat Lewis wrote his thesis on the first post-Stonewall gay organization, Multi-Issue Organizing in the New York Gay Liberation Front, 1969-71. He traced the transition from a few years of post-Stonewall radicalism to the dominant single-issue moderate politics of American gay activism. The GLF was best understood as part of a broader left rather than an outgrowth of Stonewall, he observed. It was fundamentally multi-issue in nature and maintained ties with movements of black people, women, youth, students and third world people. Kat used archival sources to locate the platform of the New York GLF within its broader vision of revolutionary change, including its alliance with the Black Panthers. Kat noted the limits of the organization in its conception as middle-class and white, and traced the collapse of the group as gay men as well as radical lesbians left. However, Kat argued that its internal conflicts opened up discursive space for new groups. The GLF was both changed by and changed the New Left, and its aftermath affirmed the significance of radical queer activism in imagining an intersectional gay subject. Kat is from Providence, Rhode Island. His plans for the future include LBGT activism and graduate school.

Stephanie Schwartz’s thesis I Can’t Find Any Halal Food in the Supermarket: Veiling, the War on Terror, and the Everyday Experiences of Muslim American and Arab American Women took its cue from recent heated debates on
Gender Breakfast Plans Graduate Workshop

By Julie Golia and Rachel Tamar Van

Gender Breakfast, a monthly breakfast series designed to bring together graduate students and faculty to discuss timely topics in gender and feminist studies, attracted a broad cross-school following in its second successful year at IRWaG.

Fall semester’s breakfasts featured faculty who directly or indirectly addressed questions of feminist activism and scholarship. In this spirit, Alice Kessler-Harris, R. Gordon Hoxie Professor of American History, kicked off in September with a talk on “Feminist Scholarship, Feminist Activism.” She drew on her own experiences to highlight the political nature of feminist studies and led a lively discussion about how a new generation of scholars should approach their work. In October, Neguin Yavari, Assistant Professor in the Religion Department, spoke on “Islam, Feminism, and Islamic Feminism.” A diverse group of graduate students and faculty attended and debated issues of identity politics. Finally, in November, Ariela Dubler, Associate Professor in the Columbia Law School, presented her recent research in “Immoral Purposes: Marriage & the Genus of Illicit Sex.” Professor Dubler and attendees discussed the ways in which marriage has served as a socio-legal prism through which courts have defined sexual boundaries.

The Gender Breakfasts during the spring semester continued with cutting-edge speakers and lively discussion. Barnard Assistant Professor of History Anupama Rao joined us in February to speak on “The Politics of Personhood: Caste and Gender in Late Colonial India,” a talk drawn from her forthcoming book, The Caste Question. Professor Rao encouraged attendees to rethink debates over empire, sexuality, masculinity, and family in a comparative perspective. In March, Marianne Hirsch, Professor of English and Comparative Literature and Women’s and Gender Studies, joined us for an informative talk entitled “The Essay as Feminist Form: Reflections from the Field.” Professor Hirsch emphasized the importance of the article, more so than the monograph, in building the canon of Gender Studies, and she shared her experiences as a writer and as editor of the PMLA. Finally, in our last talk of the semester, Sharon Marcus, Associate Professor of English and Comparative Literature and DGS at IRWAG, talked on “A Tale of Two Feminisms.” In one of the most interactive breakfasts of the school year, Professor Marcus encouraged participants to discuss new ways of defining feminism and its relationship to our work and lives.

In addition to hosting the stimulating and supportive faculty speakers, Gender Breakfast participants also initiated student-led workshops. In fall 2005, a number of Gender Breakfast regulars met to revise and update the reading list for the IRWAG Graduate Certificate in Feminist Studies. In February 2006, doctoral candidate Rosemary Hicks, of the Department of Religion, presented a draft of a conference paper entitled, “An Analysis of Agency and the Feminist-Fundamentalist Face-Off,” which she later delivered at a major conference at Columbia. In April, Jenny Higgins, a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at Columbia’s HIV Center for Clinical and Behavioral Studies, shared excerpts from her upcoming book. Higgins examined the absence of representations of women’s sexual enjoyment and pleasure from public health discourse, particularly in the reproductive sciences of family planning, demography, and HIV and sexual health.

In May, Gender Breakfast regulars gathered to plan out the 2006–07 year. We began planning for our first day-long interdisciplinary conference, to take place in early Spring 2007. We hope that the conference will engage the active interdisciplinary feminist community at Columbia. The conference will feature two to three panels of graduate students who want to workshop their research, along with faculty chairs and discussants. Papers will be distributed ahead of time so that participants and attendees can participate actively in discussions. Anyone interested in helping to plan the conference should contact us at the following emails: Julie Golia [jag2104@columbia.edu], Rachel Tamar Van [rtv2101@columbia.edu], or Ariel Rubin [ajr2112@columbia.edu].
Photographing HIV in India

On April 4, IRWaG co-sponsored with the Center for Comparative Literature and Society a presentation by photographer Sunil Gupta, titled "Imagining Childhood: Living with HIV in Delhi." Associate Director of CCLS Rosalind Morris introduced Mr. Gupta as an artist whose interventions into critical discourse in the art world were founded on "a courageous interrogation of the status of being with HIV."

Mr. Gupta began by talking about his relationship to India. Born and raised in Delhi, he immigrated with his family to Canada when he was fifteen. Later his studies took him to New York and London, where he decided to settle. "My childhood disappeared when I left India," he recounted. "Nobody in Canada was interested in it." This personal history impelled him to develop art projects on tensions between conventional images of Indian and Western identities. Later he began to photograph gay Indian men. He presented slides from each of these photo projects.

Mr. Gupta began his presentation on the invisibility of Indians with HIV by showing a short film he had made on his own experience of being with HIV in India, where he has now returned to live. He filmed a train journey in which archetypal rural scenery and popular Hindi film music were juxtaposed with images of himself inside the train, covered with the tubes and patches for his medicine. Here was a visible Indian face of HIV in the public sphere.

His most recent project, meanwhile, is on the meaning of childhood for a particular group of Indian children with HIV growing up in the Naz Care Home in Delhi. Exhibited spring 2006 at the College of Staten Island, these photographs focus on the everyday lives of these children. Gupta said that he had tried not to make either "victim pictures" or "reportage pictures." The children went to local schools and played in local playgrounds. They had not been told about their condition for fear that it might alienate their playmates. Mr. Gupta hopes to continue documenting their lives as they grow up and realize what the drugs they take every day are for.

Another section of Mr. Gupta’s presentation explored the discourse on HIV in India, formed in conjunction with international funding networks. He noted the pitfalls of constructing a category of Indian gay men according to foreign social concepts, on the one hand, and of imagining a blanket demographic of Indians with HIV as working-class and poor citizens, on the other. The development model was ultimately inadequate, he argued, to imagining the Indian face of HIV.

Mr. Gupta’s next project is about sexuality in childhood. "The idea of a gay man having a childhood is my goal," he elaborated. Meanwhile, he has also begun to teach elementary school children in Delhi. He has stopped working as a media photographer so that he can devote himself to his long-term photographic projects.

Ladenson, continued from page 4

Ladenson remarks, "I was offered the chance to do so as a graduate student and never took it. The University of Virginia had a lecture version of the introduction to comparative literature, but I am very keen to teach the seminar version at Columbia."

Professor Ladenson’s latest research has resulted in a book manuscript titled Dirt for Art’s Sake: Literature, Sex and Obscenity 1857-1966. She examines literary censorship trials in France, England and the United States in the period under consideration, asking how a work viewed as obscene could become a classic. The books brought to trial included Madame Bovary, Ulysses, Flower of Evil, Lolita and The Well of Loneliness. The book will be published this coming fall by Cornell University Press.
The ISERP-funded workshop *Gender and the Global Locations of Liberalism*, run by Professors Anupama Rao and Lila Abu-Lughod, continued to address questions of gender, rights regimes and cultural difference in the spring semester. A varied group of speakers approached the construction and mobilization of gender in neo-liberal global systems of human rights and economic development.

The workshop’s opening speaker, anthropologist Chris Walley of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, examined discourses of women’s rights that emerged in the interaction between a Scandinavian NGO and the Tanzanian women’s organization which it funded. Asking if the category of local or alternative feminism ran the risk of essentializing local groups, Walley examined tensions in the relationships between women in the project as they sought mutually to define concepts like gender and rights.

Walley argued for a detailed ethnographic consideration of how various concepts of rights were mobilized and adapted to fit new models of universal human rights. These concepts were as polyvalent as symbols in traditional anthropology, she suggested, and offered a rich complement to studies of neoliberal governmentality.

A troubling development in what might be called the abuse of human rights discourse was explored by Australian historian Therese Taylor of Charles Sturt University. She is investigating the production and circulation of “fake” memoirs about honor crimes in the Middle East. Her paper was on a particular “memoir” called *Burned Alive*. This paper offered an example of the dangers of the commercialization and circulation of human rights discourse, especially in relation to gender issues.

GGLL was also fortunate this year to have a presentation by the prominent political economist Isabella Bakker, of York University, Canada, whose discussion of neo-liberal economic policies opened up a crucial, if under-explored, horizon of gender inequity. Bakker translated debates about globalization and economics for a lay audience, by describing debates about gender budgeting and other measures of human development.

The GGLL workshop plans in the upcoming academic year to vary the format by inviting some Columbia faculty to present their work but also by organizing public events that bring together academics and filmmakers working on similar themes of gender and rights in global perspective.
Beginning her talk with reference to the controversy over the Duke University Lacrosse team's alleged rape of a black female stripper, Rose noted the broader difficulty of communicating race simultaneously with gender in black feminism. In a reading of the play *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry, she elaborated on the theme of intimate justice in private and public spaces. Respondent Professor Alice Kessler-Harris challenged some of her interpretations and commented that the play used a domestic drama to comment on larger public issues. How could such intimate politics become a force for social change? Fassin's paper investigated the idea of sexual democracy in France as it was now being used to define a basic Frenchness for immigrants. This version of nationalist discourse emphasized sex equality rather than class or race equality, Fassin noted. He argued that it was transforming French political discourse, which had conventionally excluded the private spheres to which both sexuality and religious practice were assigned. The respondent, Professor Victoria de Grazia, pointed out the waning conceptual utility of public and private spheres and suggested intimacy could instead account for sexualized conceptions of otherness. In the final paper of the session, Professor Indrani Chatterjee recounted her search for an “effective history of affect” in nineteenth century India in vernacular literature. She was surprised to find a reinvention of medieval and classical economies of manners in letters from slave soldiers who claimed affiliation to the families of their masters. She argued for a reading of intimate relations between colonizers (in this case a missionary) and subjects that did not judge in terms of present categories. Respondent Professor Anupama Rao distinguished analytically between the mapping of familial relations in the political domain and kinship obligation, cautioning against reading echoes of precolonial discourses of intimacy in colonial political relations as a sign of their continuity.

The first of the afternoon sessions was introduced by Professor Katherine Franke of Columbia Law School. Professor Saba Mahmood of UC Berkeley opened the panel with her talk on the controversy over cartoons featuring the prophet Muhammad in European newspapers. Contrasting the call for strong morality in the religious protests with the liberal secular morality propounded by defenders of the cartoons, Mahmood noted that their respective semiotic ideologies were linked to religious ones. Interrogating the semiotics underlying claims of moral injury by Muslims offended by the cartoons, Mahmood revealed Protestant underpinnings to many secular ideologies of the sign. Respondent Professor Kate Bedford pointed out that the state was often targeted in the protests, and suggested that postcolonial analytics should therefore be used to understand this moral injury. Next, Professor Michael Warner of Rutgers University explored various connotations of intimacy as a staging ground of selfhood in modern societies which valued stranger sociality. The “managed strangeness” of modern social imaginaries featured highly structured intimate relations with strangers, Warner noted, particularly in new media environments. Professor Janet Jakobsen, who responded, discussed Christian ideologies about strangers and their deployment in race relations. As race and religion were intertwined in these ideologies, she noted, moral injury was often read either as racial injury or blasphemy. Finally, Professor Tawia Ansah of the New England Law School spoke on the idea of grace as the exhaustion of law in the theology of St. Paul. Replacing an older idea of law with one of law as love, Paulian theology removed the confrontation of self with other from the process of salvation. Ansah concluded by comparing this model of intimacy with contemporary American politico-theological rhetoric which claimed a *carte blanche* to wage war within a state of grace. His respondent, Professor Elizabeth Povinelli, re-examined the fables of Paulian theology in a postcolonial context, and instead emphasized the significance of liberal representational practice as an enabling feature of contemporary political theology.

The second afternoon panel, introduced by Professor Lila Abu-Lughod, was opened by Professor Robyn Weigman of Duke University. Weigman’s paper on the proper objects of leftist academic discourse noted the pitfalls of determining one’s object of study according to a politically-informed epistemological desire. A scholar’s identification with her objects of study might produce the “adoration and negation” of the object. The object relations of academic study thus themselves deserved analysis. Respondent Professor Sharon Marcus accordingly turned her attention to the concept of intimacy as an academic object, and examined the ways in which the study of public intimacy could not leave private desire behind. Academic critique thus failed to create “a new world perfectly commensurate with our vision of it.” The next speaker, Professor Lawrence Cohen of UC Berkeley, examined surgery and “the
surgical state” in India. The Indian state had once justified forced sterilizations by eugenic imperatives, and the more recent growth in organ trade traced a transforming biopolitics linked to new economies. Finally, cosmetic surgery had grown with the dissemination of global ideals of beauty. Respondent Professor Marianne Hirsch noted that the disaggregation of bodies in organ trade created an equivalence between people. She asked if, however, an analytics of difference between bodies despite equivalence could be brought back, in light of the abiding social hierarchies of the surgical state.

The roundtable that summed up the day’s proceedings was chaired by Professor Elizabeth Povinelli and featured comments by Professors Katherine Franke and Rosalind Morris. Morris complimented the excellence of the conference papers and offered further thoughts on what remained unthinkable within the rubric of intimacy. The critique of a public sphere in several of the papers had given relatively little consideration, she noted, to mass media and tele-technicality as features of domestic life. Intimacy could also be read, Morris continued, as the absolute other of the public sphere and as communication beyond language. She concluded by foregrounding the idea of intimacy as the “kernel of an ethical relation that will not be dissolved in a demand of instrumental relations.” Franke raised another matter little discussed at the conference, that of the place of law in relations of intimacy. Law created a terrain of permissible and impermissible intimacy, noted Franke, and it both enabled and curtailed intimate possibilities. Was it thus necessary to the formation of justice? Franke proposed that it would be useful to study how traumas were articulated in legal terms, even in failed attempts, so as to see what was at stake when intimate questions entered courts of law.

**Gender had an important role in the American perception of “Arabs and Muslims” (often wrongly conflated) who were frequently characterized as both hypermasculine and not masculine enough.**

others noting the veil as a cause of harassment in the United States. Gender had an important role in the American perception of “Arabs and Muslims” (often wrongly conflated) who were frequently characterized as both hypermasculine and not masculine enough. Stephanie is from Easton, Connecticut. She is waiting to hear from the Masters Program in Childhood Education in the fall.

The final presentation by Holly Snow entitled *Life without the Vote: Re-thinking Race, Class and Gender in the Felon Disenfranchisement Debate*, examined the issue of felon disenfranchisement. She began with the observation that in the 2000 elections, the ex-felons legally excluded from voting were mostly black men. Human Rights Watch estimated their numbers were so large that George W. Bush’s electoral victory could be attributed to their exclusion. Holly used critical race theory to analyze the continuing existence of felon disenfranchisement, which could be traced back to Greco-Roman political thought. Using a comparative perspective, Holly noted the legal differences between Europe, Canada and South Africa, which had ruled this exclusion illegal, and Australia and the U.S. which still hold onto felon disenfranchisement. Holly noted that similar colonial histories in Australia and the United States had created a similar racial disproportion in jails. She also noted that disenfranchisement laws in the U.S. became harsher after the civil rights era, perhaps in reaction to the expansion of rights, and the ‘War on Drugs’ with its focus on the “crack mother” led to even more exclusions through the incarceration of black women. The limits of civic participation thus extend to men and women. Holly, whose parents attended the event, is from Kokomo, Indiana. She will begin law school at Indiana University in the fall.

After the presentations, Marie Varghese, representing the Queer Studies Prize jury, announced that Cat Lewis had just been awarded the annual prize ($250) for the best essay in queer studies. Everyone enjoyed the catered lunch that concluded the event. Congratulations to concentrator Julia Marie DiBenigno, class salutatorian 2006!
Queer, continued from page 2

because female sexuality was marginalized. Negrón-Muntaner attributed this to the prominence of virility in national discourse. Casal thought that presenting herself as a lesbian would hurt her revolutionary efforts, so she “displaced her sexuality in order to be faithful to the revolution.” She worked to build channels of communication between Cubans on the island and in the United States, and became a public intellectual. When she died, Fidel Castro lauded her and sent a wreath for her tomb. The closest she came to a lesbian identity was in a short story, Negrón-Muntaner noted, in which a female character who served in the army could be read as “a revolutionary in transgendered terms.”

Casal was more publicly critical of the nationalist ideology of the revolutionary state in her efforts at reconciling exiles with Cubans on the island. Among her projects, noted Martínez-San Miguel, was a program for young Cuban-Americans to visit Cuba and “incorporate themselves in the historical process of the revolution.” Professor Dopico offered reflections on the notion of exile in Casal’s writing as well as her life. She refused to think of exile as a final severing from Cuba, Dopico said, while also rejecting the lines drawn by a “jealous state” which demanded hostility to outsiders. “The process of estrangement was at the heart of Casal’s work,” asserted Dopico. “She even revealed how the revolution had become exiled to itself.” New York, where she eventually settled, offered Casal the identity of a city rather than a nation and a place full of “transplanted possibilities.”

The panel finally returned to Casal’s poem For Ana Veldford, written and set in New York where the two women met. Dopico read out the poem in Spanish, and examined the reciprocal relation between poet and muse. “Casal shares with her interlocutor a knowledge of that which cannot be regained. But she does not mourn her strangeness—she sees it as a possibility.” This injunction made it possible, Dopico concluded, for Casal to be a critic in each land. Writing a woman as a desiring, speaking subject was a particularly bold gesture. “To write as a woman in Cuba is to be a lesbian,” Dopico emphasized, pointing to the “misogyny of official Cuban culture.” She thus read the demand for recognition by the autobiographical speaker of the poem as the basis for Cuban feminism. By thus countering the notion that women reproduced but did not produce culture, Casal had initiated a new generation of feminist poets.

Concluding the panel, Anna Veltfort spoke of meeting the two young professors and being surprised to learn that there was a mystery about her identity as Casal’s muse. The poem for her was simply a gift from a friend which she had framed and hung in her home. “We really enjoyed each others’ company because we understood each others’ sadness,” she said of the friendship.

Frances Negron-Muntaner, Yolanda Martinez-San Miguel, Ana Maria Dopico
**Simmons, continued from page 7**

prepare their students for a diverse world, in Dr Simmons’ view, but she notes with concern that they “are not living up to their moral position on diversity.” Too often, students return to their segregated communities after graduation. “It is tempting to think that the solution to the problem of diversity is to have separate enclaves, but it is the duty of every human being to communicate with others,” she affirmed. “To embrace diversity, we must also embrace the difficulty of diversity.” Dr. Simmons suggested that it was more important now than ever that opposing views be heard on campus because free speech was being eroded outside the university. “We are seeking to create ways to deal with hate speech,” she continued. “I feel fortunate that I grew up during the civil rights struggle when one was verbally assaulted every day.”

Vice Provost Jean Howard, who moderated the question and answer period, introduced herself as an alumna of Brown and applauded Dr. Simmons for providing leadership for a wider academic community through its diversity efforts. Other Brown alumni came to the microphone during the question session. In response to a question about the importance of safe spaces such as women’s colleges, Simmons noted that their existence offered options we were lucky to have. But she distinguished between diversity issues for those academic institutions that defined themselves in particular terms and those with broader constituencies. “The issue of separating oneself in order to feel physically secure is different from doing this so that one can feel good about oneself,” she clarified. “The latter is not the job of the university.” In conclusion, Dr. Simmons acknowledged that “you can’t define a magical point when diversity is complete. You’ve just got to keep working at it.”

**Hirsch, continued from page 3**

their husbands’ lovers. So we’ve found, essentially, that the increasing salience of marital love might actually contribute to a woman’s risk of HIV.

Professor Hirsch considers the Department of Sociomedical Sciences the perfect place for her work. It is an interdisciplinary department that includes political scientists, sociologists, historians, anthropologists and public health specialists. Her colleague Dr. Constance Nathanson has recently won a grant from the National Institute for Child Health and Development which will help support doctoral students in the department who work on gender. Professor Hirsch’s appointment is primarily for research, but she also teaches courses on gender, sexuality and public health.

A native New Yorker, Professor Hirsch is delighted to be back in the city. She went to high school on the Upper West Side and confesses that she used to sneak into the West End while in high school. Now a resident of this neighborhood again, she hopes to foster links between IRWaG and colleagues who study gender at the Health Sciences campus.

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**THE INSTITUTE FOR RESEARCH ON WOMEN AND GENDER AT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY**

WOULD LIKE TO CONGRATULATE

**KAT LEWIS**

WINNER OF THE 2006 QUEER STUDIES PRIZE FOR HIS SENIOR THESIS ON

MULTI-ISSUE ORGANIZING IN THE NEW YORK GAY LIBERATION FRONT, 1969-1971

Established in 1994, the Queer Studies Prize is meant to honor an undergraduate student for his or her excellence in research and writing in the rapidly growing fields of queer studies, queer theory, and gender studies and the investigation of the connections between sexuality, gender, race, class, nationality, and religion. Its purpose is twofold: to recognize undergraduate students - who often have few opportunities for such recognition - for their superb intellectual achievement, and to provide students interested in the discipline with an instructional framework in which to work.
### Fall 2006 Undergraduate Courses

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<th>Course #</th>
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<td>Intro to Women’s &amp; Gender Studies</td>
<td>02215</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>L. Abu-Lughod &amp; K. Bedford</td>
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<td>Women and Health</td>
<td>05986</td>
<td>3</td>
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### Fall 2006 Graduate Courses

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<td>S. Marcus</td>
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