



**Ken Wissoker spoke on "Writing for Readers" on May 7. See article by Sharon Sharp on page 15.**

NEWSLETTER OF THE  
UCLA CENTER FOR THE  
STUDY OF WOMEN

# CSW update

MAY 07



## Q & A with Juliet Williams

***Juliet Williams is a Visiting Professor in Women's Studies for AY 06-07 and AY 07-08. She is an Associate Professor in Law & Society at UCSB where she teaches jurisprudence, gender and law, and right to privacy, as well as courses in the Women's Studies Program. She recently talked with CSW Update about her progress into feminism and women's studies.***

*Can you tell us about your family?  
Where did you grow up?*

I was born in Philadelphia, which is where I grew up. My dad was—and is—a professor of psychology at the University of Pennsylvania. I always lived near the university and frankly I always loved school.

I was raised at a time when "feminist" became a commonly used popular term—not always with a positive valence—but people like my mom, who identified as progressive and who believed in equal rights, would

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**BY CHRISTIA SPEARS BROWN**

## It's Not Easy Being a Girl in a Man's World

THE DAILY EXPERIENCE OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT  
FOR ADOLESCENT GIRLS

**G**IRLS EXPERIENCE sexual harassment every day in middle school. This harassment does not just affect a few girls—90 percent of girls share this experience. More than half of all girls have been called a nasty or demeaning name or teased about their appearance by a male. Slightly fewer girls have been told a mean or embarrassing joke about their gender or sexuality. By high school, the harassment is more frequent and more extreme. By the end of high school, one-quarter of all girls have been teased, threatened, or bullied by a male and one-half have been touched or grabbed against their wishes by a male. These findings from a recent study (Leaper and Brown, 2007) of six hundred ethnical-

ly and geographically diverse middle school and high school girls highlight the difficult and complicated world girls learn to navigate as they enter adolescence. Although a great deal of psychological research has examined women's experiences with sexual

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UCLA CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF WOMEN PRESENTS

### Facing Queer Frontiers

*Fresh Perspectives on Gender  
and Sexuality in Film*

**TUESDAY, MAY 22  
MELNITZ 2534 @ 5 PM**

GRADUATE STUDENT PANEL FEATURING

L WORD(S): TV'S NEW QUEER LEXICON  
*Candace Moore*

THE REAL (PORN) WORLD: THE POLITICS AND AESTHETICS  
OF THE NEW REALITY PORN  
*Jennifer Moorman*

OF COWBOYS AND COCKSMEN: 2005'S BUDDY FILMS AND  
THE (TRAGI)COMEDY OF (RE)MARRIAGE EQUALITY  
*Maria San Filippo*

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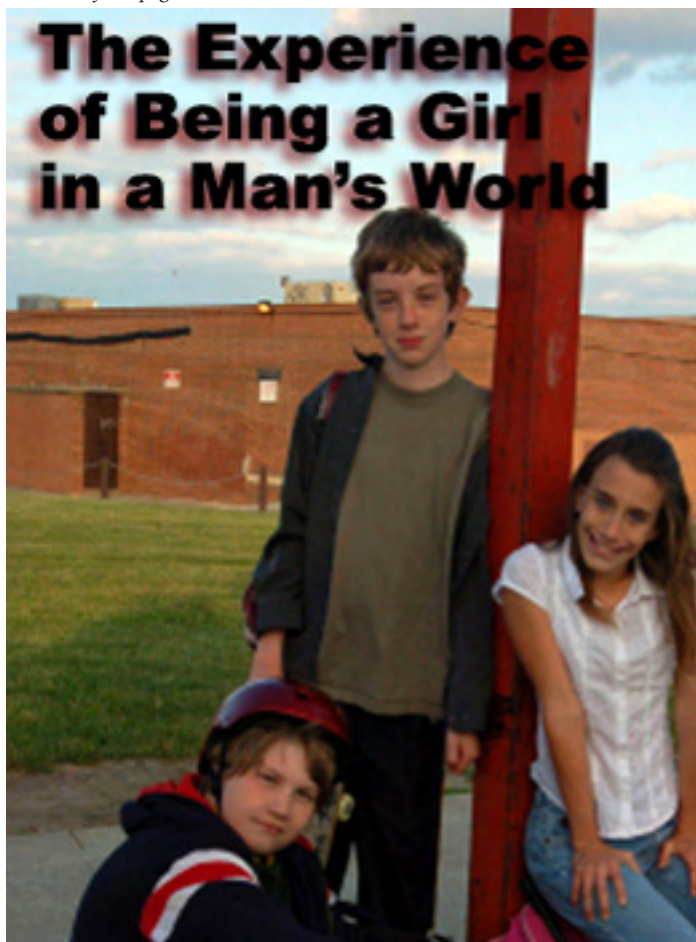
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harassment (for example, Bhattacharya and Dasgupta, 2006; Gutek and Koss, 1993; Stockdale, 1998), we often forget that girls live in a similar world.

What do girls think about this unwanted attention? Most girls describe themselves as becoming angry, anxious, and embarrassed after being sexually harassed. Older adolescents also report being worried, being scared, and feeling guilty. Although boys often think these overtures are good natured, girls rarely report being amused or flattered. With such negative emotional reactions to sexual harassment, it was particularly concerning when we examined the ways in which girls are coping with their experiences. Most frequently, girls said, after being grabbed by a boy or told an offensive joke, they either laughed about it or tried to pretend it didn't bother them. This public downplaying of sexual harassment seems to be stemming from girls' wanting to fit in with boys and not wanting to rock the boat. There is also a more ominous reason girls tend to deny their true feelings about sexual harassment—fear of retaliation. As one 15-year-old girl stated, "I knew if I said anything, I would have been messed with after school."

Although girls seem to believe it is easier to pretend that being grabbed, teased, and threatened does not bother them, there are two harmful side effects to this response. First, by denying their true emotional reactions, they are not seeking support from peers, parents, and teachers. Research (for example, Gutek and Koss, 1993) shows support-seeking is a powerful and effective way for adult women to cope with sexual harassment. The majority of adolescent girls are not using this powerful coping strategy. Second, boys who witness girls being sexually harassed are unsure of what to do. Our study revealed that there are many boys who are sincerely bothered by the way their female peers are being treated. They remarked, however, that when girls laugh it off, they assume she is unaffected. They also note that they are afraid they would embarrass their female

***Most girls describe themselves as becoming angry, anxious, and embarrassed after being sexually harassed. Older adolescents also report being worried, being scared, and feeling guilty. Although boys often think these overtures are good natured, girls rarely report being amused or flattered.***

***This problem of daily sexual harassment in middle and high schools is both bigger and smaller than most people realize. It is bigger because it affects almost every girl in school today. . . . On the other hand, it is smaller than many realize because it seems to be driven by a handful of boys.***

friend by saying something. The consequences of all this denial: girls say nothing, boys say nothing, and the school norm in which the sexual harassment of girls is acceptable continues to thrive.

What can we do as adults who care about the lives of girls? We must teach girls to react to sexual harassment in an active way. They need to tell the harasser it is offensive, they need to tell a teacher or parent, and they need to seek emotional support. Our research shows that some girls do this—typically, girls whose moms are emotionally supportive and who believe that they have the power to change sexism if they try. We must also teach boys that it is unacceptable to harass girls. Schools whose first reaction to reports of sexual harassment is to separate boys and girls into separate classes need to recognize that the school norms will not be changed without directly teaching boys that this behavior is unacceptable. Fortunately, most boys know this, and are indeed bothered when other boys do it. For those empathetic boys, we need to teach them that

they should say or do something. They need to know that, regardless of the girl's reaction, she is likely bothered by the sexual harassment and would like an ally.

This problem of daily sexual harassment in middle and high schools is both bigger and smaller than most people realize. It is bigger because it affects almost every girl in school today. Our study included girls in talented and gifted classes in the suburbs of Atlanta, GA, upper middle-class girls in Santa Cruz, CA, and ethnically and economically diverse girls in urban Los Angeles. Sexual harassment affected all of them, regardless of race, economic status, or academic ability. On the other hand, it is smaller than many realize because it seems to be driven by only a handful of boys. The rest of the boys are concerned bystanders who don't know what to do to change the norm. Our next goal as researchers (a goal that can be facilitated by parents and teachers) is to help girls actively cope with the sexual harassment they experience and help boys begin the process of changing the norm.

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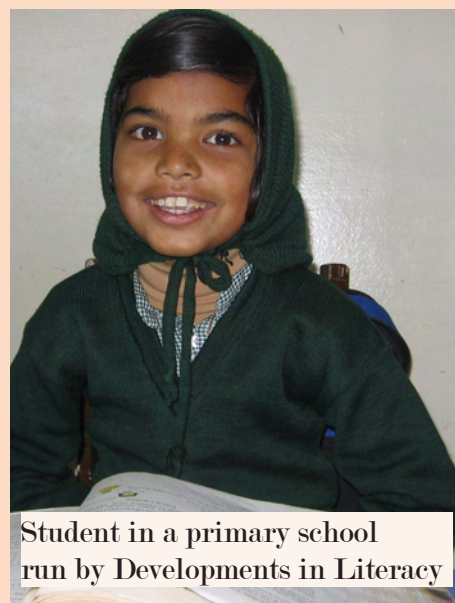


Only 22% of girls over 10 years old will finish primary school—compared with 47% of boys.

# Girls' Education in Rural Pakistan

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENTS IN LITERACY

by Sarah A. Simons



Student in a primary school run by Developments in Literacy

**I**N DECEMBER OF 2006, I traveled to Pakistan, where my classmate John Hellmann and I conducted interviews with teachers and staff of Developments in Literacy (DIL) schools. Our work and research in Pakistan were components of a Master's in Public Policy client project, and involved a seven-month organizational assessment to aid Developments in Literacy in its efforts to bring education to the disadvantaged girls and boys of Pakistan.

In Pakistan, only 53% of population is literate—where literacy is defined as the ability to write a simple letter and read a newspaper. As in many countries where women's basic human rights are still emerging in the political and public spheres, literacy rates reflect entrenched cultural inequities. In some regions of Paki-

stan the literacy gap between men and women can be as large as 45 percentage points. Take for example the North West Frontier Province that borders with Afghanistan. There the male literacy rate is 61%, while the female literacy rate is an abysmal 22%. In some rural areas of the country such as Kalat in the Province of Balochistan, only 9% of women are literate—compared to 40% of men.

Many international nonpartisan organizations, such as the International Crisis Group, have declared that the state of Pakistan is failing to provide education—one of the most important public goods—to its citizens. This is most evident in enrollment statistics from the country's own private school census data. (Private school is defined to include both for-profit and non-profit schools.) More than one-third of Pakistan's students attend

schools operated by non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Public government schools are particularly absent in rural regions. Moreover, there are many *ghost schools*: empty, unused government buildings in rural areas where urban teachers do not want to teach. For these reasons, Developments in Literacy and other organizations have stepped in to work with communities and set up schools. Developments in Literacy, in particular, is emerging as one of the leading education NGOs in Pakistan that provides education to children in rural areas and incorporates a special focus on girls.

## Developments in Literacy

Developments in Literacy is a non-profit organization formed in 1997 by Pakistani expatriate women to provide education for underprivi-

In my village there was a lot of ignorance and illiteracy before. A lot of people from my generation are illiterate, but now the tides are changing and I hope that within the next ten years there will be no one who is left without an education. I dream of making my school so good that it will become a model in relation to other schools.

– DIL teacher at a school in Rawalpindi, Pakistan

leged children in rural Pakistan. DIL (which means *heart* in Urdu, the national language of Pakistan) currently has nine projects throughout the country, six of which it manages through local NGOs. Currently, DIL and its partner NGOs are operating 150 community-based schools and educating over 13,000 students. Many DIL schools are the first ones in their village, representing the first opportunity for girls and boys to obtain an education. Furthermore, DIL hires only women as teachers. This is primarily to generate buy-in from parents who would otherwise feel uncomfortable sending their daughters to male teachers. However, it is also evident that hiring women as teachers not only generates employment for women (for many it is their first job opportunity), but also influences the role that women have in their communities as leaders in the education of the next generation.

While DIL schools are open to both boys and girls, the organization focuses on targeting girls. Each school has a Village Education Committee that is composed of volunteers from the community who, among other tasks, speak with parents to encour-

age them to send and keep their girls in school. Although cultural norms are shifting in Pakistan and women play a much larger role in society, there are still areas where girls' education is a newly embraced concept. DIL's project staff, as well as the Village Education Committee members, play a vital role in shaping these communities and the futures of many girls.

### The Client Project

The assessment John Hellmann and I conducted for Developments in Literacy examines the current teacher professional development strategies DIL is using. DIL's teachers have on average the equivalent of an 8th grade American education and typically have received a poor education based on rote memorization techniques. They often have no teaching experience prior to entering the classroom. For this reason DIL provides its teachers with continuous teacher training throughout the year in order to help its teachers improve their subject and pedagogical skills.

Our client project involved conducting a total of 91 in-depth, open-ended interviews with DIL teachers,

staff, and teacher trainers as well as with leadership and staff of other leading education NGOs in South Asia. Three weeks of our seven-month analysis were spent in Pakistan in the field. We also conducted a thorough document analysis of DIL's internal records and communications in order to evaluate organizational management and operations issues. Lastly, we used a best practices and literature review in the analysis of the critical issues we identified and the recommendations we generated for DIL.

Our time in the field with DIL's teachers revealed that they do face problems in the classroom, but are extremely dedicated to their work. One teacher we interviewed instructs from eight in the morning until two in the afternoon and then tutors all of her students in her home every day after class. Additionally, demographic data on the educational attainment of the parents of DIL's teachers demonstrates the changes that are occurring in their rural communities. We found that while nine years was the average education level of the teachers' fathers, their mothers had only received an average of two years of education. Given that DIL's teachers are educat-

ing a new generation of girls and boys, it is evident that their impact on the future of these rural areas will be profound.

Our project's work focused on ways in which DIL could improve the impact and sustainability of the professional development strategies it currently uses. Teacher training is one critical area and our final report identified methods with which DIL's project staff can improve the efficiency and reach of training workshops. Our recommendations included the institutionalization of a pre-service training program for all new teachers that incorporates on-site observation of more experienced teachers, as well as increased on-site support to facilitate the learning process that DIL's teachers are undergoing. We also provided DIL with methods in which it could utilize peer mentoring and staff coaching techniques to help teachers effectively transfer skills and knowledge from training workshops to the classroom. Lastly, we provided DIL staff with recommendations to help them improve the efficiency of the needs assessment methods they currently use.

The ultimate product of this client project was an in-depth report with the analysis and criteria through which we weighed options and narrowed our final recommendations. As DIL is a non-profit organization the recommendations sought to maximize existing resources, namely personnel and current activities. Eco-

nomics feasibility was another critical criterion and the report incorporated cost analysis and budget expenditure proposals. Lastly, we provided DIL with a detailed work plan for implementing our recommendations and a fundraising plan for addressing future cost difficulties.

Working in Pakistan alongside the women who form the team of teachers that instruct in DIL's schools was a remarkable experience that will guide me not only in my professional endeavors, but in my personal desires to ensure that women's basic rights become a part of the public policy debate in lesser developed countries like Pakistan. As DIL's teachers expand their own education through the professional development that DIL provides to them, the girls and boys in their classrooms will also receive a higher quality of education.

Ensuring education for girls is vital, not only for resolving gender inequities such as those occurring in Pakistan and many of the world's lesser developed countries, but it is also critical for helping these countries rise up out of poverty. As Vinod Thomas of the Economic Development Institute has stated, "educating girls lifts their earning potential and their nation's economic growth, ...and reduces child mortality, fertility rates and the spread of AIDS." Education for girls is a basic human right that empowers them as they grow into women who will shape the future of their families, communities and countries.

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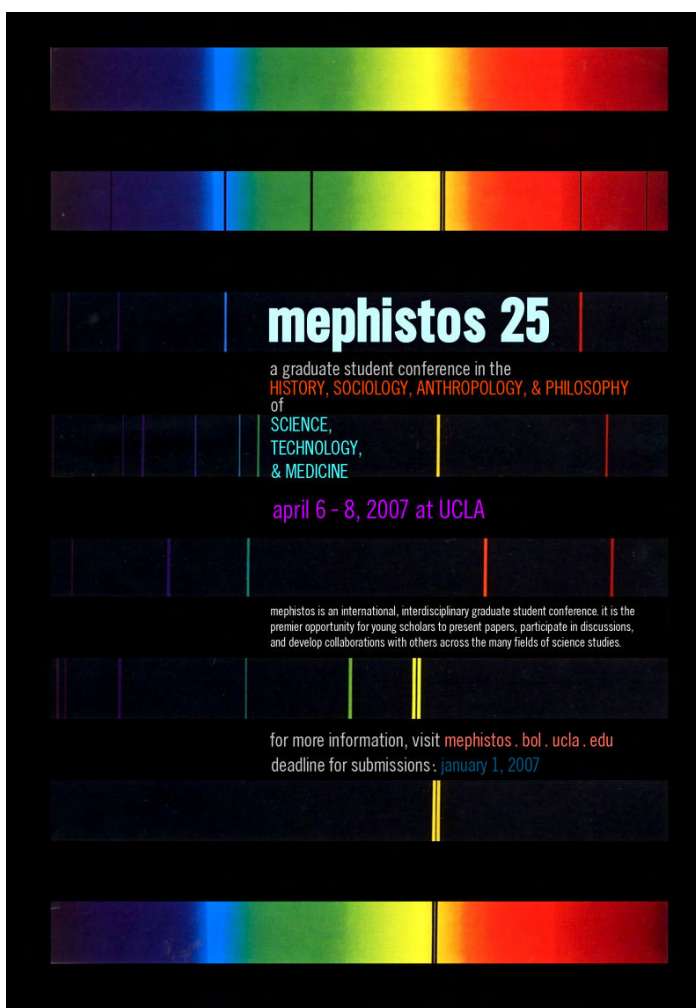
**Sarah Simons** is a Master in Public Policy Candidate in the School of Public Affairs. Her academic and professional work focus on international development policies,

specifically in the field of education and economic development. She earned her B.A. in Language Studies from the University of California, Santa Cruz and then worked in Mexico for three years. During her time in Mexico she worked for a non-profit organization that addresses health and family planning issues for indigenous women in rural areas of the state of Oaxaca. She also assisted in the coordination of a research project on the role of midwives in rural Mexico. Upon graduation in June of 2007 she will be entering the U.S. Foreign Service to work overseas in the field of international policy. She is grateful for the generous assistance of a travel grant from the Center of the Study of Women that helped her conduct her research in Pakistan.

# Spectrums of Diversity and Exchange

by Ann Marie Davis

## 2007 MEPHISTOS GRADUATE STUDENT CONFERENCE



**MEPHISTOS = Medicine, Philosophy, History, Science, Technology, and OS for (SO)ciology**

As the sun set in hues of lavender and coral behind Drake Stadium, some two dozen graduate students made their way up the hill from Bruin Plaza, past Ackerman Student Union, toward Royce Hall. Chatting casually as they walked, the students had one striking thing in common; they each carried a canary yellow, square-shaped program with the cryptic words “mephistos 25” boldly printed across the cover.

If a passerby were to overhear their light exchanges, she would learn that most of them had flown in from around the world just that day. Many of them discussed having endured long flights and jet lag, but they looked forward to a stimulating and productive weekend that began that evening. Acting as their guides, some UCLA students accompanied the group, also eagerly anticipating the weekend’s upcoming events.

Who were these young academics and why were they gathering at UCLA? What were the mysterious yellow pamphlets in their hands—and what could the words “mephistos” and “25” printed across them mean? According to Wikipedia, the free content encyclopedia online, the word “mephisto” refers to at least twenty-four different cultural events and phenomena around the world.

However, the web site overlooks the title’s most recent and relevant significance for the cluster of students and professors gathering at Royce Hall from April 6 to 8. Add “s” to the title “Mephisto” and, for these scholars, the word refers to a twenty-five-year-old academic tradition: a traveling, international, interdisciplinary conference organized annually by and for graduate students. This year it was organized by a group of UCLA graduate students. Based on the conference’s traditional subject matter, its title breaks down into the densely packed acronym, MEPHISTOS, for Medicine, Philosophy, History, Science, Technology, and OS for (SO)ciology.

Not surprisingly, the conference has witnessed a number of innovations and changes since its inception at Princeton University in 1981. Among the most significant developments this year was the decision by student organizers to widen the applicant pool, strongly encouraging scholars from anthropology as well as other science studies disciplines to attend.



Consequently, student invitees to MEPHISTOS 2007 represented a broad variety of research backgrounds including philosophy; history; science, technology and society; anthropology; art history; modern thought and literature; and communication studies. As to be expected, such a wide array of disciplines bespoke a broad spectrum of topics.

Perhaps most suggestive of the vibrant and rich exchange that was to take place at this year's conference was its official poster (pictured above). Sporting colorful rows of emission and absorption spectra, it suggests a fitting metaphor for the rich and variegated diversities that ultimately characterized this year's gathering. Designed by organizing committee member and UCLA Ph.D. student Sameer Shah, the multiple rainbow-colored strips decorating the poster allude to scientific technologies and movements—such as the boom in spectroscopy analysis in the 1860s—that conference goers, or “mephistians,” tend to choose as research topics. As fellow practitioners of “science studies,” mephistians come from diverse research backgrounds, but they apply interdisciplinary methods for situating “scientific expertise” in broad social, historical, and philosophical contexts. Although sometimes critical of certain scientific practices, their research often suggests the possibility of broader public participation in the formation of science policy.

Moving from campus to campus over the last quarter century, the conference found its way to Royce Hall this year after a ten-year interim away from UCLA. In recent years, MEPHISTOS has passed through the University of Western Ontario (2004), Brown University (2005), and the University of Chicago (2006). After presenting papers last year in Chicago, students Dan Crosby and Alix Hui jointly accepted the responsibility to **lead a group of graduate students** in organizing the 2007 conference at UCLA. The two put together a committee of thirteen. Representing the Departments of Anthropology, History, Philosophy, and Sociology, the organizing committee was composed of students whose research overlapped based on their shared interests in science studies. Despite their varied backgrounds and disciplines, each of the organizers felt mutually committed to fostering interdisciplinary exchange and collaboration at the conference.

Participants notwithstanding, perhaps the most decisive and fortuitous boon for the conference this year, however, was its wealth and variety of supporters, whose generous support was indispensable to the conference's success. Without doubt, the supporters deserve special recognition and thanks: The Southern California Colloquium in the History of Science, Technology, and Medicine; Department of History; the History of Science Field; the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies; the Division

of Social Sciences; UCLA History of Medicine; the Center for European and Eurasian Studies; the Center for 17th and 18th Century Studies; the Center for Society and Genetics; the Center for International Science, Technology and Cultural Policy; the Division of Humanities; the Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies; the Department of Sociology; the Department of Philosophy; the Department of Anthropology; the Neuroscience History Archive (NHA); the Graduate Division; and the Center for the Study of Women.

Indeed, the conference was remarkably rich—both figuratively and literally—on a number of fronts. In addition to its wide variety of themes and topics, MEPHISTOS 2007 also boasted a diverse array of speakers hailing from across the continent and around the world. With participants traveling from as far as Madrid, Spain, and India, the conference was a virtual and intellectual Mecca for young scholars interested in discussing their research and developing collaborations across the field of science studies. Among the two dozen invited to the conference, seven nationalities and four continents were represented.

On April 6, 2007, the conference was opened with brief remarks from co-directors, Dan Crosby and Alix Hui, both Ph.D. candidates in History of Science at UCLA. In the tradition of MEPHISTOS, Crosby and Hui stressed that the meeting was to be positive and supportive, allowing students to share their research, participate in discussions, and collaborate with others in diverse fields. A keynote speech by Professor Soraya de Chadarevian, who holds a joint appointment in the History Department and the new Center for Society and Genetics at UCLA, followed. Discussing her recent research, de Chadarevian gave a provocative, hour-long presentation on “Bombs, Mice, and Humans, Tales of Twentieth Century Science,” which detailed a case study on the relationship between atomic politics in post-war Britain and the course of genetics research in the late twentieth century.

The next two days were packed with panels and student presentations. Fortunately, each speaker had time to respond to questions and comments after presenting. At the end of each panel, the UCLA student moderators addressed the panel as a whole, pointing out common issues and themes. After the comments of the moderators, panels were opened for questions to the group.

In the spirit of diversity, the topics of the panels varied widely from the politics and economics of science and technology, histories of health and medicalization, and competing discourses in scientific knowledge. (A detailed schedule and panel abstracts are available at <http://mephistos.bol.ucla.edu>). Perhaps most relevant for researchers of women's and gender studies was the session entitled “What

Lies Between? Constructing and Complicating the Boundaries of Sex and Rationality.” In this session, speakers addressed topics ranging from early modern alchemy and hermaphroditism; gender ideology in twentieth-century sex chromosome research; nineteenth-century observations of sexual “pathologies” and “norms” in the “savage of Aveyron”; and present-day assumptions and debates on bodies with “ambiguous genitalia.” Above all, **by addressing assumptions that spanned four centuries, the panel successfully demonstrated that no matter how “scientific” or systematic, definitions of “womanhood,” “manhood,” and “sex” are never fixed but in a constant state of flux.**

Other MEPHISTOS panels also proffered analytic tools for research on women and gender. A panel on the histories of fitness, aging, and nutrition, for example, suggested useful frameworks with which scholars might **explore parallel links between gendered bodies and public health regimes.** Similarly, another panel on “medicalized subjects,” underscored instances where typically male-dominated professions such as medicine have extended beyond the “public” realm into distinctly domestic spaces or activist women’s hospitals. Finally, important ties between women’s studies and other interdisciplinary fields were amply suggested in presentations on social/scientific representations of racialized bodies.

As these examples suggest, the conference’s emphasis on interdisciplinarity provided an especially open and rich venue where integrative fields such as women’s studies could prosper and thrive. Commenting on this very aspect, participant Kirstin Borgerson (Department of Philosophy, University of Toronto, Canada) applauded this year’s event for “bringing together a variety of disciplines” not only in the presentations but also on the organizing committee. Borgerson, who also presented at the conference in 2006, stated that she “was particularly impressed by the presence of faculty members at the conference—too often graduate conferences exist in their own little bubble even though they are some of the best places to look for innovative and exciting new research.” Finally, in terms of creating opportunities for women, Borgerson added that she was “very pleased to see that over half of the conference participants were women. I know this is an improvement over past years.”

Kalil Oldham (Department of History, University of California, Berkeley), who had also presented at a previous MEPHISTOS conference, agreed with Borgerson. “It was great to see some UCLA faculty turn up for the conference,” he noted. In addition, he said the panels were “well put together” and **“left time for speakers to respond to individual questions and comments rather than only having a group comment at the end.”**Echoing Oldham’s sentiments,

Professor Sharon Traweek (Department of History, UCLA) applauded the organizing committee for its “intellectual planning,” which resulted in “subtle and interesting” panels. In addition, Traweek stated that she was impressed by the conference’s “intellectual ecology”; **in her opinion, conference organizers were successful in “generating a lively and congenial atmosphere, which is especially important in the development of future collegiality.”** The ability to organize workshops that foster such a collegial and productive environment, she emphasized, is extremely important. In fact, it is a skill that she and her colleagues often look for when considering job candidates at UCLA.

After the first full day of panels, participants were driven to the J. Paul Getty Museum for a celebratory banquet. Before dinner, they had time to take in museum exhibitions or to simply check out the grounds while enjoying views of the setting sun beyond Santa Monica into the Pacific Ocean.

After the final two panels on Sunday morning, the last order of business remained: **the organizing committee announced that Jessica Luther and Paul Robinson, both Ph.D. students in the Department of History at University of Texas at Austin, would be the team to handle 2008.**

The meeting had officially come to an end, but conference organizers and participants continued to mingle. Indicating the degree of collegiality generated that weekend, many students made plans to spend a few more hours together over lunch. Consequently, rather than quickly dispersing, about twenty students headed down toward a local restaurant in Westwood. Summing up the general mood for many participants and organizers, one student wrote to the organizing committee after the conference, “I once again want to thank you all for an amazing conference experience. It was a fabulous weekend and I just feel lucky that I got to participate in it.”

*A PhD Candidate in the Department of History at UCLA, **Ann Marie Davis** is currently writing her dissertation on representations of prostitution in late nineteenth-century Japan. In particular, she investigates how prostitute’s bodies were targeted as objects of scientific inquiry and knowledge formation in new fields of public health, law, and criminal studies. Having organized various conferences in the past, Davis values her participation on this year’s MEPHISTOS committee as one of her best conference-organizing experiences yet!*

# *Notes from the Field* **Living Ethnography**

by Azza Basarudin



**Q**uestions of gender in Islam, particularly of how Muslim women have been excluded from the interpretation and codification of religion has generated one of the most highly contested and controversial discourses in the contemporary moment of globalization. Across the Muslim world from Saudi Arabia to Indonesia, Islam's faithful, especially women, are calling for innovative ways to balance their religious teachings with the demands of modernity and globalization. Within this context, my dissertation research in the Women's Studies Program examines how Muslim women scholar-activists in two NGOs (non-governmental organizations) in Malaysia and in Egypt negotiate issues of gender, religion, and feminism in Islam. Through a transnational ethnography, my research examines whether the advocacy strategies of these NGOs challenge and/or accommodate conventional Islamic religious and cultural discourses in order to struggle for gender justice and reform. Furthermore, my research traces the relationship between the politicization of religion and culture and the re-fashioning of "Muslim" identity. Since the autonomous Malaysian women's movement entered the national scene in the early 1980s, a large portion of women's struggles have focused on increasing the representation of women in politics, addressing sexual harassment, eliminating violence against women, combating teen pregnancy and marital rape, and most recently with the establishment of the NGO I was researching, demanding the right to be involved in the legislation of Islamic law in the country. Although women's struggles in Malaysia can be considered feminist struggles, more often than not, they have not been labeled feminist because of the connotation and/or stereotypes that feminism carries (that is, bra-burning and man-hating females).

My interest in designing this dissertation project stems from the need to better understand the politics of possibilities in Muslim women's intervention in patriarchal religious

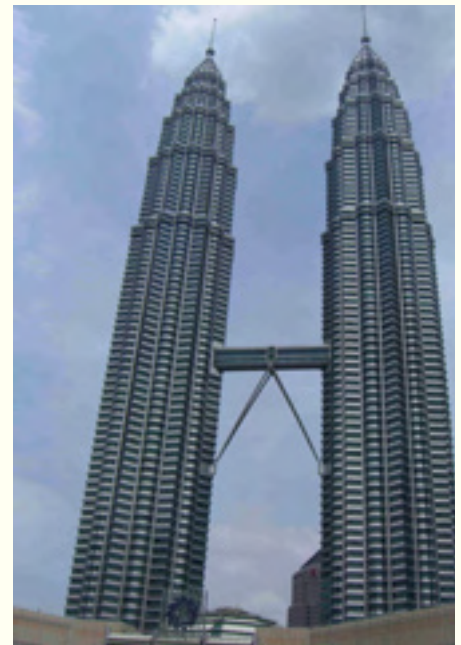


discourses and spaces. Furthermore, while contemporary scholarship provides important feminist, legal, theological, sociological and political insights into the intersection of gender, religion and feminism in shaping women's lives, much of this research focuses on the theoretical dimension of the process of knowledge production and of the debates on gender in Islam. The applications of these theories in Muslim societies and the possibilities and challenges that accompany gender justice and reform advocacy remain under-researched. My project grounds theories in empirical research within the everyday social practices of Muslims in two different national contexts. As for the second part of my research on the re-fashioning of Muslim identity, I am interested in explicating the processes by which women are redefining their identities through their engagement with religion and culture. As a Muslim immigrant woman in the United States, I find that being Muslim after September 11, 2001, means learning to renegotiate what it means to be Muslim in times of Islamophobia and xenophobia. It means "performing" and/or "concealing" my Muslim identity as I weave between and within spaces, religions, and cultures; thus I am conscious of how identity politics can be loaded with meanings and boundaries and can signify one of the most important sites of struggle.

I returned to Malaysia, the country of my birth, to conduct the first phase of my field research from July 2006 to March 2007. A former colony of the Portuguese (1511–1641), Dutch (1641–1785), and British (1785–1957), and occupied by Japan from 1941 to 1945, Malaysia is a multicultural and multi-racial nation in Southeastern Asia. Between the twelfth and seventeenth centuries, Arab and Indian Muslim traders brought Islam with them to what was then known as the Malay

Peninsula. Contemporary Malaysian society is made up of indigenous tribes, ethnic Malays (*Bumiputra*, sons and daughters of the earth), Chinese, Indians, and Eurasians. Since the mid 1980s, under the rule of (now former) Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, Malaysia's state-driven move towards becoming an industrialized nation has witnessed selective modernization that favors cutting-edge technology, free markets, and capitalism, while paying lip service to issues such as democracy, women's and human rights, and freedom of expression. Mohamad's struggle to transform his backwater nation into one of Southeast Asia's most prosperous countries was not without its share of political repression—authoritarian rule, altering legislations in his favor, cronyism, and arbitrary detentions of opposition members characterized his legacy. Despite that, under his leadership and that of current Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi, Malaysia has been singled out as a model for a progressive Islamic nation where pluralism and Islamic religiosity thrive in a *demokrasi terpimpin* (guided democracy) and where moderate Malaysian Islamic practices are a shining example of the successful balance of modernity and piety.

While Badawi's version of Islam *Hadhari* (civilizational Islam) has been hailed as the foundation for promoting a more liberal interpretation and legislation of Islam, I discovered during my field research that many government-sponsored Islamic institutions responsible for monitoring "proper" understanding and practices of religion and influential Muslim leaders are moving towards conventionalism by silencing progressive voices, with political Islam taking center stage on issues of freedom of religion, democracy, and women's and human rights. As a Malaysian, I am deeply concerned about



Petronas Twin Towers in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia's symbol of progress

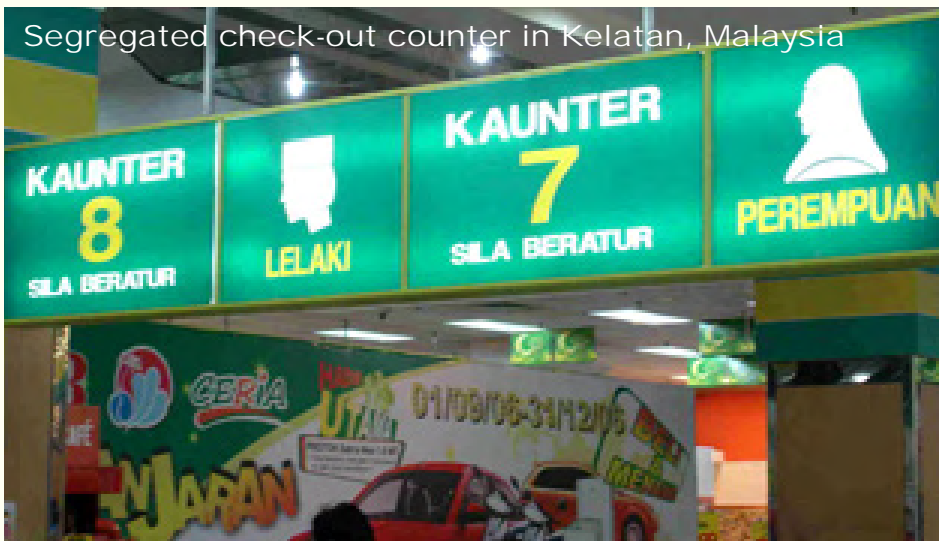


Billboard on Islamic dress in Kelantan, Malaysia



*My interest in designing this dissertation project stems from the need to better understand the politics of possibilities in Muslim women's intervention in patriarchal religious discourses and spaces.*

Segregated check-out counter in Kelantan, Malaysia



T-shirt from the organization I researched



*Ketuanan Melayu* (Malay ethno-religious supremacy) and Muslim conventionalism converging towards a dangerous intolerance of other faiths, ethnic minorities and people who dare to question the mainstream interpretation of Islam, threatening to unleash a wave of hostility upon the fragile multicultural harmony. The battle for Islam in Malaysia rages between those who believe in dogmatic understanding of religion and those who believe that Islam encourages *Tajdid* (renewal) and *Islah* (reform) according to the context of a Muslim *Ummah* (community). It is against this social and political landscape that my field research took place.

Completing a pilot study with the organization I researched in 2004, as well as continuing communication via e-mail since then, made the transition into field research much easier. I spent the first two weeks in Malaysia connecting with family and friends and re-familiarizing myself with the culture and customs of the country. By the end of July 2006 I had found an apartment close to the organization I was researching, which made my daily commute bearable, and began the immersion process into the organization. I participated in the activities of the organization, established a comfortable working relationship with many of the organization's staff and members, even becoming close friends with some of them. As a native feminist ethnographer, some of the challenges during field research were negotiating the "authenticity" question, that is, my "authenticity" not only as a Malaysian but also as a Muslim woman who has resided abroad for a number of years; my location as a Ph.D. candidate in an American University whose research is funded by American institutions and agencies, which automatically renders me suspect despite my Malaysian heritage and family ties; expectations that I

would understand cultural nuances and that I would be able to form my own conclusions and/or that my conclusions should mirror those of my respondents (that is, you are Malay, you know what it means), which also speaks to the conflict between my values and the values of my respondents; the blurred terrains between the researcher and respondents; and unequal power relations between the researcher and respondents.

As I packed up my apartment in Kuala Lumpur, visited my favorite *kopitiam* (breakfast and coffee shop) for one last time and bid farewell to my family and to the respondents and/or friends that I made during the last nine months, I was reminded of the moments I was rendered speechless again and again during personal interviews when respondents shared their most intimate hopes, secrets, and thoughts, and that no research method classes could have prepared me for a response, let alone an adequate response.<sup>1</sup> I have been humbled by the sincerity of my respondents in sharing their personal and professional lives, in opening up their hearts and minds, their hopes and frustrations, and most importantly, their aspirations for an Islamic society that is not only just but also one where Muslim women are able to play an integral role in the legislation of religion. The sincerity of my respondents and their trust in me are some of the key factors that have guided my ethics and accountability in carrying out field research and will no doubt continue to sustain me during the dissertation writing period.

In my final night in Kuala Lumpur, as I listened to the *azan* (call to prayer) from a nearby mosque, loud and clear in my apartment and to the rhythmic recitation of the Qur'an that followed, calling Muslims from all walks of life to pay homage to fourteen hundred years of tradition, I reflected on how grateful I am for

the opportunity to participate as a full and/or partial observer on this journey with a group of women, who, through their tireless advocacy for gender justice and reform in Islam, have given their own meaning to the word *jihad* (struggle).<sup>2</sup>

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#### NOTES

1. This comment is by no means a reflection on my professors, the research methods classes I have taken at UCLA, and/or the Women's Studies program. It is merely to point out one of the many unexpected dimensions of field research.

2. I am aware of the controversy with regard to the term "jihad." Jihad comes from the Arabic root word "jahada" which means "to strive for" and I utilize this meaning in the context of my research to reflect the advocacy efforts of Muslim women intellectual-activists.

**Azza Basarudin** (see page 12) is a PhD candidate in the Women's Studies Program at UCLA. Her research is supported by fellowships from the Wenner-Gren Foundation, the International Dissertation Research Fellowship Program of the Social Science Research Council, the Doctoral Dissertation Research Improvement, National Science Foundation and the Paula Stone Dissertation Research Fellowship from the Center for the Study of Women. She is currently conducting the second phase of her field research in Cairo, Egypt.

# Writing for Readers

## THINKING THROUGH PUBLISHING IN A CHANGING CLIMATE

**On May 7,** the Center for the Study of Women and the Department of Comparative Literature presented Ken Wissoker's talk "Writing for Readers: Thinking through Publishing in a Changing Climate." Wissoker, Editorial Director of Duke University Press, gave an informative, witty, and insightful talk geared toward graduate students working on dissertations and junior faculty working on their first books.

Thinking about publishing while writing or after completing a dissertation is apt to arouse anxiety in many scholars. Finishing a dissertation feels like reaching the top of a mountain peak, then from that vantage point, thinking about turning the dissertation into a publishable manuscript seems like climbing yet another, even more formidable mountain. As someone in that position, I have many questions: What is the first step in that process? How much do I need to have revised in order to approach an editor? What does the oft-lamented "crisis in academic publishing" mean for the prospects of publishing my dissertation?

Wissoker provided answers to those questions and more, offering helpful guidance on how to think about one's writing in the "post-bookstore" era of academic publishing. Wissoker stressed the importance of understanding the challenges to scholars hoping to publish their first books

posed by this new configuration of the academic publishing environment. As many independent bookstores have closed and have been replaced by corporate bookstores and by Amazon.com, there are fewer possibilities for attracting cross-over audiences who might find one's book while browsing in their local independent bookstore. Moreover, university presses consistently lose money on academic books and ship fewer copies to bookstores, which reduces visibility for books that may have difficulty appealing to readers. Wissoker advised the audience that it is now more vital than ever to write for readers and to take the needs of a book's potential audience seriously in a consistent way.

One of his most useful insights was that there are material differences between writing a dissertation and writing a book. When writing a dissertation, a writer is writing for evaluation by a dissertation committee. When writing a book, one is writing for readers. It's crucial to understand this distinction when thinking about how to revise a dissertation for publication. In dissertations, writers often hide behind the voices of others, tentatively floating their own argument after presenting a long string of block quotes. Dissertation committee readers will read dissertations, sifting through long quotations of theorists, seemingly extraneous material inserted to please a particular member

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of the committee, and actively search for the argument because they are not only paid to do so but because they also understand the nature of the dissertation genre, which functions to satisfy the requirements of a Ph.D.

This is not the case with readers of books. The reader wants to know upfront what the argument and the story are. Carefully crafting an introduction becomes important in this regard. The writer needs to think about what the readers need to be convinced of and what they need to see in order to be convinced. Wissoker offered several metaphors for the function of the introduction. The introduction is about establishing an arc, with each chapter afterward filling in pieces of the arc. The introduction is like a circular parking garage, he argued, providing an orderly descent for the book to follow. Writing the book is a dialectical process between the introduction and the chapters.

In addition, Wissoker advised the audience that knowing who the potential readers for the book might also be essential in the new configuration of the academic publishing industry. Is the book for other academics in the field? For academics in other fields? For a general audience? Or some combination of all three? When writing the book, it is important to think about the audience, how to keep everyone on board, and about what readers will be looking for and what they will be looking to avoid. Lastly, he emphasized that being present in one's field and building interest in one's book is indispensable.

After his talk, he generously took questions from the audience and walked the audience through the steps of academic publishing, demystifying the process of selecting a press, approaching an editor, revising the manuscript, and responding to reader reports. His excitement about various projects he has shepherded through the process was evident and his practical insights about writing were delivered with good humor. Wissoker's talk about how to think about one's writing in the process of reshaping a dissertation into a book was useful on many levels and helped to make the path to publishing seem much less daunting.

**Sharon Sharp** recently received her Ph.D. in the Department of Film, Television, and Digital Media with a Concentration in Women's Studies at UCLA. She is currently revising her dissertation *Yesterday Now: Television, Nostalgia and the Mediation of the American Past* for publication.



not—at the time when I was young—have called herself a feminist.

*Did your mother work outside the home? Was she a feminist?*

She did not until when I was five my parents got divorced. Then she did work and she built a very remarkable career for herself and, I think, became an emblem of the feminist revolution. She never remarried and there were four of us kids. My dad was very much involved with us as well but she took care of us and worked. She still works today. She's head of an agency in Philadelphia that finds people who have fallen through welfare safety net in the post-Clinton era and helps reknit them in the fabric of services. It's a really important job.

*How did your early schooling affect you?*

For over 150 years, Philadelphia has been home to the second-oldest public boy's high school in the country, Central High School, which has a sister school that was founded in 1848. They are the best public high schools in the city; so, when I was in ninth grade, I went to Girls' High—and I really hated it. It was just a disaster. It felt second-rate. It felt cloistered. I had always had friends who were boys. I wanted a normal social life. We didn't dissect frogs because girls didn't do that! And this was in 1983!

Meanwhile, unbeknownst to me or my family, who were worried about what to do because there really wasn't another public school, a lawsuit had been making its way through the courts. As it happened during the first week of my sophomore year, the lawsuit was resolved, affirming that the girls' school was inferior to the boys' school in violation of the state's equal rights amendment.

On the first Thursday of the school year, my parents called the lawyers that they had read about in the newspaper. The lawyers told them that I should go to the boys' school the next day and enroll. So basically that's what happened. There was a huge student walkout. Teachers were telling me that I couldn't be in their class and there was press and media coverage. The next three years for me was an incredibly shocking, out of the blue, intense—wonderful but also really hard and heartbreaking—struggle. Not so much in the name of feminism but more in the name of a kind of humanism: I'm a person too. Why can't I be here?

*Did that experience affect your college career? Where did you go to college?*

I went to Harvard where I majored in government. And I hate to say it but I had become sexist and male-identified. I took a women's studies class in my senior year and didn't like it much. I was always interested in issues of community and belonging and how individual self-expression can be flourishing but can also be shut down by political and social conditions. And when I went to graduate school at Cornell to get my Ph.D. in political theory, very accidentally I was assigned to T.A. a feminism class and I got more interested in it. My dissertation, though, was on two twentieth-century liberal philosophers, F.A. Hayek and John Rawls, not feminist thinkers at all.

*How did you come to be in Women's Studies?*

It was only when I got my first job at UCSB where, for just very, very random reasons, I was given a 20 percent appointment in the Women's Studies Program and an 80 percent appointment in Law & Society, that I first started to build intellectual relationships with women who are feminist and whose scholarship is really engaging and who are thinking about the intersection between various racialized identities and my work started to turn in that direction.

And now here I am. It's really an accidental trajectory but I could not be happier. I feel like I have been rescued from my own bad judgment. It's such a vital and vibrant field that is defined around open questions. There's really a lot to say. As a scholar, that's what you are looking for, that's where the heat is. It's all very exciting for me, the teaching and the writing.

*What are your current research interests?*

Currently, I am at work on two new book projects. The first is entitled *Untying the Knot: Rethinking Marriage in the Twenty-First Century*. This book considers the legal contradictions and social ambivalence surrounding the institution of marriage in the contemporary U.S. *Untying the Knot* includes chapters on topics ranging from the legal regulation of green card marriage fraud; spousal accommodation policies at universities; marriage-themed reality TV shows; transsexual marriage and the law; and *sigheh* (temporary marriage) in Iran.

My second book project, entitled *Making a Difference: The Fall and Rise of Single-Sex Public Education in the United States*, is a study of the growing movement for single-sex public education in the United States. Over the past fifteen years, the number of public primary and secondary schools offering single-sex educational opportunities in the United States has risen dramatically—from less than 10 in 1990 to over 250 today. Initially, single-sex public education was promoted by reformers as a way to address a perceived “boy crisis” understood to be taking an especially hard toll on the nation's most disadvantaged populations. At the time, reform efforts emphasized the need for gender-differentiated pedagogies to be implemented in the context of broader curricular initiatives foregrounding issues of racial and economic inequality. In the book, I document a pronounced change, beginning in the mid-1990s, in the public justifications presented for single-sex education, as claims concerning class-based and race-based discrimination increasingly were subordinated to assertions of “natural,” “hard-wired,” “genetic,” and “biological” sex differences. *Making a Difference* explores the causes and consequences of this shift in single-sex education politics and practices, focusing in particular on the role that antidiscrimination law and policy has played in encouraging the shift from sociological to biologicistic rhetoric.

*What will you be teaching next year?*

Introduction to Women's Studies; Feminist Theories in Social Science; Women, Gender, and Popular Culture; and Women and Public Policy. For information, visit the Women's Studies website: [www.womensstudies.ucla.edu](http://www.womensstudies.ucla.edu)

# Western Association of Women Historians Meets in San Diego

*by Kathleen Sheldon*

The Western Association of Women Historians (WAWH, [www.wawh.org](http://www.wawh.org)) held their annual meeting on the first weekend in May at the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice ([peace.sandiego.edu](http://peace.sandiego.edu)) at the University of San Diego. Inspired by the beautiful hilltop setting, the 160 attendees enjoyed a variety of panels and social occasions. One of the pleasures of WAWH meetings is the frequent opportunity for conversation and conviviality, and this year the organized venues included two receptions, lunch on both Friday and Saturday, a light supper on Friday, and the awards banquet on Saturday. This year was also the first time that a book exhibit was included.

The keynote lecture was presented by Asunción Lavrin of Arizona State University, speaking on her new project that investigates “Femininity and Masculinity Through the Prism of Religion: Mexico 1550-1800.” She demonstrated the contradictory and changing ideals of feminine and masculine behavior with rarely seen images and texts produced in Mexico concerning male and female clergy and members of religious orders.

UCLA participants at this year’s meeting included Natalie Joy, a UCLA graduate student who presented a paper on women’s activism in the antislavery and anti-Indian removal movements, Donna Schuele, a CSW Research Scholar, who was the discussant for a panel on “Women, Business, and Ethnicity in California, 1850-1960,” and Susannah Baxendale, an associate at UCLA’s Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, who presented the award for the Barbara “Penny” Kanner Award for bibliography at the dinner on Saturday evening (for all the prize winners, see the WAWH website). Penny Kanner, who endowed that book award, is a long time supporter of CSW as well. In addition, the WAWH website has been recently upgraded with the assistance of Susan Kullman, a CSW Research Scholar, and the incoming president is Carole Srole, who received her Ph.D. in history at UCLA and now teaches at California State University, Los Angeles.

I presented a paper about my great-aunt Sylvia Thankful Eddy, who was a nurse missionary in Turkey in the early twentieth century and who left a diary of her first two years in Turkey in 1919-1920. My participation was supported by a Tillie Olsen Award from the Center for the Study of Women (*see page 19*). I was particularly pleased to be part of a panel on women’s travel diaries, which included two other fascinating papers. Tory Swim, who will begin graduate studies at UC Santa Barbara in the fall, talked about the diaries left by a steamship stewardess who traveled on small ships across the Pacific in the 1890s, recounting her encounters with Chinese travelers and American prostitutes. Kate Davis of San Jose State University imparted

information about a pioneering botanist, Ynes Mexia, who traveled extensively throughout Latin America in the 1920s and 1930s, collecting tens of thousands of plant specimens and recording wonderful details about what she observed, including local societies as well as plant and animal life.

Though we three presenters did not previously know about our parallel work, Elizabeth Pryor, our discussant from UC Santa Barbara, noted some common areas in the experiences of the women we profiled. All were working internationally and outside the usual conventions of American women's lives, they were self-supporting, and all three were directly involved in encounters across ethnic and racial boundaries. In addition, the three diaries which we are using as our primary sources were lost or hidden until recently, and they provide new evidence about the varieties of female experience in history.

I cannot report on all of the panels, which were generally very interesting and wide-ranging (the program is available at the WAWH website). I particularly enjoyed an entertaining panel on beauty in postwar America that included papers on African-American beauty culture and political ideas about integration, the legacy of the Miss America protests, the role of Jewish sororities in pushing forward Jewish ideas of beauty and identity, and the contrasting and changing expectations of American and Soviet stewardesses in the Cold War. All the papers on this panel benefited from the comments of Lois Banner, a pioneer in writing about feminism and American views about beauty. A panel on women's organizations included papers on Guatemalan women's associations in the early twentieth century, the intersection of Arizona women's clubs and Indian welfare, and the role of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom in Mexico in the 1930s. Three papers on the panel on "Nurses Across Borders" brought forward the stories of Australian nurses as prisoners of war in World War II, nurses in the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Montana in the 1930s, and the role of local midwives and government nurses in New Mexico, 1930-1950. Francesca Miller was honored with a panel that included remembrances of her leadership in developing the field of Latin American women's history.

Many papers focused on histories of the American West as well as the broader Pacific Rim, while others ranged farther afield with research on religious relics in Europe, artists and intellectuals in Spain, marriage in seventeenth and eighteenth century Boston, and family politics in Renaissance Florence, seventeenth-century Portugal, and France under Louis XIV. Still other panels looked at such nuts and bolts topics as the usefulness of local archives and how to combine motherhood and graduate studies. With many other presentations not mentioned here, the confer-



WAWH's new website was created by CSW research scholar Susan Kullmann.

ence provided a range of fascinating papers and a glimpse of important research being done by women historians in the western United States and beyond.

Next year WAWH will be celebrating its fortieth anniversary at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada. With over 500 members, the organization offers four prizes that recognize the accomplishments of graduate students, books, and articles. Continuing its tradition as an organization that prides itself on the support given to feminist historians, Karen Blair and the program committee will welcome submissions for that meeting until November 1, 2007. Plan to join us and keynote speaker Merry Wiesner-Hanks on May 15-18, 2008 in Vancouver.

**Kathleen Sheldon** has been a CSW Research Scholar since 1989. Sheldon received her Ph.D. in history from UCLA in 1988 with a dissertation on "Working Women in Beira, Mozambique." She had previously completed an M.A. in African Area Studies, UCLA, 1977, with a concentration in history and political science. She was honored with the 1999 Catherine Prelinger Scholarship Award for independent scholars pursuing women's history from the Coordinating Council for Women in History, for her work on *Pounders of Grain: A History of Women, Work, and Politics in Mozambique* (published in 2002). In 2003, she was awarded a research grant from the National Coalition of Independent Scholars for her work on the *Historical Dictionary of Women in Sub-Saharan Africa*, which was published in 2005.

# Tillie Olsen Grants 2007

Each year, the Center for the Study of Women awards a set of grants that are available only to research scholars affiliated with CSW. Called the Tillie Olsen Grants, they honor of the memory of a writer who documented the silences imposed on women by family and work responsibilities and financial need (see page 17).

We are pleased to announce that this year's recipients of Tillie Olsen Grants are Kathleen Sheldon, Ernestina Osorio, and Nancy Deren. Grants may be used to support participation in scholarly conferences, travel to research sites, purchase specialized research materials, or for procurement of technical services.

The Research Scholars Program supports local independent scholars conducting research projects related to women, gender, or sexuality. Acceptance to the program is based on the quality of the proposed research. Scholars receive formal affiliation with CSW, library privileges, stationery, email accounts, personal web pages, and opportunities to participate in CSW programs.

## MODERN ARCHITECTURE IN MEXICO AND IN THE U.S.



Ernestina Osorio's research project examines the role of women in the promotion and

acceptance of modern architecture in Mexico and in the United States

during the 1930s to 1960s. She will use the Tillie Olsen Grant to support travel to consult the Esther McCoy Papers at the Archives of American Art of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C. She will closely study how McCoy sustained important cultural exchange in the mid-twentieth century.

## BLUE RIVER LAKE



Nancy Deren is writing a feature-length narrative film script inspired by communities that have been

altered by the building of hydroelectric dams. *Blue River Lake* focuses on a mother and daughter whose stories embody their different historical placement: one who has lived through dislocation and lost community, the other growing up in a region typified by vacationing tourists and urbanite second homes. The film deals with issues of single motherhood, class and social status, political protest, and the paradox of progress. The Tillie Olsen Grant will be used to support further historical research for the script.

## DIARY OF SYLVIA THANKFUL EDDY



For the past few years Kathleen Sheldon (left), has been working with a diary written by her great-aunt, Sylvia Thankful Eddy,

who was a nurse missionary with the Near East Relief in eastern Turkey. Eddy kept a record of the first two years (1919–1920) of her work in Turkey, when she found herself in the middle of a conflict between Turkish and French forces and witnessed the lingering effects of Turkish persecution of Armenians. Her story counters the usual expectations of missionary women's perspective, as she almost never mentions anything related to religion or faith and does not discuss the condition of Turkish and Armenian women in her city, but on the contrary frequently refers to social events with French soldiers, including teas, dance parties, and horseback rides at dawn. Sheldon will use the Tillie Olsen Grant to support two trips related to this research. The first is to the Western Association of Women Historians annual conference in San Diego in May where she will be presenting a paper in a panel on the travel diaries of American women. In June she will do some follow up research concerning Sylvia Eddy at the archives of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions at Houghton Library of Harvard University.



# Tillie Lerner Olsen

1912–2007



**O**N JANUARY 1, 2007, just two weeks before her 95th birthday, Tillie Lerner Olsen died in Oakland, California after years of failing health. Her short stories chronicled the lives of the working poor and her scholarship explored the silences and the silencing of women who write. In 1961, her story, *Tell Me a Riddle*, in the collection of the same name, was awarded the O. Henry Prize for best American short story of the year.

The daughter of political refugees from Russia, Olsen was born in Omaha, Nebraska. As the second of six children, she frequently had to care for her younger siblings while her parents worked. She left high school before graduating to get a job. From the 1930s to the 1960s, she worked as a waitress, a hotel maid, a packinghouse worker, a secretary and a factory worker. During the Depression, she became involved in political activism and labor organizing at packinghouses in Kansas and Nebraska. In 1933 she moved to San Francisco. During the 1934 San Francisco general strike, she was arrested, and wrote about the strike in *The New Republic* and *The Partisan Review*.

She married a fellow activist, Jack Olsen, in 1944, and they had four daughters. The burdens of child-rearing, work, and housekeeping, kept her from writing although she remained politically active. In 1953, when her youngest daughter started school, Olsen enrolled in a creative writing course at San Francisco State. On the strength of an unfinished story—the feminist classic “I Stand Here Ironing”—she won a

Stanford University Creative Writing Fellowship in 1955–56. For eight months, she did not have to have a job outside the home. The money ran out and she went back to work, but a Ford Foundation Fellowship in 1959 provided enough support for her to finish “Tell Me a Riddle.” *Time* placed *Tell Me a Riddle: A Collection* (Lippincott., 1961) on its year’s best list in December of 1961.

In the early 1970s, she became an adviser to the Feminist Press, recommending lost classics for the press to reprint, starting with *Life in the Iron Mills* by Rebecca Harding Davis. The fragment of her novel about the Depression, *Yonnondio: From the Thirties*, which she started when she was 19 and never finished, was published in 1974 by Delacorte. In 1978, she published in *Silences* (Delacorte Press/Seymour Lawrence), a book about not writing and about not being heard. In it, she wrote: “In the twenty years I bore and raised my children, usually had to work on a paid job as well, the simplest circumstances for creation did not exist.”

Although her literary output was relatively small, her contribution is far-reaching. She gave voice to women who have been silenced by the necessities of making a living and caring for family.