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Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Program
Illinois State University

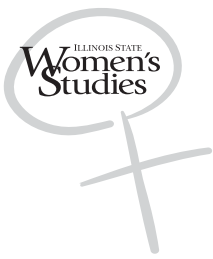
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Women's Voice

Illinois State University

Volume 6, Issue 7, March/April/May 2001

From the Director:

Gender, Race, Class – and Representations of "the Other"

An article by an Israeli feminist that I recently read has led me to reflect, once again, on two of the central questions in feminist theory and practice.* How do race and class intersect with gender, and with what implications for consciousness, identity, solidarity, and collective action? And how do feminist activists take on issues of "the Other" without being ethnocentric, paternalistic, or patronizing?

Like all modern societies, Israel's stratification system is rooted in social hierarchies and deep inequalities among social groups. In the past these inequalities – between women and men, between workers and capitalists, and between European/Ashkenazi Jews and Oriental/Mizrahi Jews – were denied by the official nationalist ideology of Zionism. (The inequality that was acknowledged was that between Israeli Jews and Israeli Arabs/Palestinians, who are both Muslim and Christian.) In recent years, however, Mizrahi feminists have forged a powerful movement and a discourse that challenges the false ideology of equality between Ashkenazi and Mizrahi Jews, and the false ideology of sisterhood between Ashkenazi and Mizrahi women.

In Israel, Ashkenazi Jews (who came to Israel from European countries) tend to be economically privileged and to comprise the political elite, while Mizrahi Jews (who came to Israel from Arab countries or from Ethiopia) tend to be socio-economically lower and more distant from the structures of political power. This division tends to be complicated by the notion that Ashkenazi Jews are more liberal and secular while Mizrahi Jews are more conservative and religious. Many Ashkenazi also feel that Mizrahi women are especially disadvantaged in their community. Challenging stereotypes, therefore, is one important goal of Mizrahi activists.

Although the dynamics of the Mizrahi movement in Israel are entirely indigenous, Mizrahi feminism has been inspired by the theory and practice of Black feminism in the United States. In her article, "Scholarship, Identity, and

Power: Mizrahi Women in Israel", Pnina Motzalfi-Haller writes of her admiration for the works of bell hooks and Patricia Hill Collins, among others, that have raised difficult but important questions about commonality and differences among women of different races, ethnic groups, and social classes. When the defining questions of a movement, or its expressed objectives, turn out to be those most pertinent to white, middle-class, professional women, what does that say about the race and class of the movement? Or even of its legitimacy? In Israel, Mizrahi feminists have complained that "as long as [middle-class] Ashkenazi feminism continues to focus on protesting cliteridectomy in Africa, such feminism will remain irrelevant to [lower-class] Mizrahi women and their more pressing agenda" (cited in Motzalfi-Haller, p. 715).

Ethnocentrism and paternalistic attitudes towards "the Other" unfortunately continue to plague the feminist movement. In Israel, a Mizrahi activist has said: "I personally witnessed paternalistic statements such as 'don't speak about your oppression by the hands of Ashkenazi establishment. Focus on your oppression by the hands of Mizrahi men'" (quoted in Motzalfi-Haller, p. 714). Similar arguments were made at meetings of the international women's movement in the 1970s and 1980s, where Third World feminists who raised questions about colonialism, imperialism, and underdevelopment were admonished by Western (usually U.S.) feminists to stay focused on issues of sexual subordination within their own societies.

I have previously dealt with ethnocentric feminism in an article on American feminists' focus on female circumcision (see "Against Cultural Relativism and Ethnocentrism: Notes on Feminism and FGM", *Women's Voice*, vol, 5, issue 8, April/May 2000). I do not argue that Western feminists should not criticize female circumcision. They should, however, also acknowledge forms of genital mutilation and bodily violations in their own culture, and they should recognize the dire socio-economic context – poverty, underdevelopment, low levels of education – within which female circumcision takes place in African or Arab countries.

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GRADUATE ASSISTANT RESEARCH

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Returning to who defines questions for a movement, it is sobering to reflect on the recent U.S. presidential campaigns. I was struck by the vociferous insistence of liberal-feminists that Al Gore had to be supported at all costs, that the issue of choice was more important than anything else, and that the campaign of Ralph Nader had nothing to contribute. I was especially disheartened by the almost willful neglect of Winona LaDuke, Nader's running mate, who is a Native American scholar/activist/feminist. *Ms. Magazine* eventually rectified this by producing a cover story on LaDuke. When asked to comment on the criticism that "you talk about motherhood rather than feminism", LaDuke's reply was cogent: "I talk about women's right to determine their destiny, to be treated with dignity and respect. The living wage, health care, welfare reform, these aren't motherhood issues, they're women's issues. I mean, welfare reform was a pretty anti-woman piece of legislation, especially in this community where we've got 50 percent at poverty level. Where are they going to work?" And in her critique of the "mainstream" feminist movement, LaDuke said: "Let's take the focus on choice – I hate that kind of forced prioritizing. ... We need to be broadening the discussion toward the human rights of women, which is a whole set of issues. In the context of most native women, you cannot separate the woman from her community. ..." ("A Conversation with Winona LaDuke", *Ms.*, April/May 2001, p. 53).

As Moztalfi-Haller argues, what is necessary is the recognition of social difference and its articulation from the minority perspective as a process of constructing counter-knowledge. In other words, the perspectives and daily experiences of Mizrahi women, Native American women, African-African women, working-class women, Third World feminists, and poor women in developing countries – all these have to be acknowledged and integrated into feminist theory, if that theory and practice is to be truly universal.

*Pnina Moztalfi-Haller, "Scholarship, Identity, and Power: Mizrahi Women in Israel", *Signs*, vol. 26, no. 3 (Spring 2001): 697-734.

Childcare at ISU: Good Quality but Limited Access

By Kate Moritz, Women's Studies Graduate Assistant

Illinois State University has a quality childcare system located in Turner and Fairchild Halls. It is accredited by the National Academy of Early Childhood programs, sponsored by the ISU Department of Family and Consumer Sciences and ISU Student Fee Board, and licensed by the Illinois Department of Child and Family Services. ISU provides quality childcare by incorporating a diverse staff to educate and promote child creativity and individuality. ISU's childcare programs provide quality and stability necessary for enriching a child's life. Unfortunately it services a mere 38 children full time, a number no doubt well below demand. Moreover at present it is offered only to the children of ISU students. This article casts an appreciative, but also critical eye on current childcare facilities on campus.

The teacher-to-child ratio at the childcare center is a good one -- five to one. The staff consists of one director, four head teachers, and teacher aides. The Turner Hall center is open 7:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and the satellite facility in Fairchild Hall is open 7:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. The center is designed to give ISU student parents peace of mind knowing their children are in a quality learning facility. Activities vary from indoors and outdoors, but include art, dramatic play, water/sand/sensory play, woodworking, computer games, math, and language arts. The wide variety of activities provides children with a stimulating environment necessary for their intellectual growth.

According to the director of the Child Care Center, Karen Stephens, the ISU childcare facility is open to children aged two to ten years. The fee for ISU students with four or more credit hours is \$105 per week for full time care and

\$85 per week for part time care. Students enrolled in less than four hours pay \$155 for full time care per week and \$135 for part time care per week. The waiting list is not long. Faculty children may use the childcare facility, but only during the summer session. Since students' children have priority for enrollment, children of employees are added to a waiting list. The facility is generally able to accommodate employees' children in the summer session because student demand for childcare is lower than the fall/spring semesters. Faculty children also pay higher summer fees, about \$120 per week regardless of full or part time care.

The center provides practicum experience for students in fields such as Family and Consumer Sciences, Health Sciences, Early Childhood Education, Special Education, Speech Pathology, Psychology, Social Work, and Sociology. Not only is ISU able to provide quality childcare, but with the laboratory setting the university can educate and prepare students for work in childcare fields.

Another option for children of ISU students and employees is the Metcalf Pre-school program. Located on campus in Fairchild Hall, it offers a nursery school and a pre-kindergarten school taught by Marilyn Blank. In an interview, she stated that each school usually can admit no more than ten children. The nursery school takes children aged three to four, while the pre-kindergarten classes have children aged four and five. The programs differ from a childcare facility because they are educational sessions and children may only attend either a morning class session from 8:30 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. or an afternoon class session from 12:30 p.m. to 2:45 p.m. Parents who work or attend school full time need to find a childcare provider for the rest of the day. The education method is play based where learning is interwoven through fun projects and themes. For example, the nursery class is learning with a birthday theme. In this case, they are able to learn about the calendar months and days of the year.

The cost of the program is about \$60 for two days a week and \$90 for three days a week. There is only one teacher, but the pre-school does involve practicum students and volunteers from ISU to produce a teacher/child ration under 10:1. Diversity is a key element within the program to socially integrate children with disabilities and racial differences. While the program is open to all children in the Bloomington/Normal area, only a few children are chosen from the application process. Priority is given to siblings of children already in the program. Next, the school tries to take a cross section of children to create the diverse environment. Information about the pre-school is not included on the Thomas Metcalf School website and possibly due to a fear of an over-abundance of applications.

Toward an Expanded Facility

Currently, there is no ISU childcare facility for employees' children. However, a project is in the works to provide an affordable quality childcare system for all student and employee children. The university is in full support of a new childcare center and considers this an action item of high priority. ISU is planning to have a facility for about 150 children that would continue to provide a laboratory setting for university students' observations. At present, obstacles to the realization of this plan are funding and a suitable location for the center. According to Karen Stephens, Director of Child Care Center, "I can't see it not happening. There is a will to do it within five years."

It is clear that although existing programs are of good quality, they are limited in scope and size. In order for ISU to become more competitive, the university needs to build an affordable and quality facility for a large number of children of employees and students. The Director of the Women's Studies Program, Dr. Valentine Moghadam, says "I strongly support the expansion of the current childcare resources on campus and I recommend more deliberate action." In fact, several issues of the Women's Voice have contained articles on or recommendations for childcare as well as paid maternity leave as part of the university's benefits package.

WOMEN'S STUDIES FACULTY AND STUDENT NEWS

Faculty News

Valentine Moghadam gave a presentation on globalization, inequalities and transnational feminist networks at the annual meetings of the International Studies Association (Chicago, 21 February), at ISU's Global Connections Seminar Series (8 March) and at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater (12 March). She delivered another talk on women's rights and U.S. foreign policy in Afghanistan at the 17th annual Institute on History and Social Sciences (ISU, 19 March).

Staff News

Bethany Struebing, Undergraduate Assistant, recently attended the Kemper Scholars Conference in Provo, Utah. The Kemper Scholarship is awarded each year to a freshman student interested in pursuing a career in business and includes a three-year summer internship with Kemper Insurance. This summer Bethany will be interning in Charlotte, NC.

Women's Studies Experience

By Priyanka Samarakoon, Undergraduate Teaching Assistant

I am a Sri Lankan transfer student who started working in the Women's Studies Department as an undergraduate teaching assistant (Women's Studies 120) during my third semester. This semester, aside from assisting Dr. Sandra Harmon with her Women Studies 120 class, I am also helping Dr. Valentine Moghadam with research. As an undergraduate teaching assistant my responsibilities included looking over students' video reaction papers while my research assistant duties entail compiling graphs and tables as well as researching Internet sources.

Although my major is in Sociology, I was able to incorporate what I had learned in previous sociology classes to my work in Women's Studies. Not only was I exposed to new and diverse academic perspectives regarding feminism and women's studies in general, but my own biases and ignorance about the various forms of feminism were also challenged, leaving me with a better understanding of this field of study.

My experiences in Women's Studies were educational and contributed to my personal growth. Working with the staff, faculty, and students has expanded my perspective on varying interpretations of feminism.

Congratulations Graduates

The following Women's Studies minors are scheduled to graduate:

Corrie Baker	Theatre
Jamie Bockenfeld	Sociology (August graduation)
Leah Bruno	English
Melinda Crabill	Sociology
Jennifer Day	Sociology
Tara Haberman	English
Hillary Patridge	English
Audrey Rosenblatt	English
Katherine Ryder	Mass Communication (August graduation)
Anne Sendlak	Political Science
Samantha Turrentine	Sociology
Diana Weekes	Sociology

Congratulations from Women's Studies on your accomplishments!

Student Profiles

Christy Eyre is a new minor who is majoring in history. A junior, Christy is from Loda, Illinois. She is treasurer of Central Campus Government and coordinates Central Campus blood drives with the McLean County Chapter of the American Red Cross. In addition, she is an undergraduate teaching assistant for Dr. Susan Westbury of the History Department. This summer Christy will be one of ISU's student delegates to the National Association of College and University Residence Halls conference on the campus of the University of Southern California.

Meghan Quirke recently declared a Women's Studies minor. A Social Work major, she is a junior transfer student from the College of Lake County where she was a member of Phi Theta Kappa, an honor society. She plans on a career in school social work.

Jennifer Stolleis, transfer student from Lincoln Land Community College, is a Speech Communications major with minors in Writing and Women's Studies. A paper she wrote while a student at Lincoln Land Community College has just been published in the spring 2001 issue of Lincoln Land's English-Humanities Department's journal *The Harvester: Transitions and Transformations*. Jennifer's paper is titled "Medea, A Doll House and Fences: A Feminist Perspective." Jennifer is a speaker for the Springfield branch of the American Cancer Society.

Biology education major **Sarah Rhoads** has minors in English and Women's Studies. She works as a section supervisor at Braden Auditorium, as extra help at the Bone Student Center, and at the Media Distribution Schroeder Hall satellite. A peer educator, Sarah is currently in training to become a Red Cross HIV/AIDS instructor. She is planning to spend part of this summer at Wasawagong, an Ojibwe reservation in Northern Wisconsin.

Tara Haberman will graduate in May with a degree in English and minors in Political Science and Women's Studies. She plans to take a break from school before she pursues a Masters in Social Work. Her career goal is to become a court advocate for domestic violence and child abuse survivors. On campus, she is a student advisor for Student Dispute Resolution Services and is a member of the University Hearing Panel.

Nicole Berg is a Mass Communication major with a concentration in Broadcast Journalism. She is active in residence hall government. She was floor president of Walker 1 South last fall and co-president of Walker 1 North the first half of the spring semester. She is a member of Central Campus Residential Government. She has been selected as a Resident Assistant for Fall 2001 in Dunn-Barton Halls. She was a participant in the March Diversity Circle luncheon sponsored by the Office for Diversity and Affirmative Action and Human Resources. Nicole will serve as a Commencement Marshall this May.

Corrie Baker will receive a BS in Theatre in May. She will move to Chicago to pursue an acting career. Eventually, she would like to work toward a masters degree in education. Corrie believes her Women's Studies classes have been important to her theatre major. She brings a feminist perspective to theater in general and to the plays she reads and roles she approaches.

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6th Annual Women's Studies Symposium

The Sixth Annual Women's Studies Symposium was held Friday, March 23, in the University Galleries. One hundred and fifty people attended some or all of the day-long symposium in which undergraduate and graduate students presented papers. Keynote speaker, Dr. Yakin Ertuk, Director of the Division for the Advancement of Women in the Department for Economic and Social Affairs at the United Nations, spoke on "The United Nations and Women's Rights."

Student presenters at the morning sessions were all undergraduates. Presenters at the session, "Women's History and Women's Autobiographies," were Angela Dykstra, Megan Lee, Sarah Roads, and Anne Semlak. Sara Mae Grant and Michelle Clardy presented papers in the "Women and Work" session and Elaine Uy, Bridget Fahrner, and Colleen McCormick presented in the "Literary and Cultural Representations of Gender" session.

Afternoon sessions included "Women in International Perspective" with papers by graduate students Gulistan Badur and Margaret Iha and undergraduate students Lara Saba and Makoto Sakamoto and "Women and Religion" with papers by graduate student Tina Landgraf and undergraduate LaKeesha James.

An equal opportunity/affirmative action university encouraging diversity.

Take Back the Night

By avada douglas

On March 29, 2001 approximately 175 folks gathered to help stop violence against women by attending the 10th annual Take Back the Night. The evening started out with tables presenting information about various organizations in the community and on campus, including Womyn's Coalition, Countering Domestic Violence, Planned Parenthood and PRIDE among others. Speakers included avada douglas from campus and Kate Schenk from Countering Domestic Violence. Amy Disabato introduced the speakers and provided a fabulous kick off for the march. While the march was considerably smaller this year, we made a lot of noise and were just as powerful. While the women were marching throughout campus, men showed their support by participating in men's space lead by Tom Gerschick. There was safe space held for women only and another for everyone. The supportive, open environment provided what many individuals needed to help their healing process. Overall, the evening was very successful and beneficial.

Feminist Majority Foundation Opportunities

For further information about the Feminist Leadership Institute, Feminist Majority Internships, and Feminist Majority Field Representatives, email the Feminist Majority Foundation Campus Program Coordinator Shonali Shome at shonali@feminist.org.