New Voices at Columbia: Introducing Anupama Rao

The Institute for Research on Women and Gender is delighted to welcome to the feminist community at Columbia Assistant Professor Anupama Rao, who has been a member of the Department of History at Barnard College since Fall 2001. With research and teaching expertise in colonial and postcolonial studies, feminist theory, the history of modern South Asia, and the anthropology of human rights and violence, Professor Rao is an important new member of our increasingly internationally-oriented faculty.

Professor Rao’s work examines transformations in the meaning of untouchability, the lowest level of caste in Hinduism. Originally a religious category of personhood and community, untouchability was secularized by the late colonial state, and then abolished in 1950 following Indian independence. Today, discrimination against untouchables (dalit) is a criminal offense, and the Indian state has implemented preferential policies to ensure dalit advancement. This legal redefinition of untouchability as a form of “injured identity,” however, has presented new challenges to discourses of citizenship and political modernity in postcolonial India. Professor Rao’s research explores the logic and effects of this transformation, bringing together legal studies, theories of rights and citizenship, the political history of modern India, and the anthropologies of nationalism, caste, and gender. In writing what is, in effect, a genealogy of untouchability within the late colonial and postcolonial state, Professor Rao also asks how contemporary dalit are remaking themselves as non-stigmatized political subjects.

Professor Rao’s interest in the contemporary politics of untouchability arises from the fieldwork and research she conducted in Maharashtra in western India as a graduate student at the University of Michigan. She arrived intending to examine nineteenth-century legal representations of dalit women, in order to bring histories of dalit struggle and reform into conversation with similar studies then being done on gender. As Professor Rao began to speak with contemporary dalit individuals and activists, however, she soon noticed that they tended to orient events, debates, and shifts in political strategies around specific, media-disseminated instances of gendered violence. The proper name of the female victim and the name of the village where the violence occurred became providing an opportunity to consider what has yet to be achieved.

At IRWaG, we are mindful that the 250th anniversary of the university’s founding coincides with the 20th anniversary of the admission of women to the College. The chasm separating these two founding dates prompts us to consider the status of women at Columbia, and to think seriously about what work remains to be done. It is, of course, true that many significant women worked as scholars and researchers at Columbia long before women were admitted into the College. Always in a minority, such women were nonetheless beacons for the

Director’s Column
By Rosalind Morris

As we enter the year 2003, the Institute for Research on Women and Gender joins other Departments and Programs at Columbia in preparing to celebrate the University’s 250th anniversary. The extraordinariness of this occasion—in such a young nation—has rightly been cause for celebration. And such celebrations have made room for more general meditations on the nature of the university and its relationship to the community of which it is a part. It has summoned reflection on the accomplishments of the past, while

Director’s, continued on page 2

IN THIS ISSUE

New Voices at Columbia: Introducing Anupama Rao .......... 1
Director’s Column ................. 1
Futures as Feminists: 
Pursuing Graduate Certification in Feminist Scholarship .......... 3
Queer Futures: 
Valerie Traub on the Production of Sexual Knowledge .......... 4
“The Impulse to Write to Survive”: Wayne Koestenbaum Speaks at Feminist Interventions .......... 5
A “Perfect Fit”? Gwendolyn Wright’s Feminist Intervention on Gender, Architecture, and the Secret Histories of Language .......... 7
...the processes of transformation are sometimes hindered by the popular but premature sentiment that feminism has already accomplished its primary tasks.

disciplines have yet to be accompanied by a radical rethinking of the gendered logics of the disciplines. Moreover, the processes of transformation are sometimes hindered by the popular but premature sentiment that feminism has already accomplished its primary tasks. In some instances, including those at the national political level, this sentiment has authorized the actual revocation of programs and entitlements for women, and the transfer of funds from women-focused programs to others less friendly to the needs of women. The recent US decision to withdraw monies from programs that provide reproductive health services to women in the Global South is a case in point. Much closer to home, the tasks may appear mundane, but they are no less important. A cursory perusal of the statistics above suggests just how much remains to be done in the interest and the pursuit of gender equality, even at Columbia.

Such recognition gives us pause, but it also gives us power and motivation. Fifteen years since the founding of IRWaG, the demand for gender analysis remains acute. We were therefore gratified to see an enlargement of enrollments in most of our classes this Fall, and equally gratified by the expanding range of courses that are now possible.

Director’s, continued on page 6
Pursuing Graduate Certification in Feminist Scholarship

For many decades now, interdisciplinary scholarship has been considered the direction of the future. Programs and Centers seeking to integrate the knowledge and methods of the social sciences and the humanities have proliferated across the country. Many of these have focused on questions of gender, race and ethnicity—with feminist and race studies leading the way in the drive to institutional change.

It is nonetheless not always easy to acquire specialized knowledge in a single discipline (History, Anthropology, English, or Comparative Literature, for example) while at the same time developing the skills and perspectives that are proper to interdisciplinary practice. This is especially true in programs that require brisk travel toward the doctoral degree. At Columbia, the Institute for Research on Women and Gender offers training to graduate students that supplements and strengthens more conventional learning in the disciplines. This includes a series of courses on the histories, methods, and themes of women’s and gender studies, as well as training in feminist pedagogy.

The Institute also offers a certification process in feminist scholarship that allows graduate students to pursue vigorous reading in a narrower domain related to their doctoral research, with an exam that formally recognizes students’ work and enhances their capacities to get employment in their chosen fields of study. Like the undergraduate major in Women’s and Gender Studies, requirements for certification emphasize an interdisciplinary grounding in both the theory and history of feminist discourse. And while in today’s tight job market there are many professional benefits to acquiring a documented specialization in the field, recent recipients praise even more the process of obtaining certification itself, which they term one of the personal and intellectual highlights of their graduate careers.

Derrick Higginbotham, for example, is a third-year student in the Department of English who received his certification last spring. Although he had studied feminism and gender as an undergraduate, he says that preparing for his exams through coursework and in-depth tutorials enabled him to learn texts, histories, and theories in a way that is “no longer patchwork, but very consolidated.” “You come in with the germ of an idea,” he explains, “and the exam gives you a site and a time and close contact with faculty that allows you to hone your interests, and to put them into a bigger picture as well.” Now studying for his departmental exams, he has reconceptualized his dissertation topic, which examines the transition from late medieval to early modern drama and its relationship to women’s changing roles in marketplace culture, to reflect the insights he gained working with his exam committee members, Professors Martha Howell and Jean Howard. “By raising the bar higher,” he says, “they pushed me to become better, to work harder and faster. It’s given me a leg up, in a certain way, and a confidence in my knowledge that I didn’t have before.”

Higginbotham terms the requirements for graduate certification—the successful completion of two courses and an oral examination—“very reasonable and very worthwhile.” The Institute requires that one of the courses must be either “Genealogies of Feminism” or “Theoretical Paradigms in Feminist Scholarship,” while the other can be an 8000-level or 4000-level Advanced Topics course, or class in another department, the content or methodology of which emphasizes gender and feminist studies.

The subsequent exam, which can be taken at the same time as the departmental exam or up to six months later, is an opportunity for the student to lay the groundwork for writing his or her dissertation. Focusing on two interdisciplinary subfields within feminist scholarship, students prepare in consultation with two examiners: faculty members affiliated with the Institute, at least one of whom must be outside the student’s department and not participating in the student’s departmental examination. This exam process, notes Professor Alice Kessler-Harris, Director of Graduate Studies at the Institute, is intellectually exciting both for the examiner and the examined. “Faculty members are very good about helping, especially considering that this work lies outside their typical department and service demands.” Mr. Higginbotham concurs, calling Professor Howell and Professor Howard “very generous with their time and knowledge—and very inspiring.”

Another important resource for students seeking certification is the Institute’s master list of recommended readings. Designed as a starting bibliography for students undertaking their exams, the list is organized according to categories that reflect the scope and ambition of current feminist scholarship: from race and ethnicity, nationalism, and colonial and post-colonial studies, to visual representation, the law, and the body, science, and medicine, among others. This list, an ongoing collaborative effort among members of the Institute, thus represents a broad consensus on the most important works in feminist and gender studies. “We asked the faculty to keep their pet books off the list,” remarks Professor Kessler-Harris, who supervised the creation of the list. “We didn’t want anything that speaks only to its main field, no matter how good: we wanted material that addressed a broad arena.”

This emphasis upon acquiring a more interdisciplinary perspective has a number of payoffs. Mona Lena Krook, a fifth year student in the political science department who received certification in May 2001, praises the opportunity to obtain “a sense of the larger picture, both historically and theoretically.” In her field, she notes, sex and gender tend to be viewed as residual analytic categories that “mess Certification, continued on page 10
Queer Futures: Valerie Traub on the Production of Sexual Knowledge

On November 13, the Institute welcomed Valerie Traub, Professor of English and Women’s Studies at the University of Michigan, to the first event in this year’s Queer Futures lecture series. Co-sponsored by the English Department and facilitated by Professor of English Jean Howard, Professor Traub delivered a lecture entitled “The Joys of Martha Joyless: Or, the (Early Modern) Production of Sexual Knowledge.” She spoke to a large and enthusiastic audience.

Professor Traub began her lecture by introducing a topic she briefly discusses in her current book, The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England. Martha Joyless, a character in Richard Brome’s stage play, The Antipodes (a comedy first performed in 1638), is still a virgin after three years of marriage. Desperate to bear a child, she turns to her new acquaintance, Barbara, for advice. Martha confesses her lack of knowledge about the mechanics of heterosexual intercourse and entreats Barbara to instruct her husband—or Martha herself—in the art of marital sexual relations.

Within Martha’s naïve plea for erotic tutelage, however, lies a reference to past sexual activity: a childhood encounter with a “wanton maid” who “kissed and clipped and clapped me strangely.” Erotically ignorant as Martha may be, Professor Traub observed, this memory nonetheless reveals her to be sexually experienced. Yet Martha so little understands this incident that “one hesitates to call it knowledge at all.”

This homoerotic encounter similarly goes unremarked in the play, where a community of family members, actors, and medical professionals conspire to stage a theatrical intervention that provokes Martha’s husband to consummate his marriage as an intoxicated mock adultery. The couple emerges the next morning “kissing, caressing, and cooing” in a narrative resolution of romantic fulfillment that leaves little place for Martha’s homoerotic recollection. Indeed, Martha’s community greets the revelation of her earlier sexual activity with indifference. They neither tolerate nor condemn it, but merely fail to recognize any moral, medical, or legal significance to Martha’s experience. Generations of the play’s readers have likewise sought to ignore or contain its textual queerness, but Martha and the play in general continue to challenge the ways we currently describe, discuss, and label sexuality. Contemporary editions of the play, for example, have variously translated the ambiguous expression “clipped and clapped” as “embraced and fondled passionately,” “embraced and patted,” or even “slapped.” And in the copy available at her university library, Professor Traub recalled, an assiduous reader had carefully “corrected” in pencil the apparent misspelling of “he” as “she” that occurs elsewhere in Martha’s speech.

Nonetheless, Professor Traub said, the very fact that Martha’s early sexual encounter goes “decertified, passed over, and ignored” makes it valuable for thinking about the epistemology of early modern sex. Not only does Martha’s experience throw into question the very status of marital sexuality during her era, but also her homoerotic activity similarly perplexes our current analytic categories. We cannot identify Martha as either “lesbian” or “heterosexual,” but nor can we simply narrate her encounter in terms of discrete sexual acts. Instead, “Martha’s position vis-à-vis sexual knowledge,” Professor Traub argued, “prods us to reconsider the state of our knowledge about early modern eroticism.” How are certain knowledges produced as intelligible, legitimate, and enabling, while others are disqualified? And do seemingly “irrelevant” experiences like Martha’s possess any potential for future signification, public expression, or personal agency?

To answer these questions, Professor Traub first asked, “What do we know about early modern sex?” She reviewed available scholarship on early modern sexual attitudes, practices, and institutions; from the widespread enthusiasm for sexual contact and acceptance of pre-marital hetero-erotic activity, to the rise of the discourse of romantic love and the waning of parental control over a child’s choice of spouse, to the endurance of a sexual double standard. Recent studies of that era have also examined the public cultures of sex, the various literatures that imparted sexual knowledge, and the rates of and reasons for various kinds of sexual offense.

Much of this knowledge, however, rests on assumptions that may obscure more than illuminate our understanding of early modern sexuality. One model prevalent among feminists and social historians, for example, structures its analysis in terms of a woman’s “life cycle” from maid to wife to mother to widow. Other scholars who attempt to evade these patriarchal categories rely upon a terminology of deviance—premarital sex, adultery, prostitution—that ultimately reinforces rather than disrupts prevailing social norms.

As a result, Professor Traub said, “we know surprisingly little about the actual sexual practices enjoyed—or not enjoyed—by early modern people.” What kinds of activities prevailed in heterosexual and homosexual encounters, and which ones were perceived as most pleasurable? How did early modern legal codes distinguish among different forms of sexual violence? What sort of acts were prostitutes expected to perform, and how prevalent was the use of items such as aphrodisiacs and dildos?

Traub, continued on page 11
"The Impulse to Write to Survive": Wayne Koestenbaum Speaks at Feminist Interventions

“I lack a subject that’s been said,” began Wayne Koestenbaum, reading from his new book of poetry, Model Homes, at the Institute’s second lecture in the Feminist Interventions series on November 18. An essay in verse on the question of autobiographical writing, Model Homes contrasts stories of his family and the popular culture of his childhood with reflections on the psychodynamics of writing itself. “My sharpest thoughts are second-hand,” his narrator worries at one point, later to realize that the act of telling—the search for metaphor, the process of public revelation—is what “makes my inner reaches mine.”

Like his poems, Wayne Koestenbaum bridges a number of worlds. Author of three published books of poetry, he is a professor of English at the CUNY Graduate Center. He is also renowned as a literary critic, queer theorist, and a chronicler of celebrity culture for both academic and general audiences (Andy Warhol; Jackie Under My Skin: Interpreting an Icon; Cleavage: Essays on Sex, Stars, and Aesthetics). What links Professor Koestenbaum’s works across these different genres are questions of speech and autobiography: “the impulse to write to survive,” as he declared in the discussion that followed his reading from Model Homes and his work-in-progress novel, Moira Orfei Aigues-Mortes.

“I’m interested in reiterating what I want,” Professor Koestenbaum explained. “That I want something, that I probably won’t get it.” His “ethnographies of self” are thus attempts to inscribe the psychic drives into writing. They tell stories of “an unappeased hunger that should never be appeased,” whether by dissecting the gay cult of opera in The Queen’s Throat: Opera, Homosexuality, and the Mystery of Desire, or by collaborating with Michael Dougherty to create an original operatic production, "Jackie O," at the Houston Opera Studio in 1997.

Yet while the details of his works are often autobiographically true, Professor Koestenbaum noted, his motivations are anything but nostalgic. His passion for the memories and popular culture of his childhood stems not from a desire to return to the past, he explained, but rather to explore the act of return itself, and to understand how stories change in the very process of their telling. Like German philosopher Walter Benjamin, whose works Professor Koestenbaum is teaching this semester, he revisits the past only to redetonate it for the future. “Trying out time,” he observed, “is the lifework of the writer.”

This process of excavating past experience extends to formal considerations as well. Each stanza or paragraph, Professor Koestenbaum argued, resembles one of Andy Warhol’s time capsules: a selection of everyday objects and observations, meticulously arranged and then sealed in a box. Whether using line breaks in a poem or the return key he hits at the end of each paragraph, his writing seeks “the pleasure of closure in every utterance.” (Model Homes, for example, is written in ottava rima, an Italian stanza form he described as particularly challenging for writing in the American idiom.) This tension between personal disclosure and formal interruption, Professor Koestenbaum concluded, is what gives his work its forward momentum. “The media I work with are not all that different. All that changes is the size of the box and the audience.”

This sensibility distinguishes Professor Koestenbaum from his contemporaries, said Jenny Davidson, assistant professor in Columbia’s department of English and Comparative Literature, at the reception following his reading. “I love Wayne Koestenbaum’s poems; his discursive autobiographical mode is immensely compelling and highly readable. I especially appreciate his ability to move back and forth between the discourses of gender and queer studies and of literary criticism and the very different language of the practicing poet. It’s rare in writers of his generation, and it makes him a very remarkable teacher and scholar as well as writer.”

Professor Koestenbaum’s readers echo this appreciation of his diverse range and his courageous commitment to self-translation, following him from lecture to poetry reading to opera. “There is something delicious about Koestenbaum’s writings,” remarks Rosalind Morris, IRWaG’s director. “They are unashamed of pleasure, but constantly critical of that sensation as well. And they are relentlessly probing of the formal limits that define any genre. There is a sense in which they perform radical queerness without ever succumbing to identity politics.” She adds, more reflectively. “They move, not unlike Benjamin’s flaneur, but with a tempo that is inimitably Wildean. Each time Koestenbaum takes up his pen or turns on his computer, you have a sense that something will be added to our cultural repertoire…. For this reason, IRWaG is grateful for his participation in our lecture series. We are enlarged by such events.”
because of good new hires in a variety of disciplines. Our classes have always addressed core themes in the history of feminist scholarship and method; now, they also cover such topics as sexuality in transnational perspective, gender and globality, queer theory, feminist theories of the state, art historical criticism, early modern women’s literatures, and the legal discourses of family—to name but a few.

These issues have assumed special relevance in the context of a possibly renewed war in Iraq, the continued war in Afghanistan, and the seemingly endless war against something called “terror.” And they became acutely visible last year, when the status of women abroad was invoked to justify military action, even as the status of women domestically was sidelined by the demand for national unity. War, it seems, is an especially powerful term for simultaneously mobilizing gender and repressing it as a topic of analytic labor. The recent ejection of gay translators from the US military has drawn attention to the structures of sexuality at play within the military—but the question of their reinstatement is by no means a simple one. In this, and in every such discussion, there are competing claims to be made: about civil rights and sexual prerogatives, about freedom and collective responsibility, about private and public discourse. The task that confronts institutions like IRWaG, however, is to insist on debate, to enable it, and to secure it against the demand for either quiet or quiescence.

This Spring, in addition to ongoing conversations about war, the state, and sexual difference, our focus of discussion shall be other activities as well, of course. And we’ll continue to host “First Thursdays,” the conversational space for graduate students, on the first Thursday of each month.

As we begin our new year, and our new semester, I am especially conscious of the challenges posed by this moment, and by our particular location in the world. But I am also compelled by the enormous successes that have been achieved by women who served IRWaG before me: Carolyn Heilbrun, Martha Howell, Victoria de Grazia, Jean Howard, and Christia Mercer. The debts owed exceed these, however, and much must be done to recognize adequately the important work of IRWaG’s staff, including Kathleen Savage and Page Jackson. As is so often the case, one is struck most by the contributions and the necessary presence of people when they are absent. Kathleen Savage, who has served four different directors, is currently away from the office due to illness, and I express the feelings of the entire Institute community when I say that we miss her terribly and wish her well. We owe Page a special debt of gratitude for holding down the fort during Kathleen’s time away, and for doing so with grace and wit. Under these circumstances, it seems appropriate to wish all of our community’s members the best of health, and also, of luck, in this New Year.

\[1\]The full report, “Advancement of Women Through the Academic Ranks of The Columbia University Graduate School of Arts and Sciences; Where are the Leaks in the Pipeline?” can be found at the following website:

http://www.columbia.edu/cu/senate/annual_reports/archive.htm

---

The Institute for Research on Women and Gender announces the Seventh Annual

QUEER STUDIES AWARD

$250.00 in prize money

All Columbia (including GS) and Barnard College undergraduates are invited to submit their best papers for consideration. Papers from every discipline, on any topic within “queer studies”—broadly defined—will be judged anonymously by an interdisciplinary committee of Columbia and Barnard faculty and graduate students.

Information and application packets are now available at the Institute for Research on Women and Gender, 763 Schermerhorn Extension.


For more information, contact Page Jackson at (212) 854-3277, or plj10@columbia.edu
Modern architects of the early twentieth century envisioned a “new man,” liberated from traditional inefficiency by the clean lines and functional spaces of new domestic housing. But what of the “new woman”? Have open-plan layouts and labor-saving devices overturned gender stereotypes, or merely reinforced them? How modern is modern architecture when it comes to the woman’s place in the home?

In her September 30 lecture on “Modern Housing: Domination, Desire and Domesticity,” the first in this year’s Feminist Interventions series, Professor Gwendolyn Wright of the Department of Architecture, Planning and Preservation responded to such questions by examining the gender politics of domestic housing. Building upon her earlier study, Moralism and the Model Home: Domestic Architecture and Cultural Conflict in Chicago, Professor Wright brought together historical, linguistic, and feminist analyses in order to challenge the assumptions that lie behind the practice and theory of architecture.

Architecture resembles language, Professor Wright argued, because it posits an ideal: a seamless match between intention and expression, form and function. It assumes that the proper environment can elicit proper behavior from its inhabitants, and thus aligns certain architectural forms with specific cultural values of family, home, and gender.

A feminist mode of inquiry, on the other hand, rejects this desire for a “perfect fit.” Instead, it seeks to “open up the complexities of prevailing patterns” in order to discover not only “bias and constraints, but also ambiguities, pluralities, and new possibilities.” Like language, Professor Wright argued, architecture is vulnerable to resistance, digression, and misuse: “ingenious adaptations, hiding behind or improvising within the stage directions one is given.” By examining the historically specific uses and abuses of architectural spaces, she continued, or by attending to the ambiguities of everyday practice, we begin to understand what lies behind seemingly similar façades.

Indeed, Professor Wright pointed out, even the words we use to talk about housing are layered with conflicting histories and meanings. The Latin root word *domus*, for example, encompasses a range of associations: from domesticity to domain to domination, from intimacy to ownership to violence. Knowledge of these hidden etymologies alerts us to other forgotten possibilities in the history of modern housing, such as the communal “apartment hotels” at the end of the nineteenth century, or the tiny bungalows designed for the single professional woman in the early 1900s. Behind the modern rhetoric of continual progress and improvement, Professor Wright argued, the actual range of living possibilities has narrowed rather than expanded over the past century.

In a similar way, while much has changed from the overstuffed formality of the Victorian parlor to the casual comfort of today’s family room, learning to read architecture as a text can illuminate similarities among forms that are superficially different. Whether the nineteenth-century “growlery” or the 1950s “Playboy Pad,” the gender roles inscribed into many domestic architectures have remained the same. “The man at ease in his easy chair. The woman on call behind the counter.”

Professor Karen Van Dyck, Kimon A. Doukas Chair of the Program in Hellenic Studies, in the Department of Classics, highlighted this tension between rhetoric and reality in her response to Professor Wright’s lecture. Praising the
benchmarks for dalit communities to address much larger social and political issues. Recognizing the importance of these names and places for defining practices and knowledges of untouchability, Professor Rao began to investigate how acts of violence were instrumental in creating and reproducing new forms of gender and dalit identity.

Once a religious identification and a form of sociality, she discovered, untouchability has become an issue of crime and punishment, compensation and retribution. “The late colonial state perceived caste as historical injury: a form of civic and political disability,” explains Professor Rao. “And when the postcolonial state back to be used as a diagnostic for reading everyday practice.

In other words, Rao argues, symbolic and physical violence has become the condition for dalit identity. As such, the status of untouchability not only challenges the limits of human and philosophical anthropology, but it is also central to the history of political modernity in India. And the limited possibilities dalit now face in redefining themselves as non-stigmatized political subjects shed new light onto India’s history of democracy, nationalism, and secularization.

Professor Rao credits her interdisciplinary training for giving her the theoretical rigor and disciplinary scope to pursue this project, which she is now preparing as a book manuscript, tentatively titled The Caste Question: Struggles for Civil Rights and Recognition by Untouchables in India, 1927-1991. As an undergraduate at the University of Chicago, she created her own major out of Anthropology, Philosophy of Language, and South Asian Studies. Her work as a graduate student in the Program in Anthropology and History at the University of Michigan similarly crossed traditional divides. More recently, Professor Rao was a Postdoctoral Fellow in Global Histories at New York University’s Draper Program in Humanities and Social Thought, where she taught graduate seminars in global histories program at NYU. She describes the course as an attempt to think about globality from outside the spaces where theory usually gets produced. “It’s an engagement with Marx and the global histories inaugurated by capitalis,” which she also taught as part of the global histories program at NYU. She describes the course as an attempt to think about globalization from outside the spaces where theory usually gets produced. “It’s an engagement with Marx and the global histories inaugurated by capitalism, but we examine foundational categories such as the commodity and gift, or the production of race—from the perspective of non-Western sites.” By posing the metropole and colony against each other, the course asks “whether categories always look how we think they look when they’re produced outside the places that we usually think that they come from. Or indeed, if they’re usable at all.”

Students have enjoyed the course, Professor Rao says, “and they’re
Professor Rao has similar ambitions for the role of gender in her work and the courses she teaches. Sex and gender are not something that should be tacked on,” she argues, “but made central, as a theoretical limit. When you want to do theory, you have to engage with gender as well.” For this reason, she values her affiliation with IRWaG for the sophistication of its programs and faculty. The very range of theoretical and disciplinary backgrounds represented at the Institute, she argues, demonstrates how crucial issues of gender are to many disciplines.

In Professor Rao’s own work, for example, the work of gender theorists has been critical to how she thinks about broader issues concerning the physicality and legibility of bodies, particularly as the objects of violence. Theories of physical and linguistic vulnerabilities, she notes, have been central to feminism, and have enabled her to rethink issues of community, identity, law, and intimacy.

Professor Rao’s teaching strategies similarly emphasize how sex and gender are integral to the production of social knowledge. “Gender is good to think with,” she says, invoking historian Joan Scott, “and it’s important to break down the paradigm of ‘Women’s Studies’ as something that should be only a concern for women.” Whether examining exchange and circulation or empire and state formation, Professor Rao thus uses examples and readings that bring gender into theory in powerful—and political—ways. For instance, a class on social reform in colonial India included a reading on the production of masculinity, honor, and chivalry in the eighteenth-century Mughal empire, while elsewhere she has illuminated discussions of economic development and the nature of work through reference to women’s labor in India’s important textile industry.

Last semester, Professor Rao also co-taught “Genealogies of Feminism: Gender and Postcolonial Theory” with Lila Abu-Lughod, Professor in Columbia’s Department of Anthropology and Director of Undergraduate Studies at IRWaG. The course was structured as a conversation between South Asia and the Middle East (the latter being Professor Abu-Lughod’s area of research specialty), tracing similar trajectories of nationalist mobilization and paradigms of gender by looking at phenomena like secularization, religion, and domesticity. “It was great to teach with a senior colleague whose work comes from a different geographical region,” says Professor Rao. “We tried to think both with and beyond the previous generation of feminist thinkers, and ask if gender was indeed a useful category through which to think postcoloniality itself.”

Professor Rao’s other courses include a class on the history of South Asia from the eighteenth to twentieth century, and an upper-level course on politics, modernity, democracy, and secularism in postcolonial India. Whether working with first years or advanced graduate students, Professor Rao calls her students at Barnard and Columbia “fantastic: incredibly refreshing and tough.” “They’re a pleasure to teach,” she says. “They’re sharp and well-prepared, and willing to work hard. They come here knowing how to be students, but at the same time they ask the questions they believe to be important, rather than what might please the professor or what would be good to ask.” Rao also praises the ambition of the senior theses she is supervising, which range in topic from education in Mexico to the political identity and human rights of the Roma.

Professor Rao is nothing if not even more ambitious in the scope of her own intellectual and professional activities. In addition to working on her current book project, she has also completed a reader on caste and gender for Indian publisher Kali for Women. Currently continuing an earlier project on criminal law and its codification in Western India, Professor Rao’s future research includes an article on sexual economy and caste, as well as a co-edited issue of Gender and History that will be published in spring 2004. In addition, she is a long-time contributor to Economic and Political Weekly, a national Indian journal that serves as a meeting ground to bring leftist progressive activists and academics into public conversation.

Frequently invited to lecture on caste, postcoloniality, and legal and philosophical constructions of violence, Professor Rao has also organized important activities here at Columbia. In spring 2002, she planned an invited workshop on “Law, Violence, and the Limits of Justice,” and in fall 2002 she organized a public lecture series on “Empire and Its Aftermath” that brought professors Uday Singh Mehta, Ann Stoler, Antoinette Burton, and Mrinalini Sinha to Columbia. Both were made possible by IRWaG’s generous support, she notes, and both were enthusiastically received by the IRWaG community. With Professor Rao’s energy and intellect, the Barnard-Columbia community is likely to benefit from many more such innovative events, and that is something to which everyone can look forward.
Rather than treat women as an add-on—"something to be addressed in the last week of a course"—her coursework and exams in feminist studies have enabled her to see how gender is fundamental to the theory and practice of politics more generally.

In feminist studies have enabled her to see how gender is fundamental to the theory and practice of politics more generally. "The idea of certification is not to do something that replicates your own work, but to be interdisciplinary. I liked the whole process because it gave me the possibility to do something that isn’t strictly political science."

The theoretical grounding she has acquired, Krook adds, tends to be rare in her field. "Understanding gender requires more than being a woman or being open to the topic," she explains. "You need certain conceptual categories." And Krook has already profited from her interdisciplinary perspective in unexpected ways. Last year, she conducted dissertation research in Sweden on campaigns to increase women’s political participation, and she found that her knowledge of feminist theory and intelligent conversations in a different, more gender research-friendly environment than the one she was used to. Moreover, the insights that sprang from her discussions inspired her to reframe the scope of her research from Western European countries to a worldwide comparison.

Krook also anticipates that certification will give her an edge on the academic job market, particularly given the growing trend for co-appointments in women’s studies and political science. Indeed, certification has already proven to be a professional advantage for Georgette Fleischer, who earned her Ph.D. in English and Comparative Literature in February 2002 and currently has a one-year position as assistant professor at Montclair State University. Professor Fleischer considers the benefits of certification to extend far beyond the purview of feminist and gender studies. "One of the things that is so good is that the courses and exam preparation provide a more solid and broad-based foundation in theory in general, not just feminist theory," she says. "I’m being asked to teach a lot of theory and am getting good feedback; my knowledge is highly valued in the field." What’s more, she notes, having a substantial and documented background in feminist theory has also helped her publications: based on her certification, she’s been asked to review books on gender theory and history for The Nation and the Los Angeles Times.

Such experiences reflect the success of the program, says Professor Kessler-Harris, who views the process of certification in feminist and gender studies not as an end-product in itself, but as a stepping-stone that students can use both to enhance their career profiles and their own intellectual growth. "It opens the door to a variety of studies in feminist and gender scholarship. Once opened, students can move through them independently. It helps them to think more ambitiously and frame their questions differently, and they will take this with them wherever they go."

Students interested in pursuing certification through the Institute for Research on Women and Gender should register their intentions with the Director of Graduate Studies, Professor Alice Kessler-Harris. They may do so by dropping by the Institute offices or by contacting Professor Kessler-Harris via e-mail at ak571@columbia.edu.
Our inability to answer these questions, Professor Traub argued, reflects our own self-consciousness about the study of sexuality. She quoted Cynthia Herrup, who observes that “the most successful (least threatening) way to make sex matters has been to disembode it. So we point out echoes of sex where it physically is not and claim to find something more than sex where it physically is.” For example, many scholars have interpreted the euphemisms ubiquitous in medical, legal, and sexual advice texts as demonstrating the hegemony of vaginal intercourse. Professor Traub, however, rejected this assumption that only accepted standards of behavior go unremarked, pointing to other studies that caution against assuming that the meanings and practices of sex for early moderns were indeed so transparent and universal.

**Traub, continued from page 4**

Doing something,” Professor Traub concluded. Rather than analyze sex through its euphemistic echoes, we should instead use “the explicit mention of sexual acts to substantiate the meaning of innuendo.” Similarly, we need to attend to the specificity of cultural discourses, as not merely the medium for representing eroticism, but for constructing the very terms of erotic knowledge and ignorance. “From the legal to the medical to the domestic,” Professor Traub said, “accounts of sexual experience are produced within site-specific domains, each with its own discursive repertoire of vocabulary, rhetoric, and syntax.”

This analysis of sexuality as “one point in a networked system of social relations,” however, must acknowledge that sexuality produces, as much as it is produced by, other forms of knowledge. Recent scholarship in gay/lesbian/queer historiography, for example, has demonstrated the role of homoeroticism in a number of early modern social systems: from domesticity to politics, patronage to pedagogy. But such work, Professor Traub cautioned, risks dematerializing erotic acts if it treats them as only epiphenomena: as a “discrete, unified, bounded, and essentially passive object of inquiry. . . . embedded in, deployed, made use of by other discourses and systems.”

To the contrary, Professor Traub said, more agency and more heterogeneity can be found in the practices and effects of early modern eroticism than historians tend to presume. Martha’s innocent plea for erotic education, for example, demonstrates that sexuality is “not only embedded in systems of knowledge—legal, medical, domestic—but itself is an agent of knowledge production.” For Martha, eroticism is not self-evident or innate, but “a question to be asked, as well as a task to be learned and performed.” The play reveals marital heterosexuality to be a particular social product, requiring the resources and expertise of Martha’s family, friends, and an array of medical and theater professionals.

What’s more, the cure for Martha’s “virgin’s melancholy” also illuminates the politics of shame that functions so effectively to silence or discredit unofficial and dissident knowledge. Martha is not ashamed of her sexuality, but rather of her limited knowledge about sex. In disclosing her shame—in “coming out of the closet,” so to speak—she breaches decorum in order to insist that eroticism isn’t something that people do, but something that they practice. It requires “initiation, experimentation, and education.”

Martha thus instinctively recognizes the right to a public sex culture, Professor Traub argued, even if her own desires for private training with Barbara or marital therapy with her husband do not meet the ambitions of today’s queer activists, whose ethos of public sex similarly highlights the importance of sexual pedagogy and a generous and empathetic acceptance of erotic variation.

Of course, this does not mean that Martha’s youthful encounter possesses the same cultural capital as her successfully consummated marriage. Nonetheless, Professor Traub maintained, Martha’s homoerotic memory does have the potential to function as a form of counter-knowledge: “capable of dissident effects and future possibilities.” Neither homo nor hetero, Martha’s sexuality inspires us to ask how the relations of knowledge about sex—particularly nonhetero sex—contributed to the formation of modern heterosexuality. And such analysis suggests a new ethics in the history of sexuality: one conceived in terms of “epistemology rather than identity, of knowledge and ignorance rather than transgression.”

The questions posed by Martha Joyless, Professor Traub concluded, deserve no less—and they continued to provoke a vigorous conversation in the discussion and reception that followed the lecture.
### Spring 2003 Undergraduate Courses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Code</th>
<th>Course Title</th>
<th>Instructor</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>V3112</td>
<td>Feminist Texts II</td>
<td>R. Römkens</td>
<td>W 4:10–6:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V3521</td>
<td>Senior Seminar</td>
<td>L. Abu-Lughod</td>
<td>F 11:00–12:50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V3813</td>
<td>Colloquium on Feminist Inquiry</td>
<td>K. Gravdal</td>
<td>R 5:00–7:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W3940</td>
<td>Queer Theories &amp; Histories</td>
<td>D. Kurnick</td>
<td>T 2:10–4:00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Spring 2003 Graduate Courses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Code</th>
<th>Course Title</th>
<th>Instructor(s)</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>W4300</td>
<td>Advanced Topics in Women's and Gender Studies: C. P. Cavafy: The Typography of Desire</td>
<td>K. Van Dyck</td>
<td>T 12:16–2:09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G6001</td>
<td>Theoretical Paradigms in Feminist Scholarship: Meanings of Motherhood: Historical and Legal Perspectives</td>
<td>C. Sanger and A. Kessler-Harris</td>
<td>T 4:10–6:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G8010</td>
<td>Advanced Topics in Feminist Theory: Thinking Sexuality Transnationally</td>
<td>E. Povinelli</td>
<td>R 2:10–4:00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**YOU can help. BECOME a “FRIEND OF THE INSTITUTE.”**

Your *tax-deductible* contributions to the Institute for Research on Women and Gender help us to cover the cost of programs, to hold conferences and public symposia, and to make sure that Feminist News reaches a wide audience. We are committed to ensuring that IRWaG continues to be a vibrant center of intellectual life at Columbia University and in the Morningside Community. If you can afford to give, please do so. We’ll make sure that you receive notice of all our events.

Your checks or money orders should be made payable to Columbia University, marked “IRWaG,” and mailed to the Institute, at 763 Schermerhorn Extension, Mail Code 5508, Columbia University, New York, NY 10027.