

JAN09

NEWSLETTER OF THE  
UCLA CENTER FOR THE  
STUDY OF WOMEN

# CSW update

Thinking Gender

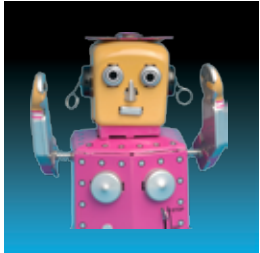
19TH ANNUAL  
GRADUATE STUDENT  
RESEARCH CONFERENCE

by Mirasol Riojas

This year's Thinking Gender promises to be one of the most exciting to date. Papers will cover a wide range of topics, including eco-feminism, women and sports, education, spirituality, activism, and pornography, just to name a few. "From Our Doorstep: Contemporary Politics" and "From Burkini to Broadcast: Revealing Assimiliations" will include presentations that speak to timely issues that beg to be addressed; and with titles such as "Cyberlicious with a Byte," "Illness, Deformity, and Shock: Re-reading Disability," and "Sex, the X, Donors, and Doping," it is no wonder that we are excited about the panels at this year's event.

As always, there will be a strong showing of top scholars from UCLA and other schools in Southern California at the conference. The diversity of the students and their work, however, continues to strengthen and grow.

*continued on page 24*



THINKING GENDER 09

Mirasol Riojas

1



Director's Commentary  
HAPPY NEW YEAR!

Kathleen McHugh

3



JMEWS News  
THE SOCIAL LIFE OF  
MUSLIM WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Diane James

4



ELA TOYANO'S LA LUPE

Mirasol Riojas

7

SHEILA ROWBOTHAM  
ON EDWARD CARPENTER

Thomas Mertes

12



TRAVEL GRANT REPORT

Wendy DeSouza

15



TRAVEL GRANT REPORT

Anna I. Corwin

18

DEPARTMENTS

NEWS: Renaissance Awards . . . 22

NEWS: Wendy Belcher! . . . 23

Staff . . . 25



# Happy New Year!



In just a few days, the inauguration of Barack Hussein Obama will make history as he becomes the 44th President and the first African American President of the United States. As

luck would have it, the faculty curator series for Winter Quarter 2009 focuses on feminism and film history. Though feminism in the latter half of the 20th century was a vast global movement with widespread, significant, if incomplete, uneven, and diverse effects, its historical im-

pact on industry and independent cinema is registered scattershot, if at all. This insight led me to curate this series. Feminist film scholars are changing the way film history is done. Film histories, whether focused on Hollywood, national, world, or alternative cinemas, often relegate women's contributions to footnotes, last chapters, anomalous honorable mentions, or special case studies. Feminist film historians are changing that. Incorporating the insights of feminist film theory, their focus has shifted from the portrayal of women on screen to women as producers. Often to access the latter, feminist scholars change or invent new objects of study in order to chronicle the expressive dimension of women's participation in Hollywood and other modes of filmmaking. The scholars in this series write new film histories

by considering women's production of ephemera, memoirs, and non-industrial film projects. They consider the star as producer and engage the history of feminism within film studies. These speakers will give public lectures in the curator series and also participate in the FTV seminar: Feminist Film, Feminist Film History. Please join us to hear Professor Patricia White (Swarthmore) on "Feminist Film in the Age of the Chick Flick" and Professor Amelie Hastie (UC Santa Cruz) on "Ida Lupino and Historical Legibility."

— **Kathleen McHugh**

# The Social Life of Muslim Women's Rights

ANTHROPOLOGIST LILA ABU-LUGHOD DELIVERS THE *JMEWS* DISTINGUISHED LECTURE AT UC SANTA BARBARA

by Diane James

Anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod delivers the *JMEWS* Distinguished Lecture at UC Santa Barbara on Wednesday, February 11, 2009, at 4:00 pm. Abu-Lughod is Joseph L. Bottenwieser Professor of Social Science at Columbia University, where she teaches in the Anthropology Department and at the Institute for Research on Women and Gender. The theme she has chosen for her remarks is “The Social Life of Muslim Women's Rights.”

The event, which is open to the public, is sponsored by the *Journal of Middle East Women's*

*Studies* and cosponsored by the UCLA Center for the Study of Women, Center for Near Eastern Studies, and Women's Studies Department, and the UC Santa Barbara Interdisciplinary Humanities Center, Center for Middle Eastern Studies, and Feminist Studies Department. Hosted by *JMEWS* co-editor Nancy Gallagher of UCSB, the event takes place in UCSB's McCune Conference Room, Humanities and Social Sciences Building (near parking lots 22 and 27; see <http://www.aw.id.ucsb.edu/maps/>).

It has been almost a quarter of a century since Abu-Lughod published *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society* (1986), an ethnography of the Awlad `Ali Bedouin in Egypt's Western Desert—pastoralists in transition to villagers—a work in which she unpacked the women's poetry which served them as a counterpoint to “ordinary” language, a way of expressing without owning socially impermissible feelings.

In 1990 Abu-Lughod co-edited (with Catherine Lutz) *Language and the Politics of*



*Emotion*, an anthropological study of emotion and discourse that sought to “pry emotion loose from psychobiology” and consider emotions as “cultural products,” learned habits shaped by social interaction. Contributors to the collection showed that apparently singular emotions may have



This volume brought together leading scholars in the field who questioned the dichotomy of tradition and modernity and the equation of modernity with progress, emancipation, and the empowerment of women.

different meanings and status in the hierarchies of admirable, acceptable, and anti-social emotions in different cultures.

Abu-Lughod returned to the subject of the Awlad 'Ali in *Writing Women's Worlds* (1993) to examine the subtle transformation of values among these erstwhile nomads who traced their origins to Libya and were now integrating into the Egyptian nation.

Her groundbreaking edited volume, *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East* (1998) brought together leading scholars in the field who questioned the dichotomy of tradition and modernity and the equation of modernity with progress, emancipation, and the empowerment of women.

Throughout the 1990s, Abu-Lughod expanded her research to the media, particularly television, a medium in which emotion, language, gesture, and politics are fused to more or

less (im)perceptible degrees. In *Dramas of Nationhood* (2005), she explored national television and developmentalism in Egypt through field work among the producers, distributors, and consumers of special dramatic series made for TV viewing during Ramadan.

One of Abu-Lughod's abiding concerns has been the politics of ethnographic representation and sociological description, problems of feminist aspiration and method, and assumptions about the Muslim Middle East. When she began working on women in the Arab world, she says, she "could never have imagined how charged the trope of the 'oppressed Muslim woman' would become in public discourse." (Recall how the trope was used to justify the invasion of Afghanistan.) Her ethnographies "challenge standard anthropological views of the patterns of Arab social life that are thought

to constrain and construct women's experiences, the same constructions that now organize human development reports and even human rights documents."

Over the past decade, Abu-Lughod's interests have shifted toward a more explicit consideration of international feminist politics, and the award of a Carnegie Scholarship in 2007 allowed her to concentrate on the ethics and politics of Muslim women's rights in the international arena. Her project aims to analyze the way that arguments couched in the language of women's rights tend to become compromised in the global political and cultural fields in which they are discussed. Thus we anticipate an original analysis and forward-looking discussion of rights, women's rights, and Muslim women's rights on February 11.

Abu-Lughod's lecture is the second presented by *JMEWS* and collaborating UC research units. The journal launched its

four-year residence at UCLA in 2006 with a conference on “Gender and the Transnational Middle East.” Professor Susan Slyomovics delivered the first *JMEWS* Distinguished Lecture in 2007. And in 2008, *JMEWS* sponsored a roundtable and reception of Southern California scholars who discussed their current research on “Gender in Muslim Societies.”

On April 9 to 10, 2009, *JMEWS* cosponsors a two-day research workshop on “Women in Conflict Zones,” funded by the UCLA Burkle Center for International Relations. Participants will consider the nature and rationales for violence, militarization and masculinity, the politics of memory and the politics of naming, trauma and healing, and forms of “truth and reconciliation.” The colloquium begins on Thursday evening, April 9, with a reception and premiere of the documentary film, *Dancing for Change:*

*Kurdish Women in Iran*, based on Shahrzad Mojab’s decades of research and work with Kurdish women. Workshop participants include conference organizer (and *JMEWS* co-editor) Sondra Hale of UCLA, Caren Kaplan of UC Davis, Jennifer Terry of UC Irvine, Elisabeth Jean Wood of Yale University, Lara Deeb of Scripps College, and Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and Visiting Professor in the UCLA School of Law and Women’s Studies. Dr. Mojab will present the keynote lecture on “Re-centering Imperialism in Feminist Theorization of War, Reconstruction, and Women’s NGOs.”

The Winter 2009 issue of *JMEWS*, now in press, includes articles on “The Burqa in *Vogue*” by Ellen McLarney, “House of Obedience” (a legal concept used in Gaza courts of law), by Nahda Shehada, “Religious Change among Yemeni Women” by Sophia Pandya, and a field

study of “Violence against Women in Qatari Society” by Kaltham Ali Al-Ghanim. The Spring issue features articles on the sexual revolution in Iran and a comparison of Palestinian male infertility and assisted reproductive technology services in Israel and Lebanon. The Fall issue will highlight research by the Arab Family Working Group.

*JMEWS* is available by membership subscription from the Association for Middle East Women’s Studies (<http://www.amews.org>) and Indiana University Press (<http://inscribe.iupress.org/loi/mew>). The journal is also accessible online through the UCLA Library via GenderWatch and Project Muse. Check it out.

*Diane James is the Managing Editor of the Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies.*

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# Ela Troyano's *La Lupe*: Queen of Latin Soul

## A "Whole" Story

by Mirasol Riojas

DURING a Q & A session that followed the screening of *La Lupe: Queen of Latin Soul*, independent filmmaker, Ela Troyano, mentioned that her film is not like traditional documentaries, particularly those that are thematically oriented. Anyone in the audience familiar with either Troyano's work or the musical performances of Cuban songstress, Lupe Yoli (aka La Lupe and La Yi Yi Yi), had to know that when they sat down to watch the film, they would be watching something characteristically unconventional. Both La Lupe (who was known for her outrageous performances) and Troyano's films—particularly *Latin Boys Go to Hell* (1997)—have developed cult followings over the years, and *La Lupe* is a testament as to the many reasons why this is so.

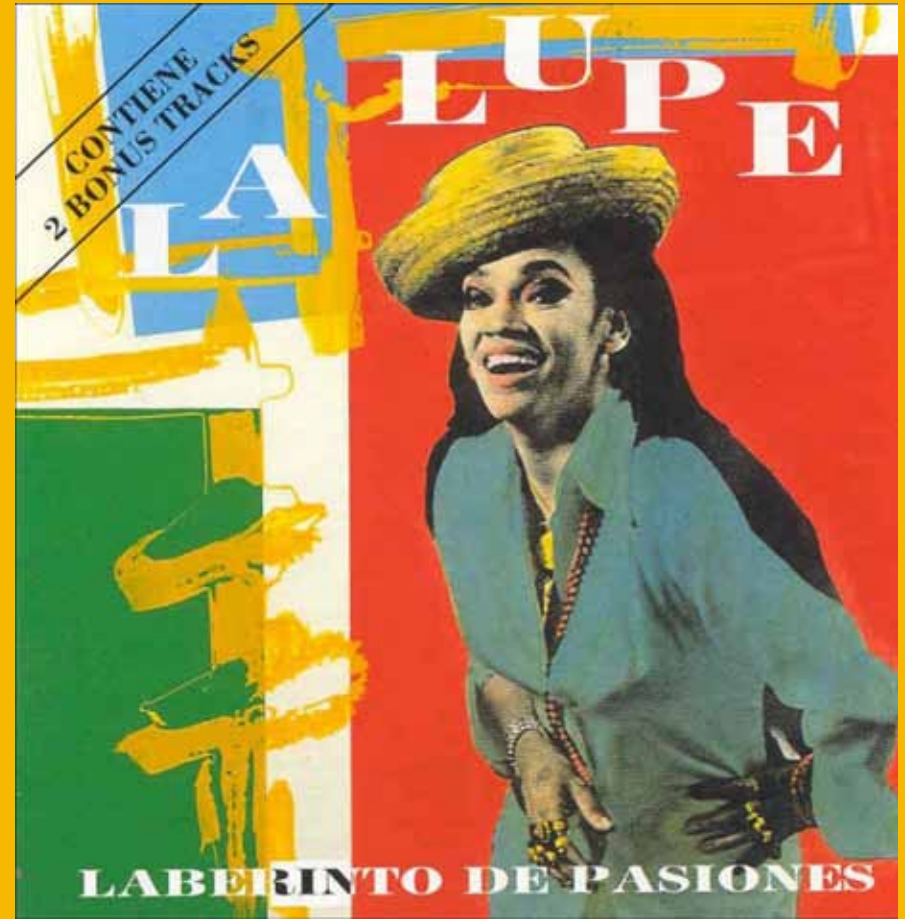
An international star, La Lupe was one of the most celebrated Latin performers of the 1960s and 70s. While her music continues to be some of the best selling of the era and her status as an icon among



Latino communities is undeniable, La Lupe is not nearly as well-known among the general public as many of her contemporaries, such as Tito Puente or Celia Cruz. Troyano notes that we have only begun to learn about the Latin musicians of this era. In making this film, her goal was to gather as much information as possible about La Lupe and

to tell her story. In doing so, she has created an important historical document and shed light on a generation from which we still have much to learn.

Troyano's interest in La Lupe surfaced in 1987, years after the peak of the singer's career. At the time, Troyano was involved with Maria Irene Forné's playwright's lab at the New York-based Latino theater, INTAR. Forné's attention to detail and the vibrancy of her writing inspired Troyano to carry a tape recorder around with her at all times. Troyano describes herself as being something like Andy Warhol at this moment in her life, "recording everything." It was at this point that she stumbled upon La Lupe. In 1987, she found her sharing stories about her life with an audience at a church on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. La Lupe made it clear that she did not want to be videotaped, which was a relief



La Lupe (*above*) was known for her outrageous performances. Troyano (*left*) is an award-winning filmmaker known particularly for *Latin Boys Go to Hell*.



to Troyano, since all she wanted to do was use an audiotape recorder to document the event. She remembers, “I went up to the altar to be blessed by [La Lupe], hiding the little blinking red light.” Troyano instantly became fascinated by the figure and the woman known as La Lupe. She did not understand just who the woman was, but says she knew that she had to know more. Troyano later embarked on the film project, and it was her resourcefulness, as exhibited in this initial meeting with La Lupe, that would be the key to seeing the film through to completion.

*La Lupe: Queen of Latin Soul* was a long time in the making. Troyano explains, “In 1993 I tried to raise funds for a film but no one seemed interested until 2000.” She was able to piece the funding together and eventually secured a contract for a one-hour documentary. The film was

made for ITVS and aired on the PBS series, *Independent Lens*. Of course, filmmakers always have to make decisions about what to include and what to leave out of their films, but because she was strictly bound to produce a one-hour long film, Troyano faced a difficult challenge and was forced to leave out much of the information she had worked so hard to gather.

As she conducted research for the film, Troyano found that documentation of La Lupe’s life, and surprisingly, even her performances, were not easy to find. Troyano incorporated rare footage of La Lupe into the film, including a vibrant performance on the Dick Cavett show, and a short clip with Tito Puente (with whom she performed for years), recorded at Madison Square Garden in 1976. Troyano says she spent an enormous amount of time “being like a copyright/

consultant type person. But you know, in order to tell the story, and in order to get things, you just had to do it. There was no other way.”

More than the archival footage, however, the numerous personal anecdotes from La Lupe’s family, friends, and peers truly sets this documentary apart. Troyano placed oral histories at the center of her project, and interviewed some of the most influential Latinos from the Cuban music scene, such as musicologist Helio Orovio and percussionist Mongo Santamaria. In the case of Santamaria, Troyano had particular foresight in that, as soon as she learned she had the opportunity to interview him, she purchased a small camera to videotape the event. The footage is a treasure, as this meeting represents the last opportunity Troyano had to interview the legendary musician. Both he and Orovio have

**More than the archival footage, however, the numerous personal anecdotes from La Lupe’s family, friends, and peers truly sets this documentary apart. Troyano placed oral histories at the center of her project, and interviewed some of the most influential Latinos from the Cuban music scene.**

since died. The film is notable, then, not only because it brings to light the life of a multifaceted woman who was much more than her legendary wild and irreverent stage persona, but also because the film stands as a tribute to many musicians who have remained too long under the radar.

There has been a recent increase in attention to many of the most influential musicians of the time. For example, like La Lupe, Cuban singer Benny Moré has also been the subject of documentary films, as well as a recent biopic, *El Benny* (2006). Puerto Rican *salsero* Hector Lavoe received much due publicity with the release of the Jennifer Lopez/Marc Anthony vehicle *El Cantante* in 2006. Rather than highlight the tragedy and the tumultuous relationships that were a part of La Lupe's life, in the way the aforementioned films tend to emphasize the musicians' personal demons and their respective struggles with alcohol and drugs, Troyano approached her film from a more holistic perspective. This is in part due, of course, to the fact that Troyano's film is a documentary and not a dramatization. There is much more to it than that, however. One of the most striking

things about this film is that Troyano constructs a story that depicts La Lupe as a complex woman, and more importantly, whole. She never attempts to tell the "whole" story or to present the definitive "facts." Instead, Troyano shows different facets of La Lupe's life, none of which viewers are led to believe defined her. Troyano begins putting the pieces of La Lupe's life together and reminds us that there are many stories to be told.

Conscious that any "'message' usually dates fairly quickly on film" and also that some aspects of La Lupe's story are quite delicate, Troyano's address is subtle, yet effective. For example, when she uses a map to discuss La Lupe's background, Troyano makes a conscious effort to show her hometown, Santiago, in relation to Jamaica and Haiti, where her family was from, rather than in relation to the rest of Cuba. She says this decision was an effort to "position [La Lupe] as Caribbean." Troyano further explains that depicting La Lupe's involvement with Santeria was difficult. She says that the different belief systems and the secretive nature of Santeria made it hard to address. About the choices she made, she explains:

*...La Lupe disavowed her religious belief in Santeria and converted at the end of her life, giving testimonials in church. There are some who believe that the Santeros were responsible for La Lupe's downfall and Santeros who believe she lost her power when she left Santeria. It is a complicated issue... the inclusion of Afro-Cuban culture in discussing her childhood in Santiago de Cuba. This was followed later on by anecdotes of La Lupe as a Santera, with different or conflicting points of view: of her musical style as possession; of her style as theatrical -- not Santeria -- but with the inclusion of traditional Afro-Cuban songs at the end of a set; with her favorite music engineer and producer, Fred Weinberg describing the alienation he felt once she became a Santera, explaining that he used to kiss and hug her to say hello and now he couldn't go near her, you couldn't touch her.*

Another example of Troyano's subtlety is in the way she addressed La Lupe's iconic status among the gay Latino community. Troyano connects La Lupe to queer culture by identifying her style as over the top and including

footage of Orovio describing La Lupe as both macho and feminine, and very much irreverent. Troyano says, "You've got to remember that the gay world was and is irreverent; it meant being against the social norms."

There is brief mention in the film of the drag performers El Lupo and El Yiyiyo, who were well known for their impersonations of La Lupe after her split from Tito Puente, but there is no direct address of the huge following within the gay community that La Lupe continues to have to this day. With regard to La Lupe's significance within queer culture, however, Troyano says, "I think the information is there."

Troyano rarely intellectualizes her decisions about how to focus her films, but rather, she prefers "going on gut instinct." As the filmmaker explains, La Lupe's "story dealt with issues of race, class, gender, sexual preference, immigration, music, aggressive sexual persona, hybrid Caribbean culture." La Lupe was not only a dynamic and controversial performer, but there was, and still is, a lot to learn about the many dimensions of her life. She says she knew she wanted to tell the story of La Lupe as an immigrant, and Troya-

no was certain that she "really did want to see her changing," as the film progressed. Yet the film is not only the story of an immigrant. Nor is it simply about the rise and fall of La Lupe's career. One of the most intriguing things about this film is that La Lupe emerges as a whole person. She was one of many mysteries, to be sure, but in *La Lupe: Queen of Latin Soul*, she does emerge as whole.

As scholars, our tendency is to deconstruct most everything we see and read. Certainly, the approach has value. As filmmakers, our tendency is often to focus on the sensational parts of people's lives, which makes sense. It makes for a good story. There is something refreshing, however, about Troyano's ability both as a researcher and a storyteller, to keep La Lupe whole. That is refreshing, indeed.

A special free screening of *La Lupe, Queen of Latin Soul* (2007) with filmmaker Ela Troyano, on November 12, 2008, at UCLA was cosponsored by the Center for the Study of Women, Chicano Studies Research Center and the Latin American Institute.

Mirasol Riojas is a Ph.D. candidate in the Cinema and Media Studies Program at UCLA. She is also the coordinator for this year's *Thinking Gender* conference and one of the presenters at the plenary session.

Thinking Gender

PLENARY SESSION

Changing the (his)story  
WOMEN IN FILM  
AND TELEVISION

**Mis-Remembering Lucille Kallen: The Erased Career of *Your Show of Shows*' Lone Woman Writer**

FELICIA D. HENDERSON,  
CINEMA AND MEDIA STUDIES, UCLA

**Collaborative Film Authorship: Writing Latinas into the Picture**

MIRASOL RIOJAS, CINEMA AND MEDIA STUDIES, UCLA

**Making the Cut: Female Editors and Representation in the Film and Media Industry**

JULIA WRIGHT, CINEMA AND MEDIA STUDIES, UCLA

**FEBRUARY 6, 2009, 11:30 AM TO  
12:30 PM, UCLA FACULTY CENTER**

*In order to go beyond protest it is necessary...  
to conceive a new vocabulary of desire...*

ON JANUARY 20, ACTIVIST/SCHOLAR SHEILA ROWBOTHAM  
WILL GIVE A TALK ABOUT HER NEW BIOGRAPHY,  
*EDWARD CARPENTER: A LIFE OF LIBERTY AND LOVE*

by *Thomas Mertes*

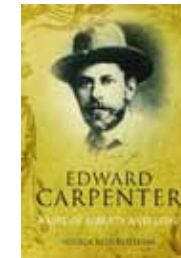


In 1969 Sheila Rowbotham pleaded with comrades at the radical newspaper *Black Dwarf* for a unified left. “We can’t appoint ourselves as an all-knowing elite, ready to issue orders to the masses,” she argued. Instead Rowbotham sought to learn from Third World revolutionaries, Anarchists, Anarcho-syndicalists, and Utopian Socialists. She advocated a broad appeal to reach out to groups who were oppressed by more than just class. She had come to the conclusion that most of the men on the left were too steeped in patriarchy and failed to take into consideration

that “liberation” was not just a change in the balance of class forces, but recognition of other forms of subordination. Rowbotham eventually resigned from the publication, suggesting that the editorial board “sit around imagining they had cunts for two minutes in silence so they could understand why it was hard” for them to consider her and other women as equals. The personal had become political.

Sheila Rowbotham was part of the initial groundswell of women around the world that would later be characterized as second-wave feminism. The movement sparked her interest in understanding herstory, as her research at the British Library yielded few analysis of how

feminists acted politically in the past. The dearth of scholarship on the conjunction of women’s issues and politics led her early on to discover activists in the first wave of feminism, including Edward Carpenter.



On January 20, from 4 to 6 pm in 6275 Bunche at UCLA, Rowbotham will present some of her findings from her latest project, *Edward Carpenter: A Life of Liberty and Love* (Verso, 2008). The event is cosponsored by the Center for the Study of Women and the Center for Social Theory and Comparative History.

Born a century before Rowbotham, Edward Carpenter was an intellectual and an activist from an upper-class family. He advocated for women's suffrage and for socialism, environmental causes, wider democracy, and a deeper appreciation of and communication between the classes. He opposed animal vivisection, imperialism, and laws that imposed rigid morals. Celebrated as a socialist during his lifetime, Carpenter is now most famous for his struggle for greater rights for gays. Through much of the nineteenth century, "sodomy" was a capital crime in England. Because of the criminalization of sexual practice, Carpenter had to tread lightly in his struggle, if he wanted to make headway and remain in progressive coalitions. He was a popular writer who utilized the latest ideas and science to bolster his arguments. In particular, Carpenter was a "lumper" not a "splitter" as an activist and intellectual, seeking to build coalitions between disparate groups fighting for or against a specific cause. Moreover, he believed in dreaming the future into existence and acting on his belief system. Thus, he taught in the early years of the Cambridge Extension system that sought to spread education to adults and members of the working class. Rejecting bourgeois lifestyle and embracing a simpler and sustainable existence, Carpenter moved to the countryside. His farm became a haven for progressives and an alternative model for free association. He also



*SHEILA ROWBOTHAM. At the University of Manchester since 1995, she is currently a professor of Gender and Labour History, Sociology. The university administration attempted to force her retirement earlier this year, but students organized in protest and were able to obtain an additional three-year contract for their esteemed mentor.*

brought his working-class lover, George Merrill, to the farm to live with him, to the consternation of some and the condemnation of others. In her biography of Carpenter, Rowbotham reveals some of her own philosophical activist position, “The dilemma Carpenter lived so strenuously, how to imagine an alternative without being trapped in a prescriptive construct, is as relevant for rebels now as it was then. In order to go beyond protest it is necessary . . . to conceive a new vocabulary of desire. . . . Instead of casting ideals in stone, Carpenter kept utopia in his mind’s eye in the immediate changes he proposed” (p. 8).

Rowbotham’s own career as an intellectual began with three path-breaking historical-philosophical monographs: *Women, Resistance and Revolution* (Allen Lane, 1972), *Women’s Consciousness, Man’s World* (Penguin, 1973), and *Hidden from History: 300 Years of Women’s Oppression and the Fight Against It* (Pluto, 1973). These works, however, were preceded by her nuclear disarmament, socialist, and anti-war activism. The publication of Rowbotham’s “Women’s Liberation and the New Politics” pamphlet in 1969 led to the first National Women’s Liberation Conference in 1970. Her activism did not preclude her research; her many publications include *A New World for Women: Stella Browne Socialist Feminist* (Pluto, 1977), and with Jeffery Weeks, *Socialism and the New Life: The Personal and Sexual Politics of*

*Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis* (Pluto, 1977). Along with Jean McCrindle, she explored the lives of working-class women through interviews edited in *Dutiful Daughters Women Talk about Their Lives* (Viking, 1977). In 1979, along with Hillary Wainwright and Lynne Segal, Rowbotham sought to unify parts of the left especially through recognition of the role of women in grassroots organizing in a pamphlet that became *Beyond the Fragments: Feminism and the Making of Socialism* (Merlin Press, 1979). The authors argued forcefully that women’s ideas and experiences—including how they live their lives—ought to shape their activism. This emphasis on experience, action, and organization persists in her work. She continues to be a prolific author translating her experience as an activist and analyst into insightful works pointed to a more enlightened future.

Rowbotham also worked at the Greater London Council including organizing low-wage women in the early 1980s and went global doing research for the UN University World Institute for Development Economics Research, where she investigated the causes of poverty and how they might be addressed. As economic globalization deepened, she examined how women across the globe experienced common problems and suggested ways to organize and meet the challenges imposed by new economic realities. In the 1990s, she edited a number of books with Swasti Mitter on poor women in

the Third World (of both the Global North and South) and how they made the most of their lives. Her work has continued on this front with *Women Resist Globalization: Mobilizing for Livelihood and Rights*, a volume edited with Sheila Linkogle (Zed, 2001).

Sheila Rowbotham has been at the University of Manchester since 1995. She is currently a professor of Gender and Labour History, Sociology. The university administration attempted to force her retirement earlier this year, but students organized in protest and were able to obtain an additional three-year contract for their esteemed mentor.

**Thomas Mertes** is an administrator at the Center for Social Theory and Comparative History, UCLA. He is on the editorial board of the *New Left Review* and he has taught U.S. political history and other classes at UCLA Extension.

## Exploring modern views of masculinity and sexuality in Persian writings during the interwar period

In the past decade or so, scholars have opened new vistas for studying gender and sexuality in Orientalist writings—European representations of Islam, Arabic, the “East” and the like—and feminist criticism has been particularly successful in adjusting our understanding. Travel writing, scholarly research, novels, and the formation of literary canons about the ‘East’ have more recently been examined for their normative assumptions about sexuality.

Contemporary discussions on mysticism, philology, and religion in Oriental studies tend to be rooted in the philological and religious studies traditions, as an internal discussion among experts in the field. Afsaneh Najmabadi and others have called for a “re-reading” of mystical litera-

ture that would include a more critical analysis of gender and modern definitions of homo- and heterosexuality.<sup>1</sup>

My current research investigates how the study of sexuality mediates our understanding of Oriental studies, an academic discipline that has been tainted by accusations of uncompromising racism and blind service to imperial culture. Using sexuality as a category of analysis, I show how Iranian and European contributions to this field of knowledge were often divergent from this nefarious intention. While not denying the deleterious effects of European writings about their Oriental others, further analysis reveals a more complex set of interests related to sexuality than has been earlier depicted.



Louis Massignon

In one of my dissertation chapters, I demonstrate how the great French luminary, Louis Massignon (1883–1962), achieved “liberation” from his sexual anxieties through Islamic mysticism (*irfan* or Sufism). Massignon’s pioneering work on mysticism, for which Edward Said reserved some rare accolades in his book *Orientalism*, came about in part as a result of Massignon’s tormented sexuality. Up until now, scholars have approached the issue of sexuality in Massignon’s writings as a side issue, and some writers have avoided the subject altogether despite its vital implications for the study of Orientalism. Most biographers of Massignon have assumed that a radical shift in his thinking on mysticism occurred at the moment of his conversion to Catholicism in 1908, neglecting to demonstrate how sexuality was central to his conversion experience and influential in his later writings. Jacques Derrida, who provided considerable insight into Massignon’s ecumenical ideas of *hospitality* and *substitution*, only briefly mentioned the issue of homosexuality in his analysis. I address these concerns by showing how Massignon was a man in conflict with colonial models of masculinity and sexuality, and more importantly, how mystical literature was a vehicle for his self-liberation.

Turning to Iranian contributions to Oriental studies, I have continually asked myself the question: what is shaping modern views of mas-

culinity and sexuality in Persian writings during the interwar period? While many have identified a discourse on women as a determinant of modern Persian masculinity—masculinity’s alleged dyad—I have been struck by how *unimportant* this was in the publications under my review. Compared with the constitutional period in Iran (1905–1911) when the so-called “Woman’s Question” provoked debates on women’s status in society, many Persian journals dedicated to Oriental studies during the interwar period were concerned with representing and redefining masculinity—without reference to women.

In a series entitled “Great Men” in *Kaveh*, an Iranian studies journal based in Germany produced before and after WWI, the idea of Persian masculinity was shaped by a discourse on science. Productive masculinity was equated with heterosexual norms, and sexual practices in Iran were evaluated based on a set of principles mediated by post-Enlightenment thought. The condemnation of male homosexuality on the part of some, for example, was based on the idea that it was anathema to scientific development. Homosexuality, in turn, was associated with sloth, laziness, and inactivity: “[What could one expect of a young politician] who spends his time lying on a mattress, smoking opium, reciting poetry about *filthy and unnatural love*” (my emphasis) (*Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards*, 3) In

other words, when seen from the vantage point of *Kaveh*’s portrait of great men, the greatest offense of homosexuality was its correlation with *a poor work ethic!*

“A key component of ‘achieving modernity’ and ‘becoming civilized,’” Najmabadi wrote, “had become ‘eradication of unnatural love’ among men” (*Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards*, 163). “Heteronormalization,” which contemporary scholars have argued is the source of more rigid ideas on sexuality in Persian writings, was in fact an uneven, poorly articulated, and de-prioritized sermon aimed at removing the fetters of Iran’s premodern past. It would be a mistake, therefore, to conclude that there was a strong opposition to homosexuality *per se*, since what is mentioned about it during the two world wars is infrequent and non-conclusive.

The editors of *Kaveh* viewed homosexuality as a decadent lifestyle that impeded the cause of modernity. Far more vitriolic speech is reserved for the unscientific behavior of Muslim clergy (*mujtahids*). As one would expect of Iranian intellectuals who reconstituted post-Enlightenment thought, religious reform was believed to be the primary vehicle for modernization. Issues of sexuality and gender were also deployed in their critiques when cataloging the abuses of errant priests; however, their criticism is geared toward fighting despotic tendencies, the ad-



vancement of technology, and the freeing of the masses from premodern cultural practices. In sum, until the end of the interwar period same-sex *eros* was deemed undeserving of any serious consideration (or attack), and it was relatively tolerable (albeit discouraged) as a social practice.

Regrettably the few scholars who work on the history of modern Iranian sexuality favor a “shame-based” explanation for growing intolerance toward homosexuality in the twentieth century. Their main argument is that beginning in the nineteenth century Iranians “naturalized” heterosexual love after greater contact with Europe and European norms of sexuality. As a result of greater cultural exchange, they were ashamed by the prevalence of same-sex desire and homoeroticized bonding in Persian society, and early Iranian reformers adopted a new vision of Persian nationalism to respond to these pressures. If “Great Men” and other articles featured in *Kaveh* are any indication, however, scientific discourse trumped any innate “homophobia” among Iranians. One could argue that heteronormalization, furthermore, never took hold or was never fully realized (akin to “modernization,” in academic parlance, which is supposed to obliterate or replace what had existed before). Same-sex *eros* occupied a relatively insignificant place in public discourse, and whether this is a disavowal, a “shame,” or an otherwise taboo

subject today, it seems that interwar intellectuals did not find it particularly problematic when articulating the goals of modern society.

Both European and Iranian perspectives on sexuality in the early half of the twentieth century present new insights into the causes and consequences of Orientalist writings. I have been struck by how intellectuals like Massignon, and the editors of *Kaveh*, held remarkably open views toward sexuality and resisted colonial norms. These findings add complexity to debates on sexuality and gender between the two world wars. I hope to show that greater tolerance existed toward homosexuality in Persian writings than has been previously understood.

### Notes

1. See Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 3. Najmabadi’s main argument in this book is that before Persia’s growing contact with Europe, literary references to a male Beloved were frequent and unencumbered by modern notions of sexuality. Europeans of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries introduced colonial categories of masculinity and femininity, homosexuality and heterosexuality, which became part of an internal and indigenous process of *heteronormalization*. Her approach has been instrumental in surveying

how modern Iranian discourse gradually displaced homosexuality yet retained homoerotic tropes.

**Author’s note:** I thank the Center for the Study of Women for providing financial support toward this research in 2008, and Professors Gabi Piterberg, Ellen Dubois, and Omnia El-Shakry for their invaluable input.



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# Aging in American Convents

FIELDWORK REPORT by Anna I. Corwin

DURING FIELDWORK this summer in a Franciscan convent in the midwestern United States, I met two Sisters who had returned to the convent after many decades of hard work. They returned to the place where they come as teenagers when they made a commitment to leave their families and to serve God as religious sisters. When they joined the community, they took the three vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. This community of a few hundred women became their family, and this convent became their home. It is the place where they have returned every summer since the day they joined the community, it is the place where they retire, and it is the place where their bodies will one day rest.

This convent is an active Catholic order, meaning that the Sisters work outside convent walls as teachers, nurses, in parish ministries, or in other capacities. These two Sisters, like many others now living in retirement at the convent, have returned to the convent because they can no longer work

in positions outside the convent. One of them is battling Alzheimer's disease, a brutal degeneration of the mind, and the other is struggling with an aging and painful body that restricts her mobility. Each evening, the two women walk with each other around the beautiful grounds of the convent. Sr. Noella, who struggles with the fear and disorientation of the progressing Alzheimer's disease, is nevertheless concerned that Sr. Agatha, whose body confines her to the infirmary, won't get any fresh air without her help, and so she helps her physically navigate the hallway, the elevator, and the paths around the convent grounds. Sr. Agatha, however, does not see it quite the same way. Each evening, Sr. Agatha musters the energy to guide and orient Sr. Noella in what are to Sr. Noella the increasingly confusing and disorienting paths on the grounds around the convent.

These two Sisters might not overcome their ailments alone; yet, together they



make it outside for a nightly stroll. Each sees herself not as the one being helped, but as a friend putting herself second in order to serve another Sister.

Epidemiologists have noted that nuns have longer lives and age more “successfully” than their lay counterparts, and I believe that this example highlights a number of key elements that contribute to this model of successful aging. First, as many studies have shown, regular exercise and physical activity contribute to successful aging (Snowdon 2001:38). There is drive towards activity and service in the community that leads the sisters to keep physically active in many ways—serving as teachers, missionaries, and in many other positions for as long as their bodies permit. As this example shows, even after retirement most community members contribute in whatever ways they can to each others’ lives as well as to ongoing projects in the convent. This model of continuing physical activity helps people age more successfully.

Second, many studies have shown that having an engaging and fulfilling social life can contribute to good health. These sisters are in the unique position of retiring and aging within the community they have shared almost all of their lives. They therefore have a built-in buffer against the many stresses and hazards associated with loneliness (Cacioppo and Patrick 2008) and the reduced social circles many aging individuals experience. There are a number of other possible factors that epidemiologists have pointed out, including the positive correlation between education and longevity (Snowdon 2001:40). The Sisters in this convent all benefited from excellent educations, and many have received graduate degrees.

To me, as an anthropologist, far more interesting than the concept of longevity is the joyfulness and emotional richness of many of the lives led by the Sisters I encountered during my fieldwork in the convent. The questions that arose during this preliminary fieldwork focused on this ethos of joy and peace. My continued work will address the following

questions: What is it about living as a nun (or alternatively, about the people who are called to join the community) that contributes to this grace, and the relatively smooth transitions into retirement and old age? What cultural and linguistic practices influence the nuns’ experience of aging and illness? I cannot yet fully answer these questions, but based on my preliminary ethnographic work in the convent, I can begin to discuss a few aspects of the Sisters’ lives that might influence their experiences as they retire and enter old age.

First, when the Sisters enter the convent, they take three vows: vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. The vow of poverty means that the Sisters spend their lives living without many material possessions. They do not own the individual beds, apartments, or cars that they use, which belong to the community as a whole. Since Vatican II in the mid-1960s, Sisters have much more freedom to own smaller things (a modest wardrobe, toiletries, and even room decorations),

**Epidemiologists have noted that nuns have longer lives and age more “successfully” than their lay counterparts, and I believe that this example highlights a number of key elements that contribute to this model of successful aging.**

yet they still live with fewer possessions than most Americans.

The vow of obedience requires that in many aspects of their lives the Sisters give up a certain amount of self-determination. Until Vatican II, the sisters received “obediences” from their superiors telling them where they would work and live each year. If the superior saw that there was a need for someone to minister in a certain area, she would reassign a Sister to that area to minister in the new position.

## As I continue my research, I will investigate how the Sisters' prayer life and faith may affect their experiences of transitions into retirement and old age.

Until the 1960s, the Sisters had little to no say in where they went and were required to accept each change in obedience. Since Vatican II, however, obedience has been reinterpreted as obedience more directly to God, and there has been a shift towards collaboration and conversation with leadership.

The vow of chastity, of course, means that the nuns live without a husband or partner. This lifetime of practice in poverty, obedience, and chastity trains the sisters to embody a habitus of non-attachment. These vows require that the sisters learn to let go of personal attachment to material possessions, to their

jobs and living situations, and even to individual people in their lives. The structure of their lives, including the fact that they own very few material possessions and that they often serve in many different ministries across the country or, as missionaries, across the globe without a partner or family, means that the Sisters have a great deal of practice in moving on and letting go of attachments to things, people, and places.

The process of retirement and aging therefore looks very different for the Sisters than it does for most Americans. Many of the stresses of retirement and aging that lay people encounter when they can no longer live independently, including leaving their home, moving in with family or a non-family group, giving up material possessions, and learning to share living space with others, are not new challenges for the Sisters. Even if these changes are not easy, the Sisters at least have a lifetime of practice with similar transitions. The process of giving up physical things and familiar

surroundings to enter assisted or group living situations is not as new for the sisters as it is for their lay counterparts, and, therefore, may help Sisters ease into retirement and old age. As Sr. Marie pointed out in an interview, the other side of the vows is that the Sisters are ensured of a certain “security.” As she put it, they never have to worry about “making a bad financial decision” or ending up “out on the street.” So while the structure of the convent requires a certain loss of self-determination, it also reduces some of the stresses lay people encounter as they age.

All of this is, of course, linked to far more than just the three vows. Daily practices, including prayer, faith, and service, teach mindfulness, self-reflection, and introspection. These habits shape the Sisters' experiences as they transition into retirement and old age. One study of deeply religious lay people, for example, found that elderly people who had a “deep religious faith” had a stronger sense of “well-being” and of “life satisfaction” than their less

religious peers (Koenig 1999:24). As I continue my research, I will investigate how the Sisters' prayer life and faith may affect their experiences of transitions into retirement and old age.

Another unique factor influencing life in the convent is that the community holds a united and coherent ideology of death and after-life. Aging brings individuals closer to death, which can evoke fear in many people. In the convent, death is accompanied by a deep faith that when they pass on, they will enter heaven and be met by God and the loved ones who have gone before them. Many people I spoke with described entering heaven as being welcomed “into God's arms” and as a returning “home.” This deep faith in heaven as a place of love and reunion requires that death is not looked at as an ending, but rather as a transition, a movement forward. This does not mean, of course, that Sisters do not grieve the loss of those who are dear to them, or that many of them do not fear this transition, but I believe

it does mean that old age and the end-of-life stage hold a more positive meaning for the nuns than for those who do not have a deep faith in the existence of an afterlife. This argument is supported by a study by Richard Kalish and David Reynold (1976) who found that elderly individuals who are either firmly religious or strict atheists experience significantly less anxiety and fear of death than those who report that they do not know what will happen to them when they die. As one sister told me in an interview, “I just gather that our Sisters are much more ready to meet death and to deal with it. Because part of our life is given to prayer, and to God in our lives.”

Finally, there is a great deal of community support and socialization into old age. Because the Sisters live in this community, they have support and guidance from others as they transition into retirement and old age. This guidance and socialization can be both explicit and implicit. As Sr. Rita pointed out, “[Our situation

is] very unique in that we usually are present when a sister is dying.” Younger sisters are often involved in the work of putting together a folder for each sister in the infirmary, cataloguing her wishes for her final hours of life: whether she wants people in the room with her or not, whether she prefers, for example, music to be playing or to have silent prayer. These administrative duties also work as a socialization process that brings together both the younger sisters and the elderly sisters into a conversation about death. As Sr. Rita noted, the Sisters are physically present when a community member is dying. This means that they have many chances to witness death, a process that Sr. Rita thinks help them pass on more peacefully when it is their own time.

As Sr. Rita put it at the end of our first interview:

I think for us it’s a spirit of gracefulness, of hospitality, charity, being present to people. There is a sense of care here. Just watch the Sisters going through the line [in the dining hall]. People will help

each other carry a tray. It’s not that they have to do it; it’s that they offer. I just think it’s the little stuff.

As I continue my research, I will continue to examine the process of aging as it occurs in the convent. Since previous studies that show that nuns and deeply religious people age more “successfully” and live longer, healthier lives, I expect to find that the factors leading to successful aging are many interrelated practices that include the physical, social, and spiritual aspects of the Sisters’ lives.

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**Anna I. Corwin** is a doctoral student in the Department of Anthropology and a recipient of a CSW travel grant. Her research interests include language and the body, linguistic performance, religion, devotion, and aging.

## Recipients of Renaissance Awards

In order to encourage achievement in continuing education, CSW recognizes two UCLA undergraduates each year with its Renaissance Award. These \$1000 scholarships, made possible through the generous donation of Dr. Myrna Hant, reward the rebirth of academic aspirations among women whose college careers were interrupted or delayed by family and/or career obligations. Applicants must be a UCLA undergraduate woman who returned or is returning to college after a period of years. This year, Beverly Woodard and Gabrielle M. Thomas were selected as Renaissance Award recipients.

### *Beverly Woodard*

Beverly Woodard is currently pursuing a bachelor's degree in the Department of Women's Studies at UCLA. She is active in her community as a Peer Mentor Volunteer with the Academic Advancement Program at UCLA. She is also an ordained minister and a program director for Youth Development Partnership. At 57 years old, she is still highly motivated.

### *Gabrielle M. Thomas*

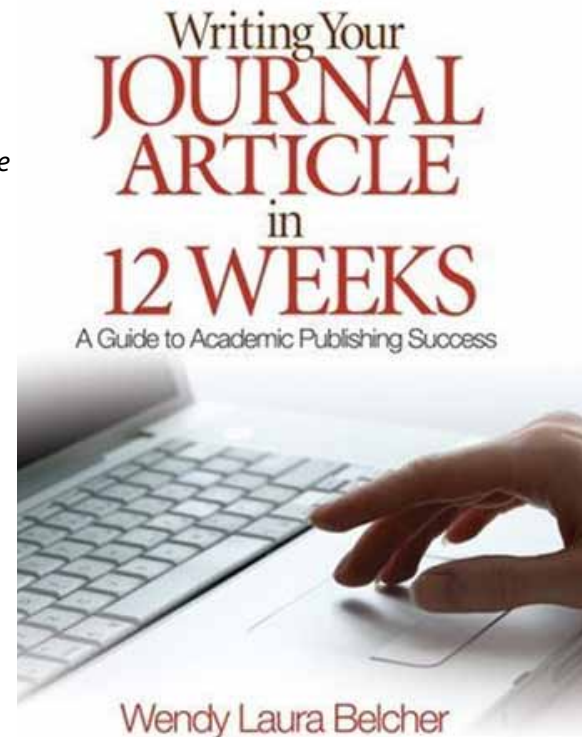
Gabrielle M. Thomas is an undergraduate in the Department of Women's Studies at UCLA. As a budding feminist entrepreneur, she founded My Beauty Inc. in 2004, an organization dedicated to working with teen girls to develop self-confidence through lifestyle empowerment workshops. She is also a skin care specialist for teens.

## Just Published! Wendy Belcher's *Writing Your Journal Article in Twelve Weeks*

A longtime friend of the Center for the Study of Women, Wendy Belcher has just published the book she developed while teaching a course on "Writing and Publishing Your Academic Article" at UCLA. Belcher received her Ph.D. in the Department of English at UCLA in 2008 and is now Assistant Professor in the Department of Comparative Literature at Princeton University. *Writing Your Journal Article in Twelve Weeks: A Guide to Academic Publishing Success* provides the instruction, exercises, and structure needed to revise a classroom essay, conference paper, dissertation chapter, master's thesis, or unfinished draft into a journal article and send it to a suitable journal. Each week, readers learn a particular feature of strong articles and work on revising their work accordingly. At the end of twelve weeks, readers send out their article to a journal. The workbook, developed over a decade of teaching scholarly writers in a range of disciplines at UCLA and around the world, is based on

research about faculty productivity and peer review, students' writing triumphs and failures, as well as Belcher's own experiences as a journal editor and award-winning author. Ultimately, *Writing Your Journal Article in Twelve Weeks* enables academic authors to overcome their anxieties and produce the publications essential to success in their fields.

Though it was only recently released, Welcher's book has already received glowing reviews. According to Joan Bolker, author of *Writing Your Dissertation in Fifteen Minutes a Day*, *Writing Your Journal Article in Twelve Weeks* offers a "comprehensive, well-written, and beautifully organized book on publishing articles in the humanities and social sciences that will help its readers write forward with a first-rate guide as good company." Kathleen McHugh, professor and director of CSW, agrees, noting that the book is "humorous, direct, authentic ... a seamless weave of experience, anecdote, and research."



For more information, see [www.wendybelcher.com](http://www.wendybelcher.com). To buy, visit <http://www.sagepub.com> or any online book retailer.

*continued from page 1*

This year, student presenters will be representing 34 educational institutions and will be coming from as far as Turkey, New Zealand, and the West Indies, for a truly inspiring exchange of ideas.

Kathleen McHugh, CSW's Director, will be moderating the plenary session, "Changing the (his)story: Women in Film and Television." The plenary includes presentations by three of UCLA's Cinema and Media Studies students: "Mis-Remembering Lucille Kallen: The Erased Career of Your Show of Shows' Lone Woman Writer," by Felicia D. Henderson, "Making the Cut: Female Editors and Representation in the Film and Media Industry," by Julia Wright, and "Collaborative Film Authorship: Writing Latinas into the Picture," by Mirasol Riojas.

Please join us for a day filled with exceptional scholarship, stimulating conversation, friendship, and fun. Mark your calendars for February 6th, as this year's Thinking Gender is something you do not want to miss!

Presented by the UCLA Center for the Study of Women, Thinking Gender is free and open to the public. Parking is available for \$9 in Structure 2. For more information on the program, visit <http://www.csw.ucla.edu/thinkinggender.html>

**Mirasol Riojas** is a Ph.D. candidate in the Cinema and Media Studies Program at UCLA. She is also the coordinator for this year's Thinking Gender conference and one of the presenters at the plenary session.

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