An Interview with Maria Pilar Rodriguez

In fall 2000 Professor Maria Pilar Rodriguez joined the IRWaG faculty, teaching Feminist Texts, one of the core courses offered by the Institute. Professor Rodriguez is Assistant Professor at Columbia's Department of Spanish and Portuguese, and specializes in contemporary Peninsular Spanish literature and culture. She has published a monograph and numerous articles on literature, film and politics in the context of political movements and the struggle for national identity. Professor Rodriguez received her Ph.D. in Romance Languages and Literatures from Harvard University, and was Assistant Professor at Syracuse University before coming to Columbia in 1996. At Columbia, she teaches a wide array of courses including "The City and the 20th Century Spanish Novel;" “Gender, Sexuality and the Nation: Artistic Representations in Hispanic Cultures;” “Resisting the Spanish State: Artistic Productions in Basque, Catalan and Galician;” “Arts, Society and Culture;” “Literature Humanities,” and seminars on Feminism/Postmodernism, Hispanic Women Writers and Contemporary Spanish Women Writers.

Her first book, Vidas in/propias: transformaciones del sujeto femininó en la narrativa española contemporánea (Improper lives: Transformations of the Female Subject in Contemporary Spanish Narrative), provides a new approach to the study of female development as it brings to light the particular "voicing," in fictional narrative, "of women's sentiments, passions, desires, and opinions, in a way that had not been previously explored." It focuses on six Spanish novels, each representing one decade, from the 1940s to the present day. In these texts,” Professor Rodriguez explains, “la mujer española of the official

Morris Returns to Institute

Rosalind Morris is returning to the Institute as Director after a year's leave. Morris served as director in 1999/2000, and will now steer the programs and activities of IRWaG for another three years. In a recent interview with Feminist News she spoke of the current state of the Institute, the events, directions and plans that are underway for the coming year, and also shared some thoughts about her research activities during her year away from New York.

Strongly encouraged by the continuing enthusiasm generated by the academic program and intellectual environment at IRWaG, Morris states: "The Institute has.

Director's Column

By Christia Mercer

It has been an honor to be Director of the Institute for Research on Women and Gender during the academic year 2000-01. As a new year begins, it's with genuine pleasure that I announce the return of Rosalind Morris who begins a three-year directorship of the Institute. With Elizabeth Blackmar (Professor, History) as Director of Graduate Studies and Lila Abu-Lughod (Professor, Anthropology) as Director of Undergraduate Studies, we look forward to a year of exciting courses, probing lectures, and engaging conversations.

We ended the academic year 2000-01 with a sense of great achievement. Our graduating seniors wrote first rate theses on a stunningly diverse group of topics, continued on page 15

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The Institute for Research on Women and Gender is the locus of interdisciplinary feminist scholarship and teaching at Columbia University. We administer the undergraduate Women’s Studies major and help develop courses for graduate students that supplement their own disciplinary studies on gender. In addition, we organize workshops, seminars, lectures, conferences, and research projects concerning various issues in feminist scholarship and teaching.

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never been on firmer footing. We have recruited two senior faculty members, and are now set to hire another. We have developed a strong undergraduate program which is both academically rigorous and unusually personalized. We have a strong cohort of graduate students in a broad variety of courses, and we’ve got a certificate program in feminist scholarship that is relevant to the demands of our contemporary moment and respectful of history. So, in terms of our pedagogic responsibilities, we’re doing well.”

IRWaG has developed ties with other interdisciplinary programs on campus, including the Center for Comparative Literature and Society, the Institute for African American Research, and the Center for the Study of Race and Ethnicity that, according to Morris, have proved both strong and productive. “Of course, at an institution like ours, people come and go, and programs change, so we need to continue to work with those centers, and to nurture more collaborative relationships. I’m very excited about that prospect, and about the possibility of creating even more linkages with programs that are newer to campus, or perhaps only newer to our own horizon.”

Despite the Institute’s successes and ever-expanding possibilities, Professor Morris acknowledges the sense of loss, on the part of both students and faculty, for the departure from Columbia of Professors Jean Howard, David Eng, AfSaneh Najmabadi, and Ann Pellegrini. “We suffered great losses this year,” she states, “when four of our colleagues chose to leave Columbia for other institutions. The reasons for this were complicated, of course, but we shall feel the absence of these people in very immediate ways. Jean Howard, in particular, will be missed by the Institute. Her leadership over the years was crucial to the maintenance of a feminist community and to the promotion of feminist scholarship here, and her stewardship of a very important reading group was an exemplary instance of intellectual community-building. Maintaining a sense of community and reinvigorating the programs associated with those individuals will be a key task for us in the coming year. The only way to do that is, I believe, to keep offering the kinds of events and activities, and keep pursuing the kinds of issues, that are most meaningful to the faculty and students on campus. Our primary commitment has to be to the support of intellectual excellence and the creation of contexts where that can be achieved; by which I mean reading groups, lectures and seminars, good classes, and the like.”

“Christia Mercer, the Acting Director in 2000/2001, has done a lot to develop and sustain these kinds of

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The Gay Right and Queer Ideas

by Eliza Byard

In 1923, Dr. Charles A. Dana of the New York Academy of Medicine proposed a study of socialists and anarchists awaiting deportation at Ellis Island. He hypothesized that political radicalism might stem from the same congenital psychiatric condition—“constitutional psychopathic inferiority”—that led to homosexuality. While there is no record of Dana having completed the study, the association of gay men and lesbians with progressive and radical politics is a long-standing fixture of American political culture.

Today, the political valence of gaynness is rapidly changing. Just as it has become clear that there is no unitary “gay community” across lines of race, class, sex, or region, the plurality of political opinions among gay men and lesbians is beginning to enter the public consciousness.

Anyone still harboring essentialist ideas about the relationship of homosexuality and progressive politics should pay a visit to the Independent Gay Forum (IGF, www.indegayforum.org), a web site featuring articles and commentary by writers and activists such as Andrew Sullivan, Jonathan Rauch, and Rich Tafel, and a home base for the growing community of conservative gay men and lesbians in the U.S.

In a presentation to Columbia’s Queer Studies Group at the Institute this spring, Lisa Duggan described the emergence of this increasingly vocal and visible “gay right,” and its evolving relationship to the conservative mainstream. The IGF offers a political vision for gays and lesbians which affirms the “fundamental virtues of the American system and its traditions of individual liberty, personal moral autonomy and responsibility, and equality before the law,” based on “the institutions of a market economy, free discussion, and limited government.”

Since the inauguration of George W. Bush, such an approach has found a new audience in Washington.

IGF commentaries are particularly vitriolic in their attacks on the “queer left,” as in a piece by Dale Carpenter that decries the left’s insistence on gay difference, and its concern about the mainstreaming of gay politics and culture. Carpenter ridicules the queer left’s “childlike” and “romanticized” vision of gays and lesbians as “sexual revolutionaries … threatening and iconoclastic, angry, ennobled, and enlightened by our oppression.” Instead, Carpenter argues, it is time for queers to get over their “fear of being ordinary” and surrender to the fact that gay men and lesbians are just like everybody else. The scholarly and political divide between “gay” and “queer” has deepened in the recent past, and IGF contributors see the tide turning in their favor. In an inclined to let them,” Rauch, Carpenter, and other IGF contributors like Andrew Sullivan argue that playing by the rules is the key to happiness—if gay men and lesbians would stop being childish, angry and sexually irresponsible we’d all get our place at the table. At the same time, many also reject the need for legislation protecting gay men and lesbians against discrimination.

A couple of recent events call into question their vision of a societal quid pro quo of “respectability,” “decency,” and “following the rules,” in return for “legal equality and equal social respect”—and serve as reminders that playing by the rules is not always such a simple matter. As legal scholar Kenji Yoshino argues such “coerced assimilation” can itself be a form of discrimination, pressuring members of minority groups to pass, convert, or cover up those aspects of their identity that are different in order to receive equal treatment.

This past semester, two students at Brigham Young University were suspended for “inappropriate same-sex behavior” under the school’s honor code which prohibits homosexual conduct. Ricky Escoto told a Salt Lake City newspaper, “I figured as long as I remained chaste the church would welcome me.” By refraining from actual sexual contact with other men (or acts that fell within the state’s definition of sodomy), Escoto felt that he was following the rules—much as a heterosexual man or woman might by abstaining from intercourse before marriage. Instead, the two students learned that actions far short of sodomy—such as receiving gifts from other men, visiting gay

Gay Right, continued on page 4

What exactly does the ascendancy of “gay” over “queer” imply?

extended review of Michael Warner’s The Trouble With Normal on the IGF site. Jonathan Rauch celebrates “the growing ascendancy of ‘gay’ over ‘queer.’”

What exactly does the ascendancy of “gay” over “queer” imply? Despite the IGF’s insistence on individual liberty and moral autonomy, there is a powerful emphasis on conformity throughout the posted work. In the site’s mission statement, “Forging a Gay Mainstream,” editor Paul Varnell denies “‘conservative’ claims that gays and lesbians pose any threat to social morality or the political order,” opposes “‘progressive’ claims that gays should support radical social change or restructuring of society,” and further asserts that gays and lesbians contribute to the “decency of our national life.” According to Rauch, more and more “homosexuals … want to follow the rules and be respectable, and the heterosexual majority seems more and more
Gay Right, continued from page 3

Chat rooms on a personal computer, and kissing and holding hands with another man—were punishable in and of themselves. While they thought they’d figured out the rules, the university moved the goalposts. Escoto, who came out as gay for the first time in the wake of these events, is serving a two-semester suspension. The other student has withdrawn from the university. Presumably when Escoto, now an out gay man, returns to BYU, he will have to be even more vigilant about behavior that might be construed as “homosexual” in order to be able to graduate.

Another current development speaks to this problem on a national level. The Census Bureau is in the process of releasing figures from the 2000 census that document a huge increase in the number of households across the country headed by same-sex “unmarried partners.” (The “unmarried partner” category appeared for the first time in the 1990 census. In Delaware, for example, the total tally of such households jumped from 212 in 1990 to 1,868 in 2000. In Vermont the numbers leapt from 370 ten years ago to 1,933 today.) A decade of activism and attention to lesbian and gay family issues—domestic partner benefits, marriage rights, and child custody issues—has led to a cultural shift within gay and lesbian communities. More lesbians and gay men think of themselves as part of a family, and are willing and eager to stand up and be counted.

The figures would also seem to indicate that more gay and lesbian couples are settling down in committed relationships, following conventional rules, and eschewing the kind of defiant rejection of normalcy that the IGF associates with the “queer.” But far from eliciting any approving response from the mainstream, this information—along with the concurrent overall decrease in the number of households headed by heterosexual married couples—has provoked an immediate and panicked response from Congress and the White House. President Bush is seeking $315 million for a public-service campaign to “promote traditional marriage.” Not to be outdone, some members of the congressional Democratic Caucus want $380 million for the same purpose.

IGF members might point to these developments as bumps along the road toward convincing the mainstream to open up conventional definitions just enough to allow for the only essential difference between gays and heterosexuals—the choice of same-sex partners. But in stressing conformity as the key to acceptance and dismissing the need to protect difference, the members of the IGF advocate a kind of coerced assimilation that could ultimately be damaging to many, whatever their sexual orientation. The onus of fitting in would then fall on anyone, gay or straight, whose identity does not easily merge with conventional standards of “decency” and normalcy as enforced by society and the marketplace.

DID YOU KNOW?
The Institute for Research on Women and Gender offers an annual prize $300.00 for the best essay written by an undergraduate on any topic in Queer Studies

2 submission dates, 1 prize

For more information and application forms, come by the office at IRWaG
763 Schermerhorn Hall Extension Phone: (212) 854-3277

Morris, continued from page 2

Activists for the rights of children who have been conceived through artificial insemination and are not recognized by the two men who were发货 for their sperm—have provoked an immediate and panicked response from Congress and the White House. President Bush is seeking $315 million for a public-service campaign to “promote traditional marriage.” Not to be outdone, some members of the congressional Democratic Caucus want $380 million for the same purpose.

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Activities. Her stewardship of our new lecture series, Queer Futures, was especially well received on campus, and we owe her a lot for not only holding the fort, as it were, but for bringing new faculty into our community. Christia will be taking a well-deserved leave this year, but we expect her back soon thereafter. And of course we wish her a wonderful and productive year away from Columbia.”

Currently, IRWaG is involved with conducting a faculty search, jointly with the Political Science department. “This is not the first effort to fill a position of this sort,” Morris states. “A comparable search failed to generate the kinds of candidates that we wanted a few years ago. But the current search is moving quickly, and we are very hopeful that we’ll have made an attractive offer to the right person by the end of the first semester. News is already out, and we have received some strong expressions of interest from people whose work we admire. The need for a good feminist scholar of politics is impossible to overestimate. Our students clamor for it. Our colleagues in Political Science are almost as loud in their expressions of hope, and the faculty at IRWaG is eager to be in conversation with good work that addresses questions of representation and the political. I’m very hopeful.”

Professor Morris’s research trajectory during the past year has been impressive. “My year has been oddly split,” she says: “The first part was spent in Thailand and Vietnam continuing work on a project about capital and speculation in the post-crisis era; and the latter part has been spent in South Africa, where I have been doing an ethnography of a mining town outside of Johannesburg. It is the latter that has been consuming me as my leave comes to a close.

“When I began the project in Carletonville, I thought I would be mainly exploring the fantasies of
**New Voices at Columbia: Introducing Mignon Moore**

Professor Mignon Moore has just completed her first year as Assistant Professor at Columbia’s Department of Sociology. She is Chair of the Undergraduate Program in African-American Studies, and Director of the Mellon Minority Undergraduate Fellowship Program. An alumna of Columbia College, she received her MA and Ph.D. degrees in Sociology from the University of Chicago where she wrote her dissertation entitled: “Family and Community Linkages with Adolescent Sexual Activity.” At Columbia her courses include “Racial and Ethnic Identities,” a colloquium examining the historical, political, and social contexts that shape the meaning of race and ethnicity; “The Changing American Family,” focusing on major theoretical frameworks for the analysis and interpretation of family structures across cultures and social classes; and “Black Families,” a seminar that places special emphasis on such topics as urban poverty and economic mobility, non-marital pregnancy and parenthood, and black gay/lesbian households in its evaluation of the “social forces” that affect stability and interaction in black families.

A primary motivating factor in Professor Moore's interest in the sociology of the family “is the lack of literature and emphasis on family environments and socialization patterns in families that are not white. Studies on black families have had a pathological undertone, but little analysis or understanding of how non-white families and socioeconomically disadvantaged families function.” Her research aims at uncovering a better understanding of the nature of the interaction between family environment and community context, and its effect on adolescent and child well-being. “I am particularly interested in the quality of the family environment and parent-child relationships in “alternative” household structures, meaning families that fall outside the traditional two-biological parent norm.” Her current project examines the influence of various father figures—including biological fathers, stepfathers, first-marriage stepfamilies formed after a non-marital birth, and partners in cohabiting families—on the incidence of problem behavior in adolescents, or on their healthy psychological adjustment. “The literature in this area,” she explains, “has focused on traditional family structures among middle-class whites, but the models that have resulted from these studies do not work well for children and parents with different racial and ethnic backgrounds and socioeconomic statuses.” Through the development of process models, Professor Moore’s study will provide a framework for understanding the quality of the relationship between father-figure and child, and how factors such as gender difference have an effect on the time it takes for an adolescent to accept a father figure.

The second area of focus in Professor Moore’s research is intraracial heterogeneity among blacks in the U.S. Her recent article, “Intraracial Diversity and Relations Among African Americans,” co-authored with Sandra Smith (CC ’92), focuses on recent demographic shifts of the African-American populations, and challenges commonly held assumptions about the heterogeneity of the Black community. “By disrupting the notion of blacks as a group with homogeneous racial ideologies and feelings of closeness, we also open the door to research on heterogeneity in other areas, including political ideology and sexuality.” As Professor Moore points out, such factors as social class and different levels of race consciousness in bi-racial, multi-racial, or strongly ethnic identities, in addition to influencing the dynamics of group identity, “directly address several issues that pertain to gender and sexuality in the larger Black community. For example, there are known gender differences in attitudes and participation in interracial dating and marital relationships, with greater (heterosexual) racial exogamy among African-American men compared with African-American women. However, we have very little longitudinal data on whether and how these gender differences affect levels of closeness to African Americans at different points in time, or the extent to which they vary by various social indicators.”

A faculty affiliate of the Columbia University Institute on Child and Family Policy, the Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Race, and member of the Curriculum Committee of IRWaG, Professor Moore comments on the significant influence of feminist theory on the field of sociology stating: “One of the biggest challenges in sociology has been to increase the visibility of feminist and gender scholarship in our top academic journals. Part of the issue has been the multidisciplinary focus of much of this research, but the primary problem is the delegitimization of work in these and other historically marginalized fields. However, our new generation of scholars—even those whose direct study does not focus specifically on gender—have been vocal regarding this oversight and proactive in efforts to change the existing hegemony.”

Professor Moore came to Columbia in 1988 as a first-year student, and during her undergraduate years participated in several research programs that developed and encouraged her interest in sociology.

*Moore, continued on page 10*
Senior Projects

Seven seniors graduated this year as Women’s and Gender Studies majors. They participated in a two-semester Senior Seminar at the Institute for Research on Women and Gender, in the course of which they developed and wrote their theses under the direction of Professor Jean Howard. They were assisted in their work by a writing tutor, Kristyn Saunders, who is a graduate student in the Department of English. Recently the seniors spoke with Feminist News about their thesis projects, and the direction of their future plans.

Stacy Lozner grew up in Short Hills NJ, and attended boarding school at the Phillips Exeter Academy in New Hampshire. “Columbia has always been an important part of my family,” she states, “as my brother and my father are graduates of the college.” While still at Exeter, Lozner, in collaboration with her best friend, made an award winning documentary on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth which is currently used as an educational video at regional high schools in New Hampshire. “Through my experience with that project, a course I took entitled “Sexual Orientation in Literature and Film,” and my own identification as queer, I became interested in issues of gender and sexuality,” she explains. Majoring in Women’s and Gender Studies was an opportunity for Lozner to incorporate her personal commitments and interests with her academic pursuits.

As she began the first semester of the senior seminar, Lozner’s ideas for her thesis revolved around issues of weight and gender performance: “My conversations kept returning to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and her ‘outness’ as a fat woman.” As she explored Sedgwick’s work, however, her interests began to shift to Sedgwick’s particular deployment of the term ‘queer’ and “the ways in which her cross-identification with gay men informed her experience of embodiment.” Lozner’s thesis, “Choosing the Compelled Body: Eve Sedgwick, Queer Politics, and the Revaluation of Embodiment,” draws on psychoanalytic and political theory to address current debates surrounding embodiment and queer politics. “Building upon Sedgwick’s interventions and insights,” she explains, “I explore a question that speaks to urgent debates within queer politics: how might anti-identitarianism—that is, a politics based not on identity or a fixed or totalized notion of self, but on identification—relationship of self to others—empower resistance of abject embodiment? The imperative question thus becomes: can queer politics ever escape the shadow of shame or abjection from which its subjects emerge? And furthermore, can queer politics facilitate this emergence for its subjects?”

According to Lozner, one of the most rewarding aspects of working on a project like this, besides understanding her own working methods (“in spurts, via epiphanies and sudden breakthrough connections that catalyze my writing”) has been the opportunity to “participate in an intellectual community and to collaborate with peers and professors.” She has been inspired by Jean Howard’s “generous enthusiasm and her no-nonsense attitude that was exactly what was needed to keep the class on track,” by her advisor Julie Crawford, “a thoughtful critic, a sympathetic listener, a hilarious friend to chat with, and an exceptional motivator,” and by Kristyn Saunders “for her guidance, help, commiseration, and encouragement.” Lozner will attend Columbia Law School in the fall, where she plans, through a focus on jurisprudence, to pursue her interests in feminist, queer, and critical race theories.

A native of Washington DC, Taylor Larsen attended Wesleyan University in Connecticut before deciding to apply to Columbia’s School of General Studies. Her interests, ranging from creative writing and philosophy to science and sociology, found a centralizing focus in the field of women’s studies. “In many ways women’s studies is the most interesting because it is still emerging as a discipline,” she states; “it provides a new way of looking at the world, and a new way at looking at all of the disciplines it draws on.” Larsen’s investment in women’s issues, however, extends beyond her academic pursuits. Describing herself as a “woman-oriented woman, interested primarily in issues having to do with women’s welfare,” she is deeply interested in mentoring and counseling therapies and is currently studying healing practices for victims of domestic violence, shock and trauma.

Larsen’s thesis, “The Technological Womb: Post-Mortem Maternal Ventilation in the Age of Cyborgs” addresses the legal and moral issues surrounding PMV, a reproductive technology that “allows a brain-dead mother’s body to be kept partially alive so that the fetus may come to term and be ‘delivered’ technologically.” Using the pioneering work of Donna Haraway as a starting point, she examines, through medical and legal case histories, not only how the experience of maternity is being reshaped by technology, but also how, in a technological society, we come to terms with “traditional ideas of women’s reproductive rights, the right to have control over ones own body, or the right to have a dignified death.” In her thesis, Larsen acknowledges “a tension between the rights of a partially alive individual and the rights of an unborn one,” and addresses the question as to “whether the brain-dead body is an individual anymore, or whether the fetus is an individual yet.” The thesis also considers “how the womb experience of PMV babies might relate to psychological problems of trust and intimacy, and contribute to developmental problems such as autism.”

According to Larsen the experience of writing the thesis taught her a great deal about the writing process itself. “It was the first time I’d edited something so many times,” she remarks, “and it was at times grueling work, but Kristyn Saunders was a great writing tutor and contributed so much in helping me to formulate my ideas and to express them well.” Larsen is currently training to be a yoga teacher, and intends to continue her studies for a career as therapist for anxiety disorders.

Cris Maisano is a native of New York, where she attended Stuyvesant High School. She came to Columbia as winner of a scholarship from J.P.Morgan Chase & Co., and as part of her
scholarship, has worked at the bank part time throughout her stay at Columbia. Even in high school, Maisano's interests gravitated towards women's issues: "Every paper I wrote tended to have a gender focus; for instance if I had to write a history paper, it would be about someone like Elizabeth Gady Stanton, or if I was writing a Shakespeare paper, it would be on Portia, and so forth." When the time came at the end of her sophomore year to declare her major, a joint focus on Economics and Women's and Gender Studies was a natural choice.

For Maisano one of the most attractive aspects of the Gender Studies program was its flexibility. As part of her coursework, she spent one semester at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London where she took courses in Gender and Development, and Anthropology and Gender. Her thesis, entitled "The Changing Construction of Gender in the New York Times," focuses on the decades of the 1970s and 1980s, and developed out of her keen interest in the impact of the news media on the processing of information. "I became interested in the period of the '70s when I began to read about the history of the New York Times. There was a major sexual discrimination suit brought against the Times in 1978 by seven female employees; to me this suggested that the Times' claim of liberalism was not reflected in its employment practices."

Detailed archival research revealed a similar bias in the gradually evolving "women's sections" of the paper during this period. Maisano's analysis shows "how the New York Times constructed gender over a period of twenty years, and how that construction changed over time." The thesis tracks the contents of the women's pages—originally named "Women's News," renamed "Family/Style" in the '70s, and changed to the "Home" section in the '80s—in terms of the kinds of topics these pages defined as being newsworthy for women. She also discusses "how and why parts of the paper that were previously aimed exclusively at women later came to be aimed at both sexes." She notes that much of the contents of the women's pages, for instance food, entertainment, fashion, remained constant despite the paper's move away from the earlier gender-specific indexing, and considers how this corresponds to the paper's readership figures.

Working on the thesis in the context of the Senior Seminar and the help of her advisor Helen Benedict of the Journalism School was a wonderful learning experience for Maisano: "You learn about how you work and what your interests really are." She will spend the next six months working at a bank in Dublin Ireland, and is considering possible careers in banking or teaching.

A native of Lubbock Texas, Naomi Paik applied to Columbia after having spent a summer in New York at the Columbia Summer School for high school students. "I liked the campus and the urban setting, and I wanted to be in a school that offered a wide scope of subjects," she states. Her interests developed around English, Ethnic Studies, and issues relating to the intersection of gender and race, and she decided to major in Women's Studies with a concentration in Asian American Studies.

Paik's thesis "America for Americans—US Law, Asian Immigration and the Meaning of Family" investigates the ways in which US immigration policies have been instrumental in shaping Asian American identity. "I wanted to write about immigration," she explains, "because that is the most important factor in the racialization of Asian Americans. I began by focusing on changes in US immigration law, and those instances in which the laws themselves contradict democratic principles." Using as a theoretical basis Lisa Lowe's contention that contradictions in the law, because they cannot be dealt with on a political level, erupt into the cultural sphere, Paik's thesis examines the interaction between the law and literature. Focusing on specific pieces of legislation "as they are dealt with in Asian American novels that explore issues of immigration," she explores how the effects of the law...
are “articulated or translated” in this alternative, cultural space. She discusses, for example, the cultural fallout of the Page Law Act of 1875 which “effectively barred any Chinese women from immigrating to the US;” or the “shift in the construction of the Asian as foreign alien, to Asian as citizen, yet still foreign” occasioned by the War Brides Act of 1945; or the issues of legal colorblindness and its social counterpart, multiculturalism, as effected in Brown vs. the Board of Education, and explores how exclusion, racialization, and disenfranchisement of Asian immigrants are negotiated in three novels: Louis Chu’s *Eat a Bowl of Tea;* Fae Myenne Ng’s *Bone;* and Chang-rae Lee’s *Native Speaker.*

Paik appreciates the flexibility of the Women’s Studies program at IRWaG as well as its “excellent and supportive” faculty. “I am glad to have worked with professors like Jean Howard, David Eng, Kathryn Gravdal, and Julie Crawford who was my senior year advisor,” she states. She acknowledges, however, that the richness of the IRWaG learning environment is also due in large part to the “intelligence and the investedness” the students show in their work, and their wide array of interests and perspectives. Paik is strongly drawn to issues of multiculturalism and critical race theory. Of her future plans, though she is considering applying to Law School, she states: “I’m not really sure where I will end up. I currently have a job at the Korea Society, where I am involved in programming work.” One of her projects, entitled “Project Bridge,” entails working with city youth, and organizing summer trips to Korea in order to “foster intercultural relations between Koreans, Korean Americans, and other Americans.”

**Simon Moshenberg** grew up in Chirilagua, a Salvadorian neighborhood on the outskirts of Washington DC. His early interest in political activism centered on immigrant rights and Central American solidarity work. He came to Columbia prompted in part by “a sense of community with New York City,” and has been profoundly inspired during his four years as undergraduate by Professors Gayatri Spivak and Michael Eric Dyson, a visiting professor in African-American studies.

Moshenberg describes the development of his thesis, “Buying Strawberries in the Big Apple: A Spectacular Analysis of Something Very Mundane,” as a “totally natural evolution.” His original plan had been to focus on a critical reading and interpretation of volume I of Marx’s *Capital* focusing on the reproduction of labor power. The project soon developed into a study of the reproduction of labor power “in the context of a new, liberal world order,” focusing on immigrant workers and domestic laborers in the US. “This was still a very Marxist analysis,” he relates, “but my ideas began to change after I read Guy Debord’s *The Society of the Spectacle,* and realized that I could not understand the phenomenon of immigrant workers in the US in terms of econometrics alone.” Starting from the Debordian premise that “capital has accumulated to the point that it has become spectacle, and that spectacle, no longer a mere symbol of wealth, has become the material substance of wealth,” Moshenberg’s thesis takes as its basis or “text” the working conditions of Mexican immigrants working at Korean grocery stores in New York City’s upper West Side. Fieldwork for his thesis was conducted on two levels: the first was under the auspices of various union organizations that gave him “access not only to the grocers, but also to the working conditions of the Korean owners;” and the second was “as a customer, talking to other customers.” His thesis focuses not only on Mexican men as a class of recent immigrants to New York City who are “protected neither by the state nor by established communities in civil society,” but also about the “spectacle of the Mexican worker in the service of the white bourgeois customer.” The thesis ends with a one-page handout in English and Spanish summarizing the conclusions drawn from the study. “I feel a responsibility to take the fruit of my research back to the community,” he states.

Moshenberg’s advisor for his project was Professor Randy Martin from the Tisch School at NYU. His goal for the next few years is to devote himself to deeper involvement in political activism in New York City.

**Christine Lee** is a native of New York City. After graduating from high school she spent two years working as a graphic artist, and preparing herself financially for college. She attended Columbia as a part time student during her first few years at the School of General Studies. “I chose Columbia,” she remarks, “because it was close to where I lived and worked.” Christine has always been drawn to women’s issues and feminism. “I think part of it comes from the fact that I grew up in the Asian culture, in a very male-dominated household,” she states, “and this made me very conscious of the limitations imposed, by virtue of gender, on who I was and what I could do.”

Lee’s choice of topic for her thesis: “Reconfiguring the Problematics of Cosmetic Surgery through Asian Blepharoplasty,” was strongly motivated by her fascination with cosmetic surgery, an interest further piqued by television coverage of various types of surgical practice. “I was riveted by the images of surgery being performed, and couldn’t fathom how women made the decision to undergo what seemed such a painful ordeal.” Lee notes that the debate on cosmetic surgery in popular programs tends to be “strongly polarized, and women who engage in surgery are invariably portrayed as victims in pursuit of an unattainable ideal.” What is more, the focus of these programs is on Caucasian women exclusively, and “there seems to be no place for the voices of minority women.” Lee’s focus on the growing popularity of cosmetic eye surgery among Asian American women engages the problematics of racialized ideologies. The “specter of authenticity,” according to Lee, continues to lurk at the root of post-modern constructionist discourses, and “the essentialist underpinnings contained within current understandings of Asian women’s identity necessarily penalizes and excludes those women who engage in practices like blepharoplasty.” Lee’s thesis

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Family, Gender, Contract: The Case of Adoption

by Carol Sanger

I teach in three areas of law: family, gender, and contracts. These three areas intersect in interesting ways. Family law necessarily implicates gender, as no other legal institution is predicated on gender with quite the same ferocity as the family, or at least as marriage, the institution upon which the legal family has long been staked. Putting aside the alternative now offered by the State of Vermont, Congress and most States have made it very clear that there must be one boy and one girl before any marital knots are tied. Accordingly, many of the controversial issues about the regulation of families over the past forty years have focused on gender-based allocations of power and responsibility.

But although links between gender and family law are more obvious and of longer standing, connections between family and contract law are increasing. Spouses and unmarried partners now contract with one another not only to order their property arrangements but also to establish families. Consider the use of contracts in the creation or acquisition of children, through surrogacy contracts, through sales contracts for eggs and other genetic material, through contracts for the use and disposition of frozen embryos and zygotes.

One area where gender, family, and contract bump up against one another in new, controversial, and still unresolved ways is that of adoption. Adoption is unusual in the realm of family law because it is one of the few institutions where all the key players are women (or at least little women): birth mothers, adoptive mothers, social workers, and of course even the babies themselves, as not only in China but also in the United States more girls are voluntarily surrendered for adoption than boys. (I am not ignoring the existence of birth fathers and adoptive fathers, but simply claiming that they play a much smaller role than mothers with regard to the adoption decision.) The all-women line-up raises interesting and largely unexplored questions for feminist scholars, for there are certainly conflicts of interest among the parties in an adoption. Here, however, the sex of the parties plays a more subtle role in sorting out issues of power and responsibility. The “sorting out” leads to the question of contract. Should the placement of children by birth mothers be regarded as a proper subject of contract between two sets of adults, or are the particular interests of all those involved, of such a magnitude or quality that the state should not allow parties to choose for themselves in this complex area of family formation, but should instead impose a set of governing rules, as has traditionally been the case with adoption.

In this essay, I present one much contested aspect of adoption, namely the role of the birth mother, in order to begin to think about the crucial part played by gender and contract in connection with adoption. Just what should birth mother participation in the process be? In recent years, the argument has been made that the birth mother should be allowed substantial participation, including the selection of, and even continued contact with the adoptive family. This argument has several bases of support. The first are the market enthusiasts who hold that modern birth mothers are less likely to give up their babies for adoption unless they have some say in the matter. Under this view, in order for the institution of infant adoption to flourish, birth mothers must get what they want. To some extent this is already the case, insofar as open adoption—where both birth parents and adoptive parents possess some degree of identifying information about each other—has replaced traditional adoption under which adoptive parents and the birth family remained strangers to one another from start to finish.

A second argument in favor of birth mother participation in the adoption process is made by those concerned with the relation between the child’s ethnic and cultural identity and her placement with an adoptive family. Tension has long existed between two schools of thought with respect to the placement of children in adoptive families. The first holds that what matters most is placing a child quickly in the best available home so that the child can begin the process of establishing itself as a permanent member of new family as soon as possible. Under this view the security of prompt placement outweighs the advantages that might accrue from delaying placement in the interest of finding a family that shares the child’s racial, religious, or cultural background. Under the second view, however, a child is not an autonomous or freestanding being who can simply be absorbed wholesale into another family, but a person who, from birth, is embedded with certain traits that ought to signify in any placement decisions. One way to combine both a prompt and secure placement and to acknowledge the child’s ties to her heritage or birth family, is to give the...
Breines’ produce a piece of work that I am truly proud of.”

Elizabeth Castelli, and Kristyn Saunders have led me to and creative people as Professor Jean Howard, Professor introduced him to a completely new way of learning. “Permission to do original work is a novel experience for an truly rewarding.” He notes how writing the thesis has to immerse myself in a topic I deeply care about has been an incredible experience for me, and the opportunity course of the past year Millstein remarks: “This project has been an incredible experience for me, and the opportunity of coming out in many autobiographical accounts of gay Jewish men. He points out that this pattern of resurgence of interest in the practice of Judaism prior to coming out “runs counter to the commonly held assumption that Judaism and a gay identity are antithetical to one another.” Millstein’s thesis explores three areas of Jewish life in their connection with sexual identity. Drawing on such text as Harold Brod’s A Mensch Among Men, Paul Breines’ Tough Jews, and Lawrence Fuchs’ Beyond Patriarchy: Jewish Fathers and Families, he details various stereotypes of masculinity in Jewish culture, ranging from the image of the patriarchal father to that of the hypersensitive Jewish male, in support of his assertion that “culturally, Judaism provides a space for an alternative masculinity.” His study of the religious aspects that relate to the link between “a resurgence in Judaism and coming out for gay Jewish men” includes not only religious texts which explore nontraditional gender roles—for example the descriptions of Joseph’s beauty in the Gemara and the Bible—but also the environment in which these texts are studied. “There are aspects of Jewish observance that have undercurrents of homoeroticism,” he points out, “and the contexts in which such texts are learned actually can, despite the obstacles, help to enable men to come out.”

About the experience of developing his thesis over the course of the past year Millstein remarks: “This project has been an incredible experience for me, and the opportunity to immerse myself in a topic I deeply care about has been truly rewarding.” He notes how writing the thesis has introduced him to a completely new way of learning. “Permission to do original work is a novel experience for an undergraduate,” he states, “and the help such intelligent, and creative people as Professor Jean Howard, Professor Elizabeth Castelli, and Kristyn Saunders have led me to produce a piece of work that I am truly proud of.”

Moore, continued from page 5

“I developed the social and human capital I needed to adapt to a variety of professional and social settings. Many of the friendships that I formed while in school continue to this day. As a matter of fact, I met my collaborator Sandra Smith in the very first sociology course I took at Columbia. She and I (and two other CC alumnae) enrolled and finished the sociology program at the University of Chicago, and are now faculty members at universities across the country.” Though she remarks a tremendous amount of social, psychological, and emotional support for CC students through institutional structures that were lacking in the 1980s, she notes that “the university has been slower in its commitment to faculty diversity” and states: “It is so important for all of our students to see women and people of color in professorial and other leadership roles in the academy.” Commenting on the ever “greater acceptance and understanding of the importance of interdisciplinary programs” like African-American Studies, Ethnic Studies, and Women’s and Gender Studies, and the ideological and methodological intersections and complementarity among these disciplines, Professor Moore remarks: “Our structural position in the university is similar, and this adds to the stake we share in each other’s successes.”

Symposium Announcement: “Comfort Women”

On October 5 and 6, 2001 the East Asian Institute of Columbia University will host a symposium entitled “Comfort Women”—Legacies for Transnational Law and Society. The symposium will bring together leaders of the past decade’s efforts to achieve justice for former “comfort women.” Participating in the conference will be those working to make sexual and gender-based violence as well as ethnic discrimination top priorities in the struggle to establish international norms and consequences for violations of human rights in war. The symposium, according to East Asian Institute Program Officer Kristi Barnes, “aims to explore the impact that activism and scholarship around this issue has had on international criminal justice, human rights, transitional justice, ethnic conflict, feminism and civil society. Ten years have passed since the first survivors of the “comfort stations” were brave enough to speak out, and in that ten years significant progress has been made toward recognizing and prosecuting sexual and gender-based crimes committed during armed conflicts.”

The symposium will be held in the Dag Hammarskjold Lounge, 6th floor, of the School of International and Public Affairs, 420 W. 118th Street, Columbia University. The event is free and open to the public. For more information, please contact Kristi Barnes at (212) 854-1742.

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provides a new perspective on cosmetic surgery, showing how “alternative visions of identity are possible once one escapes the traps of static identity labels.”

When he graduated from high school in Holland PA, Robbie Millstein intended to study Judaism in a formalized Yeshiva setting in Israel. Complying with his parents’ wish that he also follow a secular, mainstream education, he found a “wonderful compromise” in the joint program between Columbia’s School of General Studies and the Jewish Theological Seminary. Millstein’s thesis, “Superman, Sissies, and a Fabulous Coat” explores the ways in which Judaism can provide a context for the process of coming out. “I came out shortly after arriving in New York City, during my first year,” he states, “and my thesis has been a formalized, more organized way of presenting some of the thoughts that I have had since coming out.”

The starting point for Millstein’s thesis is the observation, culled from sources ranging from internet postings to more formal scholarly publications, that an intense reconnection to Judaism often precedes the process of coming out in many autobiographical accounts of gay Jewish men. He points out that this pattern of resurgence of interest in the practice of Judaism prior to coming out “runs counter to the commonly held assumption that Judaism and a gay identity are antithetical to one another.” Millstein’s thesis explores three areas of Jewish life in their connection with sexual identity. Drawing on such text as Harold Brod’s A Mensch Among Men, Paul Breines’ Tough Jews, and Lawrence Fuchs’ Beyond Patriarchy: Jewish Fathers and Families, he details various stereotypes of masculinity in Jewish culture, ranging from the image of the patriarchal father to that of the hypersensitive Jewish male, in support of his assertion that “culturally, Judaism provides a space for an alternative masculinity.” His study of the religious aspects that relate to the link between “a resurgence in Judaism and coming out for gay Jewish men” includes not only religious texts which explore nontraditional gender roles—for example the descriptions of Joseph’s beauty in the Gemara and the Bible—but also the environment in which these texts are studied. “There are aspects of Jewish observance that have undercurrents of homoeroticism,” he points out, “and the contexts in which such texts are learned actually can, despite the obstacles, help to enable men to come out.”

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Adoption, continued from page 9

birth mother—and not an adoption agency—the authority to place the child with whatever qualified family she chooses. As political science Professor Mary Shanley has explained, "One would think that the birth parents, as the concrete link between the child and the racial group claiming an interest in or jurisdiction over the child's placement, would be the appropriate persons to present their understanding of their own and the child's racial identity."

There is much to this argument. As a member of a given community, it is likely that the birth mother can best understand the importance of continued association, whether it takes the form of choosing the child's immediate placement, or of an agreement for subsequent disclosure of information. Yet designating birth mothers as the spokeswomen for cultural embeddedness does not guarantee that they will choose to honor the child's relational ties. This is the point I want to develop here. A birth mother may have an independent view of how her child might flourish, a view that envisions a way of life quite different from that in which she was raised. From an embeddedness perspective, this may look like a case of maternal contrariness or ingratitude. Indeed, at least with regard to Indian children, the Supreme Court has held that a mother may not so choose. In the 1989 Supreme Court case of Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians v. Holyfield, an unmarried Indian couple wanted the Holyfields, a white family, to adopt their newborn twins. (Years earlier, Mr. Holyfield had been the birth mother's pastor.) In an attempt to defeat the tribe's jurisdiction over the matter, the birth mother "went to some efforts to see that [the babies] were born outside the confines of the Choctaw Indian Reservation." The Supreme Court held that her efforts were of no avail, for no matter where the babies were born, their domicile—the key to tribal jurisdiction under the Indian Child Welfare Act—followed that of their mother and she was still domiciled on the reservation.

Why might birth mothers choose for their children lives different from their own? Reasons differ. Birth parents may have a special fondness for particular prospective parents, as was likely the explanation in Holyfield. They may want a better material life for their children than they experienced or believe likely in the birth community. (Imagine a community hostile to girls.) Parents may also affirmatively seek to distance the child from the very characteristic that is the source of their authority under an embeddedness delegation. In this regard, recall George Eliot's description of the long awaited reunion between Daniel Deronda and his mother. At their meeting, Deronda learns not only that his mother (and therefore he) is Jewish but that this was exactly why she gave him up: "And the bondage I hated for myself I wanted to keep you from. What better could the most loving mother have done? I relieved you from the bondage of having been born a Jew."

Some break-away preferences spike maternal concerns about a child’s well-being with a kind of petulance. A short story by Canadian author Elyce Gasco describes a Catholic home for unwed mothers from the point of view of its unhappy, waddling residents: "And one day, when a nun was slightly short with her, unusually sour, her habit freshly ironed and stiff, [my roommate] said: "I'm telling you. Give it to the Jews. They know how to laugh at themselves. They're even iffy on this hell thing."

What I have called petulance is sometimes described by experts as a predictable stage in adolescent development. The musings of columnist Dan Savage capture both perspectives. Having satisfied all the requirements of an adoption agency Savage describes how he anxiously waited to be chosen by some birth mother somewhere. But why, he wondered, would any young woman pick him and his male partner from among the agency’s catalogue of attractive married heterosexual couples applying for the same position? Savage eventually found comfort in the idea that there was, indeed, a birth mother who would choose them: a hypothetical "Susan," 16, daughter of strict fundamentalist Christians who, though upset about her promiscuity, her punk boyfriend, and her pregnancy, are nonetheless happy that she is "choosing life" over abortion, even if she insists on relinquishing their grandchild for adoption. It would be this Susan who, coming to the adoption agency and

It would be this (mother) who, coming to the adoption agency and reading the resumés of the prospective parents, would take her revenge by choosing a gay couple.
Morris, continued from page 4

miraculous value that drive a gold-mining industry. This is where the deepest gold mines in the world are located and where the most powerful gold mining companies, Anglo Gold and Goldfields in particular, have had their center of operations. Gold and value loom large in the community, of course, but mainly in memory. For the mines are gradually being closed down, and the community—I should say communities, for there are many discrete social universes there—live now in the shadow of disappearance. Formerly this shadow had a more immediate form, namely sinkholes. The area is famous for its spectacular accidents, and the awful sinkholes that form because the mines require the de-watering of dolomitic rock. Now, “going down” is an idiom of economic and social collapse rather that physical descent.

“In any case, this environment is one of utter economic catastrophe. And to a certain extent the town is typical of South Africa’s predicament right now. HIV/AIDS rates are horrifyingly high, up to 68% in some areas of the town. Unemployment is around 40%, higher in the township. Sexual violence and incest are the scourge of the moment, and part of my work has been an attempt to come to terms with the forms that violence takes here. I want to know how, if at all, these facts are related to other social phenomena, such as massive indebtedness, or the horrors of underground mining in an industry that has seen relatively little technologization (when, for example, compared to coal mining). But I do not believe that economic factors either explain or cause the forms of violence that are now taking their toll on the children of this place. There is a relationship, yes, but what that relationship is, I have yet to discover.

“The work has turned out to be very demanding, emotionally and physically. How one writes about such things becomes a big question, of course. But I believe that time must be taken, that one can rush too quickly to conclude about violence or suffering, and that the pursuit of an elegant conclusion can obscure some of the truths that would emerge were one to take one’s time, and learn to listen to the soundings and echoes that are produced in ethnography. If there is anything special about this discipline, anthropology, which I reluctantly call my own, is the tendency of other people’s words to haunt you long after you’ve left a place, and to enter into your consciousness in a way that permits a very singular understanding of the lives that people live.”

This year, Professor Morris will teach courses that include an undergraduate introductory course in social anthropology; a course on Thailand; and, jointly with Dorothea von Muecke, a course on the cross-cultural histories of media and media theory. (A complete list of the Institute’s Fall semester course offerings is on page 16).

With respect to the Institute’s additional activities over the course of the year Professor Morris states: “The Institute will continue to host lectures and seminars that bring the work of Columbia University scholars and those from other institutions into the public domain. Feminist Interventions, the flagship lecture series that Jean Howard and I initiated three years ago, will continue this year. The In the House series, featuring faculty who are new to campus, and which Alice Kessler-Harris has led since joining us two years ago, will also proceed. Queer Futures generated enormous enthusiasm this year, and I hope that will be sustained as we enter our second year in that series. And, of course, there will be occasional lectures, and new collaborations with the departments and other interdisciplinary programs. All of this will be announced on our website, as well as through regular mailings and postings. We’ll be busy. Of that you can be sure.”

Interdisciplinary Colloquium

“Law, Violence and the Body”

Fall 2001 and Spring 2002

Speakers in the fall:

October 9
Professor Dorothy Nelkin (University Professor, Law and Sociology at NYU) on “The Body in Law and Science”

October 30
Professor Beatrice Hanssen (University of Georgia, Athens, Language/Philosophy) on “Critique on Violence”

December 4
Professor Jeffrey Fagan, Professor James Liebman and Professor Valerie West (Columbia Law School) on “Death Penalty in the United States”

Lectures are scheduled from 4-6 pm in William & June Warren hall (115th Street and Amsterdam Ave)

Confirmed speakers for the spring series are:

Professor David Garland (NYU Law School and Sociology)
Professor Susan Silbey (MIT/Sociology)
Professor Patricia Ewick (Clark University/Sociology)
Professor Jeremy Brunner (University Professor, Law and Psychology at NYU).

The colloquium is coordinated by Professor Renée Rümkens (Department of Sociology/Institute for Research on Women and Gender) and will be co-sponsored by the Center of Law and Culture of Columbia Law School and the Institute for Research on Women and Gender.

For information: 854-1201 (Alexa Rosa)
Adoption, continued from page 9

birth mother who, having surrendered her child to an agency in a traditional closed adoption, later discovered the child was adopted by a same sex couple and sought (unsuccessfully) to rescind the adoption.

Birth mothers may not always choose especially well. Certainly, data suggests at least that some teenage birth mothers choose open adoption for reasons less connected with the child’s needs than for their own “self-related concern about their own ability to know the child.” As researchers explain, “Given the developmental status of adolescence in regard to altruism versus self-concern and the difficulty for teens to think through the long-term consequences of behavior, this finding of self-interest is not surprising.” Of course, the law does not permit birth mothers to choose too poorly. All states require the judge to certify that the order of adoption is in the child’s best interest and the court’s determination on that point trumps whatever placement preferences a birth mother may have. (We might, however, also keep in mind that there is little quality control on parental decision-making outside of adoption.)

I present these examples not to argue that birth mothers are particularly idiosyncratic, prejudiced, or enlightened, but simply to suggest that like other parents, they have preferences about how they would like their children raised. Their preferences are not always predictable or admirable or comfortable. But in this regard, their decisions are not so unlike the evaluations unmarried adults make in deciding whether a potential partner will be the kind of person one could imagine raising one’s child. In choosing a future mate/co-parent, singles are free to choose a partner from the same community or from a different one. So too, one could argue, with adoptive parents. A birth mother may insist on continuity, or she may not. The point is that if she is permitted to participate in the placement decision, there is no way to ensure that she will honor rather than disrupt relational ties between her child and any community of origin.

If birth mothers cannot be counted on as reliable proxies for their children’s cultural ties, are there other, additional reasons to give them authority to place their children? I would answer yes, and for a fairly straightforward reason: Making decisions about the care and custody of one’s child falls within a well-established bundle of parental rights. These include the right—and the obligation—to provide care for one’s children, whether personally or by arranging for a surrogate caretaker. We see this daily outside the context of adoption as parents regularly determine where and with whom and for how long their children will live. Thus parents may send children to summer camp or to boarding school or to live with Aunt Louise. Divorcing parents too are entitled to decide between themselves which one will have custody of the kids and under such agreements, one parent may significantly decrease or even cease contact with the children. Parents may also choose substitute caretakers for their children in anticipation of a permanent separation. All states now provide for the testamentary appointment of guardians and the rule is clear: “The statutory right of the parent, duly and lawfully exercised by the execution of his or her will, must be respected and maintained by the court.”

All of these examples—custody, babysitting, guardianship, summer camp—reflect the law’s respect for parental determinations regarding the provision of substitute care in the parent’s absence, whether the arrangement is temporary, long-term, or permanent. Adoption simply provides another type of separation in the spectrum of acceptable absences which necessitate a surrogate caretaker. We may, however, be unused to thinking of adoption as similar to other separations: Some are still skeptical about any mother who would give away her child.

Placement authority, however, may serve to level the reputational playing field, for what birth mothers want is what all other parents get as a matter of course, namely some recognition that they are the child’s mother and have contributed to the child’s life in some manner or form beyond childbirth itself, in giving it a name, and in securing it good parents. The significance of birth mother participation is made clear by considering the work it does for adoption vocabulary. At present, the verbs typically (awkwardly, reluctantly) used to describe what birth mothers do with their children are “surrender” or “relinquish” or “give up.” Consider the difference for the mother—and for the child—when it is understood that the mother placed her child.

To be sure, not all birth mothers want a continued connection or some vestige of authority over their child. But many do. Some mothers want simply to name the child and ask the adoptive parents to honor that significant selection. Others seek the promise of information, such as a yearly photo, or the adoptive parents’ agreement to give the child a memento or letter when it is older. Still others negotiate some form of ongoing contact.

Whether or not these various agreements brokered (“mediated” in agency speak) by agencies will be upheld by courts is another matter. Courts initially refused to enforce such agreements on grounds of public policy. Open adoption was understood to violate the letter and spirit of existing laws severing all ties between birth mother and child. Slowly, however, things have changed. About twenty-five states have now authorized “post-adoption agreement contact” statutorily although most provide that enforcement is contingent on the court’s determination that the agreed contact is in the best interests of the child. It is important to remember that the interests of birth mothers are also properly served by a process that takes account of and honors their parental status. ■
Rodriguez, continued from page 1
discourse of the Francoist period—with wife and mother representing the most desirable possibilities for self-realization and development—is subverted and reversed into a multitude of vital, affective, and sexual options that confront such domestic images.” In a country and political environment where the government, the Catholic Church, and the education system were “in complete alliance” in their efforts to promote an ideal of marriage and motherhood as the only viable option for women, women writers had to take recourse to “veiled forms of expression in order to elude the strict censorship” in their exploration of alternative models of femininity. In this context, for example, she points out that texts reflecting lesbian love were strictly prohibited during the dictatorship, and did not appear in Spanish literature until 1975.

Her current book project focuses on contemporary film, and is titled Historias emergentes de un mundo en conflicto: aproximaciones al cine vasco de los años noventa (Emergent Stories of a World in Conflict: Approaches to Basque Cinema of the 1990s). The book is “an exploration of the interplay of community, language, race, family traditions, institutional, and political strategies as key elements in the construction of the nation.” The films she analyzes draw on a broad range of sensitive issues relating to the recuperation of the Francoist past; the difficulties in negotiating female subjectivity in the context of changing family configurations and a world rife with conflict; and the tensions of confronting the political and social views and orientations proposed by the younger generations. Professor Rodriguez shows how directors such as Pilar Miró, Josephina Molina, Icíar Bollain, and Dolor Payás have “given life to experiences of female subjectivity hitherto ignored by male filmmakers.” One such film, Yoyes (1999) by Helena Taberna, is interesting for its focus on the relationship between feminism and nationalism. Based on historical events, the film depicts the life of a female activist in the terrorist organization E.T.A., who is assassinated for treason by the group members when she attempts to leave the organization. “The film manages to offer a balanced vision of a woman’s difficult political and social negotiations in the context of the Basque Country, privileging a feminist and nationalist approach.”

Professor Rodriguez draws our attention to the impact of feminism on cultural, political, and academic environments remarking on “the differences between feminist practices across nations. In Spain, a feminist approach to cinema and literature has frequently been undertaken within the context of women’s political and cultural groups and associations which are not connected with the academic realm.” Within the academy on the other hand, feminist scholarship has fostered “interdisciplinary debates and mutually enriching exchanges among such disciplines, for example, as psychoanalysis, historical and anthropological studies, film, and cultural studies.” Feminist critiques of Freudian psychoanalytic models, especially of the Oedipus complex, have been widely adopted by literary and film critics and scholars, and this exchange “has modified traditional psychoanalytic investigations, making them receptive to new interpretations.” In her own work, Professor Rodriguez draws fully on such interdisciplinary connections in striving “to achieve a balance among the diverse ideological, ethical, and aesthetic contexts at work in artistic productions.”

Professor Rodriguez’ interest in interdisciplinary and multicultural approaches is also reflected in her teaching. “I do not believe in the rigid limits that our academic programs of study at times impose. The extreme division between Peninsular and Latin American studies is still very frequent, and in general our courses reflect that dichotomy sharply.” In her courses she frequently includes works by both Spanish and Latin American writers such as Susana Torres Molina, Daimela Eltit, Mireya Robles, Rosario Ferré, and strives “to establish connections among diverse periods, countries, and cultures.” Her class discussion tends to focus on such topics as gender and cultural production, oppression and resistance, family and state, sexual identity and orientation, and the transformations of contemporary narrative fiction by Hispanic and Spanish writers in the context of postmodernity. “I always pay special attention,” she remarks, “to theoretical and critical texts, and include readings and lectures about the socio-political context in which these works were created.” In her course “Gender, Sexuality, and the Nation: Artistic Representations in Hispanic Cultures,” which will be offered in Spring 2002, Professor Rodriguez presents a view of contemporary Hispanic cultures through paintings, literature, and film. She pays particular attention to traditionally marginalized authors such as Rigoberta Menchú, Luis Zapata, Gloria Anzaldúa, Luisa Valenzuela, and focuses on such issues as politics in artistic production, discourse and corporeality, violence, nostalgia and nationalism in postmodernity. “I try to include works that lead to an analysis supported by feminist and queer theory,” she states. “On the one hand, for me, it is fundamental to rescue certain artists who have traditionally been marginalized by academic studies, and, on the other hand, to try to include approaches that stem from more innovative and critical readings when analyzing canonical works (such as those read in LitHum or in other, more traditional courses). Ideally, such readings allow us to view these works from new perspectives.”

According to Professor Rodriguez, IRWaG plays a crucial role for the intellectual life of Columbia. Not only does it provide a space for courses, talks, conferences, and reading and discussion groups that would otherwise be excluded from the academic life of the university, but also, insofar as it is the focus of increasing collaborations with other departments, it makes possible the
realization of new projects that contribute enormously to the richness and depth of academic life. “It is particularly important,” she states, “that IRWaG, as an institute for gender studies, looks also for new explorations of masculinities, and that it opens its doors to queer theory in its multiple manifestations.” Teaching feminist theory over the past year, Professor Rodriguez has been impressed with the students that the Institute attracts: “The students seem to me to be the best that I have had on an undergraduate level, especially motivated, hardworking, and intellectually sophisticated. For me it is truly a pleasure to discuss the readings with them and share their concerns. It is no longer possible to marginalize feminist advances in all fields of study, and I am enthusiastic about the way in which the field of feminist and gender studies continues to function with a level of activity that is uncommon in other areas.” Professor Rodriguez hopes to continue her participation as a faculty member at the Institute which she appreciates not only for its academic richness, but also for its strongly collegial atmosphere.

**Director’s, continued from page 1**

topics (see ‘Senior Projects’ in this issue). When they summarized their theses for a large group of teachers and friends at the end of the spring semester, those of us in the audience were struck by the depth of the research and the liveliness of the ideas.

The lecture series that we began this year, entitled *Queer Futures*, was an enormous success. In November, Rosalind Morris, spoke to a packed room on “Un timely Meditations on the Future of Queer Studies.” And both of our panel discussions engaged a full house of interested participants. In February, Kristina Mihor, Julie Crawford, Greg Pflugfelder (all of Columbia) joined Matthew Sommer of the University of Pennsylvania for a discussion entitled “Queer Futures: Premodern.” In April, David Eng, Janet Jakobsen, and Ann Pellegrini (all of Columbia) joined Amy Villarejo of Cornell University for a discussion entitled “Queer Futures Right Now!”

As always, our *Feminist Interventions* series were well attended lectures of the highest intellectual caliber. One of the most popular events of the entire academic year was the *Feminist Intervention* given by Farah Griffin (Professor, English and Comparative Literature) and cosponsored by the Center for Jazz Studies. The enormous success of this evening bears witness to what we do best at the Institute: encourage and support interdisciplinary discussions of gender-related topics.

When I began my directorship last June, one of my first duties was to plan and organize the lectures for *Feminist Interventions*. In a sense, one’s goal here is to let the voices of women—both past and present—sing forth. Imagine my delight to discover that Professor Farah Griffin would be joining the English and Comparative Literature Department at Columbia. Professor Griffin has spent much of her academic career making public long-silenced women’s voices. Whether it is the stories of women who have migrated from the rural south to the urban north, or the letters of nineteenth-century lovers like Addie Brown and Rebecca Primus, Farah’s work has brought forth the voices of previously silent African-American women. Farah’s original idea was that she would discuss “the” Black woman’s singing voice. Farah and I then agreed that Robert O’Meally, the Zora Neale Hurston Professor of English and Comparative Literature, and the founder and director of the Center for Jazz Studies at Columbia, should get involved. Not only was Bob O’Meally willing to cosponsor the event, he wondered if Farah would like to be accompanied; and before long, the wonderful Bernice Johnson Reagon agreed to add her voice to the evening’s program. Professor Reagon is best known as the founder and director of Sweet Honey in the Rock, but she is also the Smithsonian Institute’s distinguished curator of African-American culture. Given both the reputation of Farah Griffin and the enormous popularity of Dr. Reagon, we needed a large space for this intertwining of ideas and music. The Columbia Chaplain, Jewel nell Davis, then generously volunteered St. Paul’s Chapel. At the Institute, we were enormously proud when, after a gestation period of nine months, we brought forth one of the most exciting intellectual events that many of us had ever witnessed on Columbia campus.

Professor Griffin gave a fascinating lecture, followed by the singing and comments of Dr. Reagon. In response to Bernice Johnson Reagon’s request, those of us packed into St. Paul’s Chapel happily accompanied her as she lent her remarkable talent to singing a moving selection long-forgotten slave songs. The combination of penetrating lecture and sublime music represents the best kind of interdisciplinary work, and the sort of intellectual exchange that the Institute is committed to encourage.

We are also proud to announce several new courses which will be offered for the first time this academic year. These include one cosponsored with the Southern Asian Institute entitled “Gender and South Asia,” and a course on film theory entitled “Hollywood Film Since 1948.” As promised, we now have a course on Queer Theory, entitled “Introduction to Queer Theory.” Moreover, there are a number of new courses listed in our course guide that can count toward the major (please see the complete list of courses on page 16). It promises to be an exciting year for our students and colleagues.

It has been a pleasure to be Director of the Institute. I would like to thank Kathleen Savage, Page Jackson, and my students and colleagues for their encouragement and help over the past year. The new academic year promises to be an exciting one. I wish all of you a productive semester, and invite you to join us at the Institute in another year of academic events and intellectual accomplishments.
# Fall 2001 Courses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Code</th>
<th>Course Name</th>
<th>Instructor(s)</th>
<th>Days/Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>V1001</td>
<td>Intro—Women and Gender Studies</td>
<td>N. Kampen/S. Ortner</td>
<td>T/R: 10:35-11:50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V3111</td>
<td>Feminist Texts I</td>
<td>T. Sheffield</td>
<td>R: 2:10-4:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V3112</td>
<td>Feminist Texts II</td>
<td>L. Tiersten</td>
<td>T: 2:10-4:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V3121</td>
<td>Black Women in America</td>
<td>L. Perkins</td>
<td>M: 11:00-12:50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V3122</td>
<td>The Jewish Woman</td>
<td>I. Klepfsz</td>
<td>T/R: 1:10-2:25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V3311</td>
<td>Colloquium in Feminist Theory</td>
<td>A. Pellegrini</td>
<td>W: 11:00-12:50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V3520</td>
<td>Senior Seminar</td>
<td>L. Abu-Lughod</td>
<td>W: 11-12:50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V3813</td>
<td>Colloquium on Feminist Inquiry</td>
<td>E. Baker</td>
<td>T: 4:10-6:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V3915</td>
<td>Gender &amp; Power in Global Perspective</td>
<td>L. Abu-Lughod</td>
<td>T: 11:00-12:50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V3925</td>
<td>Hollywood Film Since 1948</td>
<td>K. Lentz</td>
<td>M: 11:00-12:50</td>
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<td>W4300</td>
<td>Search for Self</td>
<td>I. Klepfsz</td>
<td>R: 4:10-6:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W4300</td>
<td>Sexuality and Science</td>
<td>R. Young</td>
<td>T: 11:00-12:50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W4320</td>
<td>Intro to Queer Studies</td>
<td>J. Jakobsen</td>
<td>W: 2:10-4:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W4485</td>
<td>Gender and South Asia</td>
<td>D. Siddiqi</td>
<td>M: 1:00-3:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G4000</td>
<td>Genealogies of Feminism</td>
<td>R. Roemkens</td>
<td>R: 4:10-6:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G8010</td>
<td>Sex and Text In and Out of China</td>
<td>D. Ko</td>
<td>W: 2:00-4:00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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### Feminist Interventions

**Monday, October 1, 2001**  
*Martha Howell*  
Professor of History, Columbia University  
**The Properties of Marriage in Late Medieval Europe**  
*Sherry Ortner* responding  
8:00 pm, 501 Schermerhorn Hall  
**Monday, December 3, 2001**  
*Poetry Reading*  
8:00 pm, 501 Schermerhorn Hall

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### Feminist News

**Institute for Research on Women and Gender**  
Columbia University  
763 Schermerhorn Extension  
New York, NY 10027

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