IRWaG Welcomes New Director Lila Abu-Lughod

This fall, Professor Lila Abu-Lughod will take up the directorship of IRWaG, replacing Professor Rosalind C. Morris of the Department of Anthropology, who has served as Director of IRWaG over the past five years (see Director’s Column in this issue). With a joint appointment in Women’s and Gender Studies, and Anthropology, Professor Abu-Lughod is the first IRWaG permanent faculty member to fill this position.

A scholar of the Middle East, Professor Abu-Lughod has made important contributions to both anthropology and gender studies and these have extended far beyond the geographical boundaries of her work. In her books Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society (University of California Press, 1986) and Writing Women’s Worlds: Bedouin Stories (University of California Press, 1993), as well as in numerous articles and edited collections, Professor Abu-Lughod’s ethnographic research on the Awlad ‘Ali Bedouin community in Egypt has made an impact in helping to set the terms of “feminist ethnography,” in redefining the nature and study of resistance, and most recently, in illuminating the gendered consumption of mass media in specific national-cultural contexts.

Professor Abu-Lughod joined Columbia from New York University in 2000, and she has already contributed much to the IRWaG community as its Undergraduate Director and supervisor of its yearly senior thesis projects. We anticipate benefitting from her knowledge, experience, and scholarship for many years to come.

Last spring, Feminist News contacted Professor Abu-Lughod in Egypt, where she was conducting fieldwork, to ask about her current research and future projects and the directions she plans to pursue as Director of IRWaG. This was her reply:

I am at a crossroads now with my own research, making this a great time to take on the directorship of IRWaG. My book on the politics of television in Egypt, Dramas of Nationhood, will be published this winter. It draws from more than a decade of research spent exploring how popular television serials bind, and fail to bind, women to the nation, and it has been an amazing project, taking me deep into the mediated lives of a rich set of people and into Egyptian political discourse.

Back now in the village where I did fieldwork, I am seeing again just how critical television is. The last few days have been full of excited talk about the film crew, famous television actors, and local extras (including camels and horses) that are here shooting on location for a new television serial!

Over the next few years, I'll be working on two new projects, quite different from each other. One is a critical reflection on Palestinian memory, inspired by my late father’s memoirs. I'm working on a volume with a Palestinian colleague at Ben Gurion University on memory of “the catastrophe,” as 1948 is known. My own essay considers what happens when memory is inserted into ongoing history, and what, in particular, Abu-Lughod, continued on page 12

Director’s Column By Rosalind Morris

This is the last column I will write for IRWaG as Director, and it marks the end of five years (less one of leave) in the offices at 763 Schermerhorn. I am delighted to be turning the reins over to Professor Lila Abu-Lughod, the first permanent IRWaG faculty member to assume the mantle of Director. Professor Abu-Lughod’s tenure as Director will commence a new stage in the life of the Institute, which will finally welcome onto campus all of its faculty members. In addition to Alice Kessler-Harris, who was the first of our recruits under the new structure of cross-appointed, permanent faculty, Professor Abu-Lughod will be joined this Fall by Professors Marianne Hirsch and Elizabeth Povinelli (see the faculty profile columns in this issue). A hearty welcome to them all! It is my hope that you, readers, will make them as welcome and as supported as you have made me feel during my time here.

It is possible, in a moment of departure, to achieve a degree of lucidity and frankness greater than at other times, when one’s thoughts are clouded or at least constrained by pragmatic considerations. Director’s, continued on page 2
Director’s, continued from page 1

In the hopes that my own departure will enable such clarity, I would like to use this final column to speak more directly than I have in the past about the issues that now face IRWaG and the feminist community in general. These are dominated by institutional transformation and by the context in which we at Columbia University continue to try to think. For our context is not merely a neighborhood—Morningside Heights and Manhattanville—but also a condition or, rather, a predicament: namely war. If Columbia imagines itself to be at the vanguard of a new kind of intellectual project, often written under the rubric of critical globalization, and if that new intellectual project corresponds to a stage of physical expansion as the University seeks to extend its domain into the historically black community of West Harlem, it is perhaps wise to reflect upon the relationship between thought and geopolitical practice.

Over the past five years, IRWaG has gained a degree of institutional stability that will allow it to grow and transform in response to student demand and new scholarly trends, while preserving a solid core of feminist scholarship rooted in the tradition of critical thought. The Institute hopes to play a significant role in the changes that Columbia University undertakes as it engages the issues and problems of globalization and the transformation of the sciences. Increased resources, faculty development, and curriculum enhancement aimed at the latter areas must be oriented by the fundamental need to account for gender and to understand the gendered consequences of knowledge and practice across a variety of social and institutional contexts. At the same time, feminist scholarship at Columbia must not forget the foundational contributions and concepts that have emerged (and that continue to be made) within the humanities. Developments in medicine that continue to try to think. For our context is not merely a neighborhood—Morningside Heights and Manhattanville—but also a condition or, rather, a predicament: namely war. If Columbia imagines itself to be at the vanguard of a new kind of intellectual project, often written under the rubric of critical globalization, and if that new intellectual project corresponds to a stage of physical expansion as the University seeks to extend its domain into the historically black community of West Harlem, it is perhaps wise to reflect upon the relationship between thought and geopolitical practice.

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Conference Report: “Can the Subaltern Speak?”
Reflections on the History of an Idea

Last February, the Institute for Research on Women and Gender held a one-day symposium at Casa Italiana to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s original writing of her landmark essay, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Although the essay had been presented earlier, at a conference at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, it was not published until five years later in Marxism and the Interpretation of Cultures. Since then, it has been widely translated, excerpted, and reprinted in numerous collections. Spivak, who is now Avalon Foundation Professor in the Humanities at Columbia and Director of the Center for Comparative Literature and Society, followed this work with writings that continue to have a defining influence across a range of disciplines: In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics, Outside in the Teaching Machine, A Critique of Post-Colonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present and, most recently, Death of a Discipline. As David Freedberg, Professor of Art History at Columbia and the Director of the Italian Academy for Advanced Studies in America, noted in his opening remarks at the symposium, Spivak is a scholar without whom it is impossible to speak of deconstruction, feminism, postcolonial theory, cultural studies, and literary critical analysis in their current incarnations: “Each refers and constantly recurs to Gayatri.”

The papers given at the symposium reflected a similar breadth of concerns. Panelists offered new readings of both the “subaltern” and the possibility of speech referenced in the title; others revisited various elements of Spivak’s critical intervention as they apply to the new global economy. And while some of the participants focused closely upon the original essay, paying tribute to the history and contexts within which it emerged and continues to resonate, several more brought Spivak’s insights into conversation with their own fields of study, including topics both very close to and more removed from the material Spivak draws upon in her own work.

The symposium’s first set of papers, moderated by Lisa Anderson, Dean of the School of International and Public Affairs, provided a history of the production and reception of “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in India and elsewhere. Ritu Birlu, Assistant Professor in the Department of History at the University of Toronto, gave an explanatory and introductory reading of the essay, while Partha Chatterjee of the Anthropology Department reflected upon how it impacted the Subaltern Studies group, a group of scholars of South Asia for whom Spivak first delivered her paper in 1983.

For how can the subaltern speak on his or her own behalf when the subaltern is a category defined in terms of what it is not—a space of pure negation?

Chatterjee (whose contribution was read by his colleague, Franz Boas Professor of Anthropology Nicholas B. Dirks) remembered the “initial bewilderment” Spivak’s intervention first encountered. At the time, subaltern studies was still in its first phase of what was, then, a largely recuperative project, which sought to restore the perspectives of subaltern groups to colonial and nationalist narratives previously focused upon vertical histories of elites. Spivak, on the other hand, critiques both first-world and third-world intellectuals for misunderstanding the capacity of those subordinate to and disempowered by the ruling elite to represent themselves. Since the subaltern is only visible in the colonial archive as absence, Spivak argues, the attempt to make a sovereign subject out of this very absence falls prey to essentialism. While we can trace textual gaps and their effects, her essay maintains, we cannot make the subaltern speak intelligibly through this absence without also radically transforming the speaker. For how can the subaltern speak on his or her own behalf when the subaltern is a category defined in terms of what it is not—a space of pure negation?

Spivak pursues this question in the second half of her essay, in which she examines the colonial history of sati (widow self-immolation). For the female subaltern, she argues, sati-suicide was an act so overdetermined by the local patriarchal discourses that demanded it and the colonial legal structures that prohibited it that almost no other narrative could be voiced within it. As a closing example, Spivak cited the case of Bhuvaneswari Bhaduri, a young woman who committed suicide in the 1920s because, it was revealed a decade later, she was involved in the armed struggle for Indian independence and had been entrusted with a political assassination that she could not bring herself to fulfill. Faced with the need for silence, Bhaduri instead chose to hang herself; but in order to contradict the common assumption that blamed “illicit passion” for such acts, she waited until she was menstruating to do so. Yet despite Bhaduri’s attempt to frustrate the narrative conventions surrounding female suicide, her family nonetheless read her political decision as a gesture of frustrated femininity or delirium. “There is no space from which the sexed subaltern subject can speak,” Spivak concludes—not because Bhaduri was not speaking, but because from the space of subalternity, she was unable to be heard.

For the scholars of the Subaltern Studies group, Chatterjee recalled, Spivak’s essay and its demand for critical reflexivity effected a

Conference, continued on page 13
New Voices at Columbia: IRWaG Welcomes Elizabeth Povinelli

What do land claims made by indigenous Australians have in common with transnational queer movements such as Radical Fairies? The difference between “there” and “here,” “race” and “sexuality,” “cultural identity” and “alternative movement” could not appear more stark. But what truly seems to separate these two phenomena is the basis upon which each group and their claims to legitimacy are recognized. While both live within political worlds constructed according to the terms of liberal humanism, only gays and lesbians are permitted to define themselves according to the usual terms of Western subjecthood (in this case, “lifestyle choice”). For indigenous Australians, on the other hand, the very legitimacy of Aboriginal identity—and, hence, the ability to make legal and political claims—rests upon genealogical definitions of inheritance, tradition, and culture that are not of their own making. In other words: one chooses to be queer, one is established to be Aboriginal.

Such discourses may be mutually unintelligible, but appearances to the contrary, they are not independent. Rather, argues Professor Elizabeth Povinelli, who joins Columbia this fall as Professor through a cross appointment to Anthropology, and Law, both forms of postcolonial critical study of the impact of progressive land rights legislation in the mid-1970s upon Belyuen, a small indigenous community in northern Australia who may no longer choose freedom but rather may only have it given to them by their occupiers.

For Professor Povinelli, this image of gridlock expresses how ideology doesn’t need to be coherent—but rather only “to manage its incoherence”—in order to distribute power and life-force effectively. Only at certain moments, she observes, do the discourses of intimacy, genealogy, and carnality intersect and these crucial incoherencies within postcolonial liberalism become visible. For example, she explains, “we act as if subjecthood in the West is all about people making life choices and making bodily determinations, but whenever we hit a space where the social is organized in terms of genealogical inheritance”—such as interracial intimacies several generations ago, or queer marriage more recently—“the liberal subject gets thrown out and a moral limit emerges that we can’t exceed. Suddenly marriage is no longer about love or recognition or worth, but the making of babies. It produces a lot of anxiety: are we subjects determined by our choices—or by our skin color or genitals? And what are the ramifications of determining this?”

Such questions concerning gender, sexuality, and the politics of recognition animate a body of work Professor Povinelli describes more generally as a critical study of postcolonial liberalism. Based on nearly twenty years of research into indigenous groups living on the northwest coast of Australia, her books examine how colonial history (and liberal postcolonial reactions to it) shaped not only liberal systems of indigenous land rights legislation, but also local indigenous cultures and social practices, particularly the role of gender in the making and unmaking of Aboriginal culture. Central to Professor Povinelli’s work is a commitment to history and ethnography that does not treat such material as mere illustration, but rather challenges anthropologists to produce theories of liberalism as a social practice. By situating her philosophical interventions within the actual everyday lives of indigenous and non-indigenous persons, Professor Povinelli insists that the analysis of liberalism must be embedded within existing social worlds, rather than in possible worlds of political philosophy that seek to produce normative theories of what liberalism could or ought to be.

For example, Professor Povinelli’s first book, Labor’s Lot: The Power, History and Culture of Aboriginal Action (Chicago, 1994) examines the impact of progressive land rights legislation in the mid-1970s upon Belyuen, a small indigenous community in northern Australia who were then engaged in the longest-running indigenous land claim in the Northern Territory. Liberal legislation was intended to support indigenous spiritual traditions, but it demanded that indigenous claimants
multiculturalism (Duke, 2002), which Alterity and the Making of Australian Professor Povinelli's second book, The liberalism views as inherently subjects themselves in terms that culture, it constituted indigenous recognized the worth of indigenous very moment in which the law themselves and their families in the made on the basis of a distinct cultural resilience with which Belyuen social status. turn, had uneven effects across law and public life. (For example, a demand for native title could only be made on the basis of a distinct impasse this politics of recognition presents for Australian liberal thought forms the ground for Professor Povinelli's second book, The Cunning of Recognition: Indigenous Alterity and the Making of Australian Multiculturalism (Duke, 2002), which received an Artforum Best Book of the Year award for 2002 and was short-listed for the W.E.H. Stanner Award for 2003. Here, she traces the emergence of the specifically Australian liberal political discourse of cultural tolerance to argue that it is liberalism's strong ethical obligation to difference that perpetuates rather than rectifies unequal power relations. That is, it is not the failure of liberal principles but in fact their very commitment to diversity that results in the political stalemate detailed in Labor's Lot, in which the right to self-determination comes into conflict with the liberal regime's reliance upon inheritance to determine cultural identity and property relations. Professor Povinelli makes this argument by examining how Australian multiculturalism arose in part out of the (often sexual) discourses and encounters that colonial settlers had with indigenous alterity. These encounters ultimately produced contrasting—and even contradictory—legal, ethical, and social forms and practices that, in turn, had uneven effects across law and public life. (For example, a demand for native title could only be made on the basis of a distinct Aboriginal culture, yet some of these very Aboriginal practices were nonetheless subject to criminal prosecution under Australian common law.)

Professor Povinelli's current book project on gridlock, which is now nearing completion, might be understood as an expansion of these earlier works, in both the theoretical and geographic sense of the term. For while Australia is an exemplary site through which to study the social effects of liberal multiculturalism, the question remains not only as to how the forms of life demanded of indigenous Australians relate to regimes of multicultural recognition elsewhere, but also and more importantly, how these regimes connect to other, "more standard" ways through which Western subjects are defined and empowered to make demands.

Instead of attempting to translate between two bounded groups, such as indigenous Australians and Radical Fairies, however, Professor's Povinelli describes this latest project as coordinated, rather than comparative. As such, she envisions her work as a corrective to recent scholarship that, in her view, has literalized and hence misunderstood the work of late French philosopher Michel Foucault, whose work (particularly the History of Sexuality, Volume I) has had a decisive impact upon sexuality studies. Many of these studies, she argues, treat the examination of discourses of gender and sexuality in specific cultural and historical contexts as if they were part of a "speciation project"—the comparative study of sexuality in particular national-cultural sites. This literalism of the referent, however, misses what is most crucial about Foucault's intervention. The point of studying discourses of gender and sexuality, Professor Povinelli points out, is to understand how power is organized and how life worlds, resources, culpabilities and obligations, etc. are distributed. Her concern is thus to examine the circulation among phenomena that on the surface do not appear to be connected, in order to illuminate how the gridlock among the discourses of intimacy, genealogy, and carnality impacts the politics of recognition within specific postcolonial liberalisms. 

What kinds of life options and life experiences do these discourses to their own lives, and their coherence in describing the lives of even the most ubiquitous of modern subjects?

Another ongoing writing project similarly contributes to these theoretical meditations on alterity and the politics of recognition. Building on material she has already published, Professor Povinelli is working on a set of essays that concern the intersection of language theory and liberalism, examining how the fundamental tension within contemporary anthropological approaches to language reflect specific tensions within the unfolding history of postcolonial liberalism. Although the eventual book-length manuscript will be single-authored, she considers the research project to be collaborative in nature: the outcome of ongoing conversations in several long-standing interdisciplinary and inter-university working groups research circles, including the Michigan Linguistic Circle, the Center for Transnational Cultural Studies, and the Late Liberalism Group. Professor Povinelli plans to continue her participation in such supra-university academic working groups and foundations at Columbia; for example, she will continue on as a member of the editorial collective of Public Culture (for which she served as editor 1999-2004), a publication of the Center for Povinelli, continued on page 11
New Voices at Columbia: IRWaG Welcomes Marianne Hirsch

A turn-of-the-century family photograph of her grandmother and aunt, frozen in a half-embrace, forms the cover image of Marianne Hirsch’s second book, *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism* (1989), a study of the representation of the family in literature. Drawing from literature, psychoanalysis, and feminist theory, *The Mother/Daughter Plot* examines the role of the family in constituting gender and power relations in culture: what Professor Hirsch calls “how families tell stories about themselves (to themselves and to others).” But for Professor Hirsch, who will join IRWaG this semester through a cross-appointment with Columbia’s Department of English and who previously taught at Dartmouth, where she was a Ted and Helen Geisel Third Century Professor in the Humanities, publishing this photograph did more than illustrate the book’s contents. It provided a way for her to narrate a more intimate relationship toward both the theme of her completed work and the distant family history that the photograph embodied. By framing the photograph with the book’s title above and her name below, as Professor Hirsch explained in a subsequent discussion of the photograph in her book *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory* (1997), she not only made her personal investment in “the mother/daughter plot” more explicit than she had perhaps realized while studying it, but she also inserted herself more directly within the play of gazes and familial relationships that the photograph contained. In other words, using the photograph of her grandmother and aunt made the book feel more her “own,” just as its framing by the book’s title and her own authorship enabled her to find her place within that photograph’s particular family history.

But the story conveyed by the photograph goes beyond that suggested by the book’s contents or Professor Hirsch’s particular investment in the subjects of the image themselves, or even the nostalgia evoked in the viewer by the fashion and visual conventions of the long-vanished world they represent. For the cover image, in deference to a visual aesthetics of “authenticity,” reproduces all the flaws of the original—the rough edge, the wrinkles, the scratches upon the surface—and in so doing, it testifies to the auratic power invested in the material substance of the photograph itself. Hirsch’s argument is that photographs mediate family narratives and family memory. They do not merely record: they also create and substantiate the myths and realities of family life. But as objects, photographs are nearly as crucial as their subjects: after the past century’s destruction, dislocation, and historical disjuncture, photographs have become an important instrument for preserving family continuity. As Professor Hirsch observes, “photographs and objects do more than to supplement the accounts of historians and the words of witnesses: they carry memory traces from the past, but they also embody the very process of its transmission.”

Photographs are both substance and symbol of the larger phenomenon that has dominated Professor Hirsch’s recent scholarship: what she terms “postmemory.” Postmemory refers to the memory of the “generation after”—those whose lives are dominated by events that they did not experience personally but that were handed down to them by previous generations. For Professor Hirsch, the term enables her to confront and conceptualize more directly her own subject position as a woman, an immigrant, and a child of Jewish Holocaust survivors. *Family Frames* (1997), for example, combines theoretical reflections upon photography and memory with personal writing and readings of literary and artistic texts that use and comment upon the genre of family photography. Professor Hirsch has also edited two collections (*The Familial Gaze and Time and the Literary*), and she has co-edited a forthcoming collection with Irene Kacandes, *Teaching the Representation of the Holocaust* (MLA Options for Teaching series, 2004).

Currently, Professor Hirsch is focused on a new project, which she describes as not only more personal and more narratively-oriented than *Family Frames*, but also more historical. Funded by grants from the Guggenheim and the ACLS, *Ghosts of Home: Czernowitz and the Holocaust* is inspired by a return journey Professor Hirsch and historian Leo Spitzer took with her parents to Czernowitz (now Chernivtsi, in the Ukraine), the city of her parents’ birth. Drawing from a wealth of contemporary and historical resources (videotaped oral histories, fiction, poetry, memoirs, letters, family photographs, and archival records), Professors Hirsch and Spitzer set out to recapture the history and memory of Czernowitz as both a place and idea—as a cultural community shattered by the Second World War, but also transplanted and recreated in diasporic recollection.

“Until the end of World War I,” Professor Hirsch explains, “Czernowitz was the capital of the Bukowina, a province of the Austro-Hungarian empire. Once viewed as the ‘Vienna of the East,’” its multi-ethnic, multilingual population included a large number of Jews who, following their social and political emancipation under the Habsburgs, whole-heartedly embraced the German language, its literature, and the social and cultural standards of the Austro-Germanic world. Living on the margins of the empire, emancipated Jews in the Bukowina became willing agents of Germanization and Austrian hegemony in the 19th and early 20th century. Indeed, even after the Bukowina’s annexation by Greater Romania in 1918,
the region’s Jews continued their lively participation in Austro-German cultural life, producing some of the most celebrated German-language literature of the 20th century.

“But Czernowitz was also the place in which Jews would increasingly suffer anti-Semitism and discrimination—where, during the early years of World War II, they were interned in a ghetto, forced to wear the yellow star, and from where a majority were deported to forced-labor camps or to perish in Transnistria. Of the more than 60,000 Jews who had inhabited the city at the start of the war, less than half were alive at its conclusion. Most of these survivors left the city after it was annexed by the Soviet Union in 1945, and Cernau became Chernovtsy. If Czernowitz and its rich German-Jewish culture exist at all nowadays, it is only in the language and memory of its survivors and in the mediated ‘postmemory’ of their children and grandchildren.”

Ghosts of Home is simultaneously one such postmemory (a “second-generation memoir”) and a cultural history, told as a narrative of two trips to the Ukraine in 1998 and 2000, and as an historical account of the region’s German-Jewish population between the late nineteenth century and the end of World War Two. Its focus is upon individuals and families whose destinies took different turns during the Holocaust and its aftermath, but in telling these stories, the book also illuminates the distinct culture of Czernowitz and its role in some of the defining narratives of Europe’s twentieth century: what Professor Hirsch describes as “the intensity and reach, but also the tragedy, of the German-Jewish symbiosis; the encounter between fascism and communism; the displacement of refugees; and the shadow of Holocaust memory on the children and grandchildren of survivors.”

Indeed, Professor Hirsch continues, producing the book as an act of collaboration has added further dimension to this interplay among family, memory, narrative, and cultural history. The difference between the two co-authors is not merely one of different disciplines and methodologies, but of personal relationships to the subject. Professor Spitzer’s family is also from the old Austro-Hungary, a culture he has studied and written about a great deal, but “he is more historian than participant,” Professor Hirsch says, whereas she considers herself to be “very much a participant as well as a scholar of this material.” As such, “our work on these family archives and family stories has made us conscious of how deeply invested most academic work actually is; the transference is just more obvious for us in this particular project.”

In other words, it is not despite but precisely because the project is such a very personal one for Professor Hirsch—“an act of recovery and memorialization”—that makes it of broader importance to contemporary studies of history, memory, and acts of generational transmission and retrospective witnessing. Collaborative, interdisciplinary, and self-reflexive, Ghosts of Home exemplifies what the cultural historian James Young has identified as a new genre in historiography, the “received history”—“the combined study of both what happened and how it is passed down to us.” How did a small provincial city produce such a rich cosmopolitan culture that its Jewish population would continue to preserve and protect their positive memories of it, even in the wake of the devastating trauma that followed? What role did the Habsburg Empire’s multi-ethnic tolerance—however real or mythologized in retrospect—play in this process? And what is the relationship between nostalgia and negative/traumatic memories, and how do the ways they co-exist and inflect each other pass down to the next generation?

Capturing the effects of the past on the present, and of the “telling” on the witness and the listener, Ghosts of Home aims to reclaim the memories, artifacts and discourses of ordinary persons who might otherwise remain hidden from history. As such, Professor Hirsch says, the project also continues her work on how the tropes and codes through which a culture represents its past are marked by gender, race, class, sexuality and other conventional identity markers, and how these markings intersect, shift and evolve. “Gender inflects the structure of archives, what gets preserved, what archival items are valued, what stories are remembered, and which forgotten or erased,” Professor Hirsch says. “It inflects the questions we ask of the past, and thus also the answers we receive or fail to receive.” Professor Hirsch also addresses the relationship between memory and gender in a special issue of Signs that she co-edited with Valerie Smith of Princeton University, as do several of her recent essays on contemporary second-generation artists and writers who re-use and re-appropriate objects, images and documents inherited from the Holocaust era; she plans to collect these pieces in a book called Points of Memory: Visuality, Gender, Generation. For the next two and a half years, Professor Hirsch will continue to share her research, teaching and writing time with her duties as editor of PMLA, the primary journal in modern languages and literatures. This editorial work has been challenging as well as time-consuming, she says, but she has enjoyed the processes of blind editorial review and the close work with authors and the editorial board. Under her editorship, PMLA is developing several special topics, such as the one on “Cities” that has recently been announced. Other recent and upcoming activities include organizing an interdisciplinary and international conference on “Contested Memories of the Holocaust,” held at Dartmouth last April, and serving on the program committee of the biannual “Lessons and Legacies” conference to be held at Brown in November.

Here at Columbia, Professor Hirsch has been speaking to her IRWaG colleagues about organizing a conference on “Motherhood,” as well as a discussion group (perhaps also to culminate in a conference) on “Memory, Exile, and Diaspora.” She is teaching an upper-level seminar in English, cross-listed with IRWaG, on “Trauma, Narrative and Gender in the Twentieth Century” this year, and has proposed future courses through IRWaG that include...
War is a political phenomenon that makes men and women its agents—in ways that are over-determined by the sometimes-violent social structures of gender, race, and class difference.

We see this daily in the figure of the woman warrior (whether as US army soldier or as suicide bomber) who is returning to adorn the cultural myths of the moment. Often poor, uneducated, passionate but willing to surrender her erotic life, and driven by deeply-felt ideals that are themselves reflections of local ideology, the new woman warrior demands our attention. In my opinion, she should be read as the exemplary instance of a world of total militarization. For, the woman warrior emerges in those moments when the boundaries between combatants and non-combatants are finally eliminated. Now, as in the past (she has appeared periodically in many times and places), she testifies to the impossibility of what early twentieth century writers, such as Sigmund Freud, described prior to the establishment of the Geneva conventions as “civilized war.”

After the rape camps of Bosnia or the strategic deployment of sexual violence in the “ethnocidal” wars of Rwanda—after the rationalization of sexual violence in the service of foreign policy around the world—we should not be surprised to find the woman warrior rising on our horizon. She is the inverted image of this development: the generalization of war that we see elsewhere in the collapse of distinctions between warfare, police action, and peace-keeping. When there is no longer a difference between peace-keeping and war-making, when one cannot tell where the war ends and the home-front starts, the woman warrior appears. We need now to understand not only how this has occurred, but how to overcome such a development—not by re-domesticating women, but by comprehending the nature of militarization: a process that afflicts not merely policy and geopolitical relations but thought and cultural practice at all levels.

I am proud of the fact that IRWaG has been a major force in the public discourse about war and its consequences at Columbia University, having hosted numerous conferences, symposia, film screenings, and lectures which have allowed students, faculty, and members of the public to question the events and political trends through which we have all been forced to live, especially since 9/11. In this, as in all of our activities, IRWaG has undertaken to emphasize the difference between critical thought in which women are token presences (or token speakers at conferences) and the kind of critical engagement that makes gender a foundational question without reducing all social phenomena to a matter of gender. We have and will continue to oppose tokenism just as we have and will continue to support the thorough and systematic analysis of gender and the violences or exclusions committed in its name.

Not everything we do at IRWaG has been motivated by a sense of responsibility to the politics of the present war, however. We have been eager to facilitate conversations about domestic policy and legal reform, foreign aid and development, reproductive technologies, queer issues and sexuality, cultural production in the US and abroad, literature, the arts, religious practice and ideology. Our palette has been diverse, our range of concerns broad. Over the past few years, we have reached out to members of our School of the Arts, and in recent months, we have expanded our contacts with the sciences, and engaged students in their pursuit of careers devoted to service and care, medical research, and development.

All in all, we have striven to be open to any and all members of the Columbia University community concerned with and committed to the critical analysis of gender in whatever form that takes. Such is the legacy of IRWaG. It is one of which I have been glad to be a part, one to which I hope I have contributed, and one which I am happy to see pass on that it might assume a new form and a new life under Professor Abu-Lughod’s leadership. Here, then, I wish Lila Abu-Lughod the best of luck. To the readers of Feminist News, I extend my thanks and my best wishes, for success in the future, but mostly for peace.
Senior Projects

Eight seniors majoring in Women’s and Gender Studies wrote theses at IRWaG last year, under the supervision of Professors Lila Abu-Lughod and Karen Van Dyck, who alternated as Directors of Undergraduate Studies. With topics ranging from the philosophy of language and the initiation rituals of African-American sororities, to breast cancer treatment and prevention programs in the US and the Philippines, the diversity of these projects speaks both to the broad relevance of Women’s and Gender Studies as a discipline, and IRWaG’s success in conveying this interdisciplinary reach to students. Indeed, despite the very different interventions, logics, and agendas that otherwise characterize each senior thesis, what this diversity reflects is the students’ common understanding that gender is not merely one lens through which to examine other forms of difference (such as race, ethnicity, class, religion, and sexuality), but that questions of women and gender cannot be studied without taking these other questions into consideration—and vice-versa.

Nadia Guessous, a Ph.D. candidate in Cultural Anthropology now conducting fieldwork on Islamic family law reform and the women’s movement in Morocco, worked closely with the students as their Writing Tutor during the spring semester. “In the fall, Professor Lila Abu-Lughod [now Director of IRWaG—see Director’s Column in this issue] led the senior seminar and helped the students in coming up with a project and designing a research question,” she explains. “My role in the spring was to meet with the seniors individually to help them develop their ideas, work out the structure of their arguments, and translate them into writing.” The task the seniors faced, Guessous notes, was a challenging one: to narrow down what were initially very ambitious projects, while at the same time producing work that would constitute an intervention into feminist studies and their own disciplines, and satisfying those multiple audiences all at once.

“It was extremely interesting to see young scholars learn how to produce an original piece of work that would nonetheless engage with pre-existing scholarship,” Guessous continues. “No one else could have written those projects”—each of the topics was not only deeply personal to the students, but a number of the students explicitly identified as members of the group or community she or he was examining. Yet many of the students were nonetheless hesitant to use the first person pronoun in their writing or to foreground their personal investments in the topic. “You come to Columbia and you read Aristotle and Plato,” Guessous explained. “Students felt they didn’t have ‘permission’ to talk about themselves.” But one of the contributions of feminist theory has been to refuse rigid distinctions between the philosophical and the personal, and for Guessous, teaching students to speak from their own positions and experience in ways that would maintain their critical engagement was one of the most rewarding aspects of her work.

For example, Ebony Wiresinger produced a history and ethnography of African-American sororities that reflected her own experience not only as someone who had considered joining such a sorority, but who had the rare inside knowledge gleaned from undergoing the screening process. Her thesis examined the contribution of such sororities as women’s organizations, both historically and in the present moment, and to what extent they can be regarded as feminist. Drawing upon historical material on two of the earliest African-American sororities, Wiresinger concluded that while these organizations have served important functions in empowering women and fostering a sense of community, their exclusive nature and the heavy emotional demands made during their selection process also renders them problematic from a feminist standpoint.

Rebecca Brafman similarly studied an organization from the inside to ask its feminist potential. In her case, however, it was Darkhei Noam, an example of one of the new prayer communities available to Modern Orthodox Jewish women, where women can utilize their leadership skills in the religious realm while remaining within the bounds of Jewish tradition. Although Judaism emphasizes involvement in both secular and religious realms, the traditional structure of the sanctuary in Orthodox synagogues separates the sexes and relegates women to second-class status. Such gender roles are considered by some not only to preserve traditional Jewish life and values, but to be necessitated by Jewish law (halacha).

Yet, according to Brafman, many of these laws are not based on any inherent religious inequality but are simply the result of historically-specific practices regarding women’s roles. And just as rabbis earlier reversed halachic laws concerning capital punishment and slavery, Brafman argued, proscriptions against female involvement in religious life are equally capable of being overturned. She thus views mixed kriyah minyanim, ritually observant congregations that have accepted and put into practice new interpretations of rabbinic literature allowing women to read publicly from the Torah and lead specific prayers on behalf of the congregation, as an illustration of the flexibility of the halachic process and its continuing evolution in dealing with modernity. Instead of weakening Jewish tradition, her thesis argues, these congregations strengthen it by harnessing the abilities and enthusiasms of their female members while enabling them to remain within observant Judaism.

A third senior who chose to research one of the organizations she has been involved with was Elizabeth Capone-Newton, who turned a critical gaze upon her own investment in volunteer work in a health program for youth in Harlem. Her thesis on the race, class, and gender politics of such volunteer programs examined the hesitance of student volunteers to acknowledge the privilege that their whiteness and elite education represents, as well as the specifically
Senior, continued from page 9

gendered forms this privilege takes. Capone-Newton argued that the student volunteers who envisioned and established the program she studied did so without explicit emphasis on how systemic racism enables their own institutional access to starting such an organization, even though this racism creates the very conditions of poverty and poor health that the volunteers sought to address. Combining an analysis of gender, race, class, sexuality, access to resources, and other social and developmental influences, she concluded, better enables us to analyze how volunteers express their role as volunteers and their identities as women: that is, how they consider critically the meaning of what volunteers “do.”

Elena Comendador also came to her topic—breast cancer awareness, education, and prevention—in terms of her own activism, and both she and Guessous recall that her early drafts were very impersonal and policy-oriented. Yet as a breast-cancer survivor herself, Comendador had an especially rich source of insight to refer to in creating an agenda for breast cancer advocacy among disenfranchised and marginalized communities in both the United States and in the Philippines. Ultimately, Comendador drew upon both her research and her own experience to argue that not only gender but questions of race, ethnicity, class, culture, religion and location are crucial to one’s experience of the health care system. She advocated the necessity of training healthcare workers on the importance of culturally sensitive communication skills, and drew particular attention to the medicalized and hierarchical nature of the patient-doctor/medical personnel relationship, which can stigmatize and alienate patients. In addition, she proposed a program to train community members in socio-economically deprived communities of the Philippines to assist in recruitment activities and education concerning breast cancer detection and awareness. Incorporated into local health programs, such prevention and screening initiatives could ultimately assist in reducing breast cancer mortality rates.

Like Comendador, Guessous recalls, Patricia Gibson was also initially uncertain about integrating her own experiences into her project, which dealt with the race, ethnicity, and gender politics of the U.S. military presence in Japan. A woman of mixed-race who grew up on a military base in Japan, Gibson wanted to discover why so much of the international literature on mixed individuals has been phrased in tragic terms. Historical research and interviews with mixed-race women representing different generations illuminated how the post-World War II generation viewed mixed females as the physical representation of the defeat of Japan—evidence of the U.S. military’s aggression and sexually violent masculinity. For the younger generation, however, the cultural meaning has shifted along with the meaning of U.S. culture; now, the experience of being of mixed-race is not viewed as negative or shameful, but as something fashionable and progressive. Interviews with younger-generation mixed females, as well as Gibson’s critical reflections upon her own experiences, enabled her to fit these self-perceptions into a larger historical and cultural context.

Anatolli Smith’s thesis similarly examined those excluded from national identity (in his case, Jamaica), but like Carol “Dex” Thompson, whose work is discussed below, his focus was upon queerness and how it conflicts with other markers of identity. The process of defining Jamaican-ness in opposition to European or American identities, he argued, has exiled homosexuality from the national community, leading to violence against gay men and lesbians, and hostility to sexual difference. His thesis attempts to counter the processes of silencing and invisibility that feed Jamaican homophobia by piecing together the beginnings of a historiography of queer Jamaica out of violence reports, newspaper articles, editorial commentary, and other materials. Smith also emphasizes the degree to which tourist economies, such as that which sustains Jamaica, harness the wealth of leisure societies to buttress oppressive policies at home. He advocates for more discerning choices by tourists when they select their destinations; travel is not neutral in Smith’s eyes, but constitutes one of the means by which even those from far-flung places become complicit with local politics of inequality and oppression.

Thompson’s thesis, on the other hand, chose an example both spatially and temporally closer to home in order to examine together the often-conflicting discourses of minority and queer empowerment. Thompson’s thesis researched the public debate surrounding the use of public money to fund the expansion of the Harvey Milk High School (HMHS), New York City’s public high school for public school students who have been severely harassed in their home schools because of their perceived sexual orientation. While HMHS accepts applications from all students regardless of sexual orientation and/or gender identity and expression, the majority of its students are LGBTQ youth of color. For Thompson, the debate took place at a critical moment in the LGBTQ rights movements: both those covered in the news (the overturning of the anti-sodomy laws, the issuing of marriage licenses to same-sex couples in Canada) and those that were tragically overlooked (the murders of Sakia Gunn, Bella Evangelista, and others). A closer look at the racially and economically-charged arguments deployed in opposition to the school, she suggested, provides a focused way to critically examine the current state of LGBTQ activism more generally. Importantly, Thompson argued, opposition to HMHS justifies itself by arguing against special rights for privileged people, invoking a mythic image of gays and lesbians as the sons and daughters of the white elite. However, the school’s domination by students of color, many of them poor, suggests not only that the myth of gayness, as perceived by opponents of the school, is untrue but also that gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender youths of color may be especially at risk for abuse and institutional discrimination.

Finally, Hallie Liberto took as her project the gendered structures in the English language itself. From a social
and political point of view, she argued, singular pronouns and possessives are discriminatory, since both physical and social sex distinctions are impossibly blurry (just like definitive markers of race or sexual orientation). Feminists such as Kate Bornstein have thus proposed the adoption of gender-neutral feminist pronouns and possessives on this basis. Liberto's thesis adds another, non-social reason to support such a proposal, by arguing that singular/sexed pronouns and possessives are also incoherent when examined through the lens of popular theories in the philosophy of language. These words fail to match phenomena in the actual world and thus pose a problem for externalism, descriptivism, and communicative implicature. They also posed a problem for Liberto herself when she attempted to mask her gender on her graduate school applications, since she did not believe that either her categorized body or gendered social upbringing were relevant to her skills as a good analytic philosopher: it was only her letters of recommendations, which required her professors to refer to her using singular/sexed pronouns and possessives, that rendered this goal impossible to achieve.

Each of the seniors' projects thus intersected with their own personal lives and interests in ways that challenged them during the writing process to both maintain their critical perspective and honor the number of different, and differently-invested, subject positions from which they approached their topics. This was a process that entailed both finding new meaning in previously undervalued forms of knowledge, as well as admitting the limitations in their comprehension of what already seemed all-too-obvious. As Professor Van Dyck noted, while praising the seniors' accomplishments at their theses presentations at IRWaG in early June, "we all begin our research projects thinking we know something about something. Thinking that we understand the question. Listening for certain answers." Yet although this access to inside information may indeed have been crucial to the success of these theses, Professor Van Dyck suggested, it was precisely those moments when the students encountered the limits in their own assumptions or the possibility of other interpretations—"when each student realized that they weren't hearing what they thought they were going to hear"—that transformed their theses into critical interventions in specific fields and disciplines.

A number of people—not only Professor Van Dyck and writing tutor Nadia Guessous, but Director Rosalind Morris, the staff of IRWaG, and the seniors' departmental advisors—had the pleasure of witnessing this process in action. We congratulate all the seniors on a job well done, and are proud to announce that the College has granted Department Honors to both Leah Rorvig from fall semester and Rebecca Brafman from spring semester. We also salute Dex Thompson, whose thesis shared this year's Queer Studies Essay Prize, with Anna Sochynsky.

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**free**

**thought**

**speech**

**trail**

**love**

**ride**

**movement**

**pursuit**

**happiness**

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**Povinelli, continued from page 5**

Transnational Cultural Studies, a consortium of international scholars examining the dynamic of cosmopolitan public culture in the context of linguistic and social theory.

At Columbia, Professor Povinelli also looks forward to taking advantage of new opportunities to collaborate on intra-university teaching and events. This fall, she and Kendall Thomas of the Law School are co-teaching a graduate seminar on the topic of internment, and how we think about new forms of internment in the post-9/11 world. In everyday language, “internment” is usually understood solely as incarceration (penitentiaries, torture regimes, military prisons, etc.), but there are many other forms of internment across the body, state, and economy, Professor Povinelli points out, that “we don’t have a lot of traction on—they all fade into one another.” For example, the gendered discourses of fetal rights and vegetative states can be read as new forms of bodily internment, as can economic forms of internment ranging from the night-workers literally locked-in at Wal-Mart to the customer service jobs outsourced to young adults in south Asia. Such forms of internment, Professor Povinelli notes, in which certain people occupy the daylight hours and others do not, “may seem more metaphorical, but they aren’t.” Indeed, this only makes thinking them alongside other forms of incarceration more urgent, and she and Professor Thomas hope to have a conference on this subject, through the Center for the Study of Law and Culture, in the spring.

Professor Povinelli brings a similar energy and commitment to IRWaG, where she is now Director of Undergraduate Studies. Indeed, she has helped to manage and establish a number of feminist-informed sexuality programs since completing her graduate training at Yale (PhD 1991), and even when she was a student there. She was one of the founding members of the Lesbian and Gay Studies project at Yale, and at Cornell, where she taught for three years, Professor Povinelli helped to establish the undergraduate concentration in Transnational Cultural Studies, a consortium of international scholars examining the dynamic of cosmopolitan public culture in the context of linguistic and social theory.

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**Povinelli, continued on page 15**
happens to “postmemory”—the term my new colleague Marianne Hirsch (see profile in this issue) has coined to describe intergenerational transfer of memory. Although I am a Middle East scholar, this is new territory for me.

The second project I hope to develop lends itself perfectly to the collective intellectual work an interdisciplinary institute can foster. I hope to capitalize upon Columbia’s faculty and programmatic strengths to launch a critical examination of the liberal language of human and women’s rights. Although this language has moral and legal power, it does not translate well into other traditions, including the religious. More problematically, it claims universalism but its applications are always located—in specific regions and historical moments. Can those who are deeply familiar with particular regions in which women’s rights are being championed offer insights into the ways gendered locations affect the meaning of liberalism, and how we assess its value?

As Director, I’d like to help IRWaG develop in three areas. First, I hope to push forward several initiatives that already have momentum, building on the work of our dedicated outgoing director Rosalind Morris and the generous faculty who consolidated the curriculum, set up high intellectual standards for public programming, and oversaw major hiring that has opened up new creative possibilities. One of these is to enhance our ability to teach and think about the critical intersections between race and gender. Another, responding to strong student interest, is to develop feminist science studies. In my four years as Director of Undergraduate Study, I was struck not only by the energy and independence of our undergraduate majors—who challenged my limits by writing theses on topics as diverse as Dominican women’s experiences of the welfare-to-work program, the gendered implications of drug testing at the Olympics, Chinese and Japanese feminism of the 1930s, and debates about the “gay” Harvey Milk High School—but by their strong orientation to medical topics and science and sexuality. With Barnard, IRWaG could advocate for this important field of study.

Second, I want to draw even more new faculty and students into IRWaG, and get them involved in charting our future. Over the past few years, the university has attracted a number of prominent feminist and queer scholars, as well as exciting junior faculty. The community of scholars around the IRWaG enriched my move to Columbia, and I hope we can continue to offer this community to others joining the university, for IRWaG can only thrive with new ideas and people. I’d also like to continue to make students an integral part of the institute; they have enormous energy, if also pressures and needs. I want them to see IRWaG as the place for extra-departmental and interdisciplinary intellectual community—intellectually rigorous but supportive.

Since I’m an anthropologist working in global contexts, it will come as no surprise that my third priority is to develop our programs and research on global gender issues. Every global process from nation-state formation to economic development, from the spread of disease to environmental devastation, from human rights campaigns to religious mobilization, is deeply gendered: men and women are differently involved and affected, gender issues are often given as alibis for globalization, and cultural ideologies about masculinity and femininity form and deform their dynamics. At Columbia, where there is a growing recognition of the global forces that shape human life today and the need to study them responsibly and rigorously, the development of global gender expertise and the coordination of curriculum and research needed for innovative work has barely begun. I’d like to address this problem through developing closer collaborations between IRWaG and the existing area studies and human rights programs, as well as with Barnard and its Center for Research on Women. I also think we would learn a great deal from international exchanges. We are now in the planning stages of a collaboration with colleagues at Oxford, and I hope in the future that we can develop programs with gender institutes of the Global South.

I look forward to working with all those who have given their energy to the Institute in the past, as well as the “new faces,” (as they say in the credits for Egyptian soap operas) who I hope will bring their ideas and projects to our ongoing conversation about critical issues in the study of gender, sexuality, and life itself.
Conference, continued from page 3

poststructuralist turn parallel to those then going on in other disciplines. In other contexts, however, the essay was received very differently, and he recounted his surprise and puzzlement to discover how differently the essay’s impact was felt in the Anglo-American academy. Spivak, whose own training is English literature and French literary theory and criticism, also devotes a good portion of her essay to charging French philosophers Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze with having abdicated their critical responsibility by smuggling back into the radical critique of Western philosophy a notion of the subject which universalized their own history’s perspective. Even in the heart of the most progressive forms of Western critical discourse, then, Spivak discerned an imperialist tendency, and thus a source of redoubled silence for the subaltern.

Jean Franco, Professor Emeritus of English and Comparative Literature here at Columbia, next gave a talk on subalternity in Latin America, focusing on the example of Rigoberto Menchú, a Mayan Guatemalan who became a public intellectual and activist on behalf of indigenous peoples. For Franco, Menchú represents how the “new subaltern” has become a mainstay of globalization: she is a name that gives voice and representability to many issues concerning race, gender, and subalternity in the United States and Latin America. Indeed, the name “Rigoberto Menchú” is the means by which Menchú herself perceives her own political consciousness to have been born. For while it was Menchú’s testimony as a subaltern that enabled her to become a public intellectual, it is her insistence upon the secrets that do and will continue to remain—Menchú’s Mayan identity and her actual Mayan name—that in a sense preserves her subalternity. “The secret keeps us,” Franco said, quoting Spivak. In other words, as Spivak herself explained in the discussion that followed this panel, “The subaltern cannot speak because she has something to keep secret. This is the first human right—the right to refuse.”

The testimonial subject, Franco argued, thus suggests a model for a non-totalizing politics that avoids the transparency which flaws the political thinking in Foucault and Deleuze.

The following panel continued this theme of the subaltern in the post-Marxist epoch of globalization. Alice Kessler-Harris, who holds a cross-appointment with IRWAG and History, where she is Chair and R. Gordon Hoxie Professor of American History, moderated this set of papers, which took up various elements of Spivak’s original essay in new ways. Pheng Cheah, Assistant Professor of Rhetoric at the University of California at Berkeley, re-opened Spivak’s critique of Foucault to ask whether given Foucault’s ideological blindness to the international division of labor, his analytics of power is still useful for understanding the periphery. Is Foucault’s notion of a state that, rather than repress its citizens, seeks to produce self-disciplining subjects still applicable to the case of foreign domestics who make the lives of liberal professional women possible? While these women are the objects of the state’s discipline and regulation, their only remuneration is financial. They are entirely replaceable, and thus, Cheah concluded, the state is not concerned with recognizing—and hence producing—these women as subjects who will internalize its ideology.

Abdul JanMohamed, also from Berkeley (where he is Associate Professor in the Department of English), drew from his current work on Richard Wright to pay tribute to the spirit of Spivak’s essay and what he termed her “unrelenting commitment to the negative.” He examined subalternity in the context of US slavery, in order to ask the conditions of possibility for subaltern speech and audibility, and the conditions for suicide as an act of resistance. Specifically, JanMohamed drew a distinction between biological death and symbolic death (that is, the death of one’s social position), arguing that the conditions of slavery itself represent a subjective death—a state of being which turns man into a “brute.” For a slave, one’s biological death is the only thing that does not have use-value for one’s master; thus, paradoxically, suicide becomes a way to negate the very negation of life that slavery represents. In other words, JanMohamed concluded, affirmation of subjective agency may come out of the willingness to embrace the total demise of that agency, by taking an active rather than passive relationship to one’s own death. In the words of Richard Wright, “I will not let them kill me; I would rather die first.”

Concluding the second panel, Michèle Barrett, Professor of Modern Literary and Cultural Theory at the School of English and Drama, Queen Mary College, University of London, gave a paper on “Subalterns at War” which re-approached the issues of silence, audibility, and subalternity from the perspective of World War I. In order to do so, Barrett called attention to two different definitions of subaltern, and the two different problems created for the military by subaltern speech. First, there is the Oxford English Dictionary definition of the subaltern, as the military classification for second lieutenant. Many such subalterns were killed during WWI, for although the position still reflected class privilege, it was nonetheless subordinate in rank. In this case, the silence of the subaltern refers not only to these dead bodies, but also to the trauma the sight of these mutilated corpses produced. Mutism, a common symptom in shell-shocked survivors, performed the very unspeakability of the horrors witnessed in battle. As such, this silence was viewed as a form of resistance by military and medical authorities, who sought to break it in the interests of discipline. Barrett noted the methods—some very cruel—undertaken to force the subalterns to speak before being returned to the front.

For the second definition of subaltern, Barrett returned to the question of the Indian army and the British empire, noting that only at the end of the war were Indians allowed to be officers. Barrett chronicled the movement of these troops and their casualties, and noted that the ambivalence towards the role of the subaltern in the war was repeated a generation later in the case of a French war memorial which had Conference, continued on page 14
Conference, continued from page 13

crossed out the word “Indian” from every page of its register—thus simultaneously denying and calling attention to the issue of subaltern participation in WW1.

Nicholas Dirks moderated the final panel of the day, entitled “The labor of affect and the question of right.” Two panelists—Drucilla Cornell of Rutgers University, where she holds a joint appointment as Professor of Law, Women’s Studies, and Political Science, and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, Professor of English at Oxford University—spoke of “rights” as a demand for recognition that cannot be made by the subaltern except in terms not her own. Cornell’s paper, “Unlicensed Lunacy: Spivak’s Feminism and Human Rights,” critiqued the common notion of “women’s rights” as a special or defining case within “human rights,” and used the problems with this logic to then call attention to the even more pervasive ethical asymmetry that enables those with class-privilege to view themselves as entitled to dispense rights to others—others who do not even have access to a representational space through which to articulate their claims. The language of “entitlement” to dispense rights, Cornell argued, needs to be rephrased in terms of responsibility and accountability to those who are victims of wrongs. Rajan’s paper issued a similar call for “ethical responsibility,” applying Spivak’s insights concerning death and the subaltern to Rajan’s study of contemporary female infanticide and the indifference it arouses in local feminisms. How is a woman’s death connected to gendered subalternity as a framing device for feminist thought and practice, she asked? Why is death the means by which the subaltern becomes figurable and enters narrative: “to speak across death by rendering the body graphematic—but unheard”? It is crucial to remember, Rajan pointed out, that the subaltern cannot speak not because she is incapable of speech, but because it is impossible to communicate from the position of the subaltern. Does her silence merely disclose her identity, or produce it?

The symposium concluded with a keynote address by Spivak herself on the trajectory of the subaltern in her work, preceded by a series of remarks made by Homi Bhabha, Anne F. Rothenberg Professor of English and African American Literature at Harvard University, and introduced by Alan Brinkley, Provost of Columbia University. Bhabha’s interventions considered Spivak’s essay as it has been transformed, cited, and reiterated throughout Spivak’s career, tracing its appearance in other texts of which she is the author. For Bhabha, the recurrence of the ideas which first appeared in “Can the Subaltern Speak?” is itself a form of intervention, and the basis of a reiterative practice which has defined Spivak’s work since the essay’s publication. Moreover, this reiterative practice is, he suggested, linked to a political practice or, rather, an ethical vigilance which infuses not merely Spivak’s writing but also her pedagogy. He closed by reading from Adrienne Rich’s poetry, and slipped from the conference as Nobel Laureate Toni Morrison arrived to hear Spivak herself speak.

After paying tribute to the many scholars who had gathered in her honor, Spivak described her essay as another form of tribute—an “act of private piety” to Bhaduri (whom Spivak had revealed, years after the essay’s original appearance, to have been one of her grandmother’s sisters) and to the Bengali middle-class from which Spivak originates. Spivak, whose own intellectual training is emphatically Europeanist, does not view the writing of this essay as a form of identity politics or as a “coming home,” however; she strongly resists playing the role of “professional Indian” in her intellectual life. Rather, she drew upon the lived experience of herself and her family as a jumping-off point to examine the failure of decolonization worldwide. Similarly, Spivak wanted to discover what understanding of “normality” would make suicide appear to be an effective and ethical form of communication to her foremothers.

Spivak compared the logic of such acts to that of today’s youthful suicide bombers, in that without any institutional background for resistance, one’s attempts to speak cannot be recognized, much less validated. Perhaps, she suggested, this is the message of the suicide bomber: “You won’t listen to me, and I can’t speak to you.” Subalterns, it must be remembered, are always there to kill and be killed; there are always going to be forms of death that ideology sanctions as legal and legitimate. By targeting civilians, the suicide bomber refuses to respect these rules; if one’s life is already a “dead life,” then one can take death and use it as a weapon for one’s perceived liberation.

With the stakes of communicability and subalternity so painfully clear, Spivak argued that the solution to these questions lies in the difficult and unglamorous work of education and developing infrastructure—a task to which Spivak has committed herself in her work as an activist. We must educate those in the space of subalternity not to accept their conditions as normal, she concluded, and we must also educate those on the path to hegemony so that they themselves do not become sub-oppressors who are celebrated as representatives of “subalternity.”

By the time Spivak rose to give her address, the audience at the symposium not only filled Casa Italiana to capacity but considerably exceeded it. As conference organizer, Director of IRWaG and Professor of Anthropology Rosalind Morris noted in her introductory remarks, this breadth of Spivak’s community and influence is all the more to be celebrated when we appreciate the accomplishments of feminist scholarship in their full institutional perspective. After all, the twentieth anniversary of Spivak’s writing is also the twentieth anniversary of the admission of women to Columbia College—and the 250th anniversary of Columbia University itself.

IRWaG is grateful to The Office of the Provost, Casa Italiana, the Center for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, the Center for Research on Women at Barnard, the Department of Middle Eastern and Asian Languages and Cultures, the Department of English, Department of History, and the Institute for South Asian Studies for their support and contributions in sponsoring this important event.
sexuality studies, co-chaired the graduate program in lesbian, gay, and queer studies, and served on its women’s studies steering committee. At the University of Chicago, which Professor Povinelli joined as a tenured faculty member in 1995, she co-chaired the Lesbian and Gay Studies Project and the Late Liberalism Project, both within the Center for Gender Studies, and sponsored several university conferences that served as the basis for two major journal publications. She also served on the Center for Gender Studies’ executive committee, later acting as its Associate Director.

Here at Columbia, Professor Povinelli is teaching the undergraduate core course this fall, and she looks forward to getting to know the Columbia and Barnard student community further. She has already had the experience of teaching a graduate seminar at Columbia, as a visiting scholar during the 2002-2003 academic year, and describes the students as “fantastic: very smart and very engaged politically, but without losing any of their analytic edge.” She also praises IRWaG itself as a place for working out the intersections of embodied critical theory, in both its sociological and ethnographic sense. “Scholars are really drawing on and drawing together comparative work across disciplines,” she says. “They’re working on the cutting edge—not just gender and sexuality, but how these nodal points operate in other discourses.” Similarly, Professor Povinelli sees a potentially very productive synergism between Columbia’s university resources and Barnard’s own history of working with gender and sexuality as an undergraduate institution.

As for the course her own interests might take in the long-term future, Professor Povinelli says that she will continue to return to Australia: both for her research and to offer assistance as senior anthropologist or expert witness in several land claims and native title claims. Most important of all is Professor Povinelli’s long association with indigenous families in northwest Australia. “I have been doing research in Australia among the same group of people since 1984, and they have become good friends—and family in the deeper sense of the word,” she explains. “I imagine I’ll keep going back every year; the shape of their lives will always continue to determine the shape of my research.”

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**Hirsch, continued from page 7**

“Feminist Theories of the Subject;” a course on the history of feminist literary criticism entitled “Feminist Readings;” a course on French feminisms including Francophone writing and thought; and another on feminist memoirs and their narratives of the feminist movement.

Professor Hirsch is also team-teaching the core course in Women’s and Gender Studies this year with Alison Wylie of the Department of Women’s Studies at Barnard College, and she adds that she would be happy to continue to team-teach across disciplines and departments. Last spring, for example, she team-taught an interdisciplinary course on “Gender and Generation: Holocaust Memory in Israel and the US” with historian Annelise Orleck at Dartmouth and Hannah Naveh and Orly Lubin, of Women’s and Gender Studies at the University of Tel Aviv. The students on the two campuses worked together on the web and through teleconferencing. “I would be very interested in being involved in others such collaborations in the future,” Professor Hirsch says, “especially in Women’s and Gender Studies, a field that is at the nexus of cultures and disciplines.”
### Fall 2004 Undergraduate Courses

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<tr>
<th>Course Code</th>
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<th>Credits</th>
<th>Instructor(s)</th>
<th>Days</th>
<th>Time</th>
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<tr>
<td>V1001x</td>
<td>Introduction to Women's &amp; Gender Studies</td>
<td>3 pts</td>
<td>A. Wylie &amp; M. Hirsch</td>
<td>TR</td>
<td>10:35–11:50a</td>
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<tr>
<td>V3111x</td>
<td>Feminist Texts I: Wollstonecraft to Beauvoir</td>
<td>4 pts</td>
<td>T. Sheffield</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>2:10–4:00p</td>
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<td>V3112x</td>
<td>Feminist Texts II: Beauvoir to the Present</td>
<td>4 pts</td>
<td>L. Tiersten</td>
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<td>W3250x</td>
<td>Senior Seminar</td>
<td>4 pts</td>
<td>L. Abu-Lughod</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>11:00–12:50p</td>
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<tr>
<td>V3311x</td>
<td>Colloquium in Feminist Theory</td>
<td>4 pts</td>
<td>J. Jakobsen</td>
<td>W</td>
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<td>W3521x</td>
<td>Senior Seminar I</td>
<td>4 pts</td>
<td>A. Wylie</td>
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<td>BC1003x</td>
<td>Introduction to Women's Health</td>
<td>3 pts</td>
<td>R. M. Young</td>
<td>MW</td>
<td>4:10–5:25p</td>
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<td>BC3121x</td>
<td>Black Women in America</td>
<td>3 pts</td>
<td>L. Collins</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>11:00–12:50p</td>
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<td>BC3122x</td>
<td>Jewish Woman</td>
<td>3 pts</td>
<td>I. Klepfisz</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>1:10–2:25p</td>
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<td>BC3136x</td>
<td>Asian American Women</td>
<td>4 pts</td>
<td>C. J. Cynn</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>12:10–2:00p</td>
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### Fall 2004 Graduate Courses

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<td>W4300x</td>
<td>Advanced Topics in Women’s &amp; Gender Studies</td>
<td>4 pts</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>These seminars are directed toward students with previous work in feminist scholarship but open to all majors.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Jewish American Women Writers</td>
<td></td>
<td>I. Klepfisz</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>4:10–6:00p</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Sexuality and the Law</td>
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<td>P. Ettelbrick</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>6:10–8:00p</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Sex, Gender &amp; Transgender Queries</td>
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<td>A. Swarr</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Sexuality and Science</td>
<td></td>
<td>R. M. Young</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Sexual Sovereignty: Intimacy, Genealogy, Carnality</td>
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<td>E. Povinelli</td>
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<td>G6001x</td>
<td>Theoretical Paradigms of Feminist Scholarship:</td>
<td>3 pts</td>
<td>C. Sanger &amp;</td>
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<td>Meanings of Motherhood: Historical and Legal Perspectives</td>
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<td>A. Kessler-Harris</td>
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<td>G8010x</td>
<td>Advanced Topics in Feminist Theory</td>
<td>3 pts</td>
<td>J. F. Howard &amp;</td>
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<td>2:10–4:00p</td>
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<td>European Merchants and International Trade, 1300–1700</td>
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<td>M. Howell</td>
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**Feminist News**

Institute for Research on Women and Gender

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