



Women's Studies in Religion Program, Harvard University

## ***Religion, Gender and Politics: An International Dialogue***

**International Conference at the Van Leer Institute in  
Jerusalem**

**January 9-11, 2006**

Organized by

Women's Studies in Religion Program, Harvard University  
Van Leer Institute in Jerusalem

The aim of this conference is to foster an interdisciplinary conversation about the complex relationship between gender, religion, and politics.

Recent discussions among scholars in the social sciences and humanities have enriched our understanding of women's involvement in religion and politics. Gender analysis sometimes reveals challenges to dominant outlooks, whether to central tenets or subtle implications. However, many studies portray politics and religion as separate spheres and, when gender is introduced as a variable, the discussion is frequently disconnected from general theoretical frameworks. This interdisciplinary conference will approach religion, gender, and politics as interlocking systems, each of which is necessary to an understanding of the others. Presenters will explore mutually constitutive expressions of religion, gender, and national identity in a variety of times, places, and social arenas. Of special interest is the role of gender in the constructed bifurcation between Islam and the Judeo-Christian world.

The conference seeks to bring together several shifting trends in social theory. Until recently, many social scientists have described modernity as a process of secularization that involves the disappearance (Comte), decline (Weber), privatization (Berger), or transformation (Durkheim) of religion. Separation between state and religion, and the assumption that people have become less religious have been perceived as part of a larger change led by rational, scientific knowledge, humanistic education, high-technology, multi-national capitalism, and the bureaucratization of the modern era. Empirical studies, however, prove otherwise. The role of religion has increased in the last decades both in Western and non-Western societies. Religion continues to be significant in individual lives, collective identities and political mobilization (including extreme violence). Furthermore, religion today is quintessential of identity politics, and functions both as liberating as well as repressing. Wherever religion is on the rise, issues relating to women and gender are central to its social and political expression.

The epistemological changes in understanding modernity necessarily lead to a reassessment of the binary perceptions that separate between modernity-traditionalism, sacred-profane, secularism-religiosity, private-public, women-men, state and religion, religion and nationalism, and West and East. Rather than employing a dichotomy, we suggest a hybrid approach, which collapses these dichotomies and examines these relationships in historical and comparative contexts. This alternative approach stems from the now substantial body of work in gender studies addressing these issues.

Thus, we face a two-fold challenge. First, to unveil the social mechanisms that construct binary worldviews, and support the idea of separateness between two poles (e.g. between religion and state; Western religions versus non-Western; Men-Women). Second, to analyze the contingent character of these social categories, themselves the result of dynamic relationships – of power, substitution, dialogue, clash, or conciliation - between perceived dichotomies, embedded in their time, place, and historical contexts.

### **Sponsors**

The Van Leer Institute is a leading intellectual center for the interdisciplinary study and discussion of issues related to philosophy, society, culture and education. The Institute gives expression to the wide range of opinions in Israel, and takes particular pride in its role as an incubator and creative home for many of the most important efforts in civil society to enhance and deepen social justice, peace and democracy in Israel.

Harvard Divinity School's Women's Studies in Religion Program (WSRP) will collaborate with the Van Leer Institute in organizing this conference in order to advance the Program's goal of producing new knowledge about religion and gender. Founded in 1973 and assuming its current focus on post-doctoral research in 1980, the WSRP is one of the preeminent centers for interdisciplinary research and teaching on women and religion in an international context.

The conference has also received financial support from the Goethe-Institut.

## **DIRECTORS**

**Hanna Herzog** is Director of the Van Leer Institute's Program on Mediterranean Cultures and Societies which includes project areas on Mediterranean Religion and Dialogue with Palestinians. Her own research focus is expressed in the Institute's ongoing workshop on Religion, State, and Gender. *Unveiling Faith* culminates the work of that workshop.

Professor Herzog is a member of the Sociology Department at the University of Tel Aviv, which she chaired from 1998-2001, while serving as President of the Association for Israel Studies. She has published over fifty articles and book chapters on women in modern Israel. Her most recent book is *Gendering Politics: Women in Israel*. One of the founding figures of women's studies in the Israeli academy, she is also a veteran member of the Peace Movement

**Ann Braude** is Director of the Women's Studies in Religion Program and Senior Lecturer in American Religious History at Harvard Divinity School. Her role as Program Director places her at the hub of an international conversation on religion and gender. Her own research focuses on women in American religious history construed broadly to incorporate the diverse traditions and peoples who practice their faiths on the North American continent. Her publications include *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in 19<sup>th</sup>-century America* and, most recently, *Transforming the Faiths of Our Fathers: Women Who Changed American Religion*.

## **LOGISTICS**

The conference will take place in Jerusalem at the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, January 9-11, 2006. It will be conducted in English. The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute in collaboration with the Women's Studies in Religion Program, at the Divinity School, Harvard University will publish an edited book of selected papers of the conference.

For more information contact: Kinneret Lahad, Van Leer Institute  
[KinneretL@vanleer.org.il](mailto:KinneretL@vanleer.org.il), (972) 2-5605249

## Short biographical notes of the participants

**Orit Avishai** is a doctoral candidate at the University of California at Berkeley. Situated at the intersection of gender, sexuality, nationalism, and religion, her research examines transformations in the social organization of Jewish practices of menstrual impurity (*niddah*) among modern-orthodox Jews in Israel as a lens on the cultural negotiations that characterize this community as it attempts to define and defend its cultural boundaries.

**Ruth Barzilai-Lumbroso** is lecturer of Women Studies and Middle Eastern Studies at The Max Stern Academic College of Emek Yezreel and a research fellow at the Center for Strategic and Policy Studies at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. She is currently completing her PhD dissertation on images of Ottoman women in modern Turkish historiography at UCLA.

**Wallace D. Best** is Assistant Professor of African American Religious Studies at Harvard Divinity School. His research and writing focuses on the relationship between migration, urbanization, and religious transformation. His latest work deals with gender and religion, the religious literature of the Harlem Renaissance, and global Pentecostalism. He is the author of "Passionately Human, No Less Divine: Religion and Culture in Black Chicago, 1915-1952" published by Princeton University Press, 2005.

**Shmulik Bachar**, is a PhD student (in direct course) in the Contemporary Middle Eastern Studies Program in the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He works as a Mid-East researcher in the IDC – Interdisciplinary Center in Herzliya. In his researches, he deals with various fields: Egyptian popular culture, politics, society and religion, Syrian politics, Islamic radicalism etc. His Ph.D. dissertation is a comparative analysis of the representation of Egyptian women in the popular cinema between the 1940s (the dawn of the Monarchy) and the 1960s (until the failure of the Nasserist project).

**José Casanova** is Professor of Sociology at the New School for Social Research in New York City, where he has taught since 1987. Presently he is a Fellow at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin. He has published widely in the areas of sociological theory, religion and politics, transnational migration, and globalization. His most important work, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (University of Chicago Press, 1994) has appeared in Japanese, Spanish, Italian, Polish and Arabic editions and is forthcoming in Indonesian.

**Dr. Maina Chawla Singh** (University of Delhi) has published on gender and religion in the context of colonial India. Her research on the cross-cultural interventions of missionary women has highlighted educational and medical missionary work (New York: 2000). Current projects: 1) exploring the politics of health, medicine and empire in

British India and 2) Understanding gender-based violence and Sex-Trafficking in South Asia.

**Ruth Ebenstein** is writing a doctoral dissertation at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem on Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) responses to the Shoah as depicted in the Haredi Ashkenazi press (daily, weekly and monthly) and other sources (popular literature, theological works, and educational texts, among others) from 1950 to 1973. Beyond the purview of her dissertation, she is also studying contemporary aspects of Haredi media and society. Ruth completed a B.Sc. in journalism at the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University, and an M.A. in German history at the Hebrew University. She has worked as a journalist and writer in the US and in Israel for more than 15 years.

**Dr. Tamar El-Or** is a Senior lecturer at the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. She is Head of the Lafer Center for Gender studies and Research. Among her Publications are the books *Educated and Ignorant: On Ultra orthodox Women and their World*. Boulder CO: Lynne Reinner Pub. 1994; *Next Year I will Know More: Literacy and Identity among young orthodox women in Israel*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press 2002. A third book on Orthodox Women in the Mizrahi-Sphardi community is forthcoming.

**Dr. Hunaida Ghanim**, Postdoctoral Fellow (2005-2006) at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Harvard University. Her PhD was carried out at the Hebrew University Sociology Department and focused on the social role of the Palestinian intellectuals in Israel 1948-2002. Her book *Intellectuals Reinventing a Nation: Israeli-Palestinian Persons-of-Pen Crossing Boundaries and Struggling Liminality* is due to be published soon.

**Daphna Hacker** received her LL.B from Hebrew University Law Faculty and her LL.M from American University Washington College of Law. Her PhD was carried out at Tel Aviv University Sociology Department and focused on custody and visitation upon divorce. Currently, she is a lecturer at the Tel Aviv University Buchman Law Faculty and NCJW Women and Gender Studies Program. Her research and teaching areas deal with the relations between law, gender and families.

**Tova Hartman** is a lecturer at Hebrew University's School of Education in Jerusalem. Dr. Hartman holds a Masters in Jewish Philosophy from Hebrew University; a Masters in Counseling Psychology from Boston College; and a doctorate in Psychology from the Harvard University Graduate School of Education. Working with Carol Gilligan, her thesis was entitled *Mothering in Culture: Ambiguities and Continuities*. Dr. Hartman's writings include numerous articles on gender, religion, and education. Her book *Appropriately Subversive: Modern Mothers in Traditional Religions* was published by Harvard University Press, winter 2002.

**Gertrud Hüwelmeier** is an anthropologist and research fellow at the Humboldt-University of Berlin, Department of European Ethnology. She just started a research project on Transnational Religious Networks and New Migration, comparing Vietnamese and Ghanaian diasporas in Berlin and other parts of Europe. In the last years she worked on Gender and Religion and on Transnational Religion – Women’s Congregations as Actors in the Process of Globalization. Fieldwork with catholic nuns has been carried out in Germany, the Netherlands, England, the US and India.

**Amy Hollywood** is the Elizabeth H. Monrad Professor of Christian Studies at Harvard Divinity School. She is the author of *The Soul as Virgin Wife: Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete, and Meister Eckhart* (University of Notre Dame Press), *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History* (University of Chicago Press), and articles on feminist theory, contemporary continental philosophy, and the history of Christian mysticism.

**Ruth Halperin-Kaddari** is a senior lecturer at Bar-Ilan University Faculty of Law, and is the Director of the Ruth and Emanuel Rackman Center for the Advancement of the Status of Women at Bar-Ilan. She has earned her LL.M and J.S.D. at Yale Law School. Her fields of interest include family law, feminist critique of law, and bioethics. Her latest book *Women in Israel: A State of Their Own* was published by Pennsylvania University Press in 2004.

**Dr. Michael Karayanni** (LL.D., Hebrew University, S.J.D., University of Pennsylvania) is Senior Lecturer, and holder of the Edward S. Silver Chair in Civil Procedure, Faculty of Law, The Hebrew University. His research interests are Private International Law and Inter-religious Law, Civil Procedure and Multiculturalism.

**Pnina Lahav** is Professor of Law at Boston University where she teaches constitutional law, political and civil liberties and comparative law. She is a graduate of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and Yale Law School. She held a Rockefeller fellowship and a fellowship at the Center for the Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford, California. Professor Lahav is the author of the acclaimed biography *Judgment in Jerusalem, Chief Justice Simon Agranat and the Zionist Century* (1997) and (with others) of *The History of Law in a Multi-Cultural Society* (2002).

**Anat Lapidot-Firilla** is a researcher at the CSPS, the Hebrew University and a research fellow at the Harry S. Truman Research Institute for the Advancement of Peace. She teaches at the Contemporary Middle Eastern Studies program, Hebrew University of Jerusalem. She received her Ph.D from the University of Durham, (U.K) and her B.A. in Jewish History and History of the Middle East from Tel Aviv University. Her research

focuses on various aspects of religion, politics, gender and identity conflicts, with an emphasis on Turkey.

**Mary Segers** is professor of political science at Rutgers University and Chair of the Political Science Department at Rutgers-Newark. She served as Visiting Lecturer in Women's Studies at Harvard Divinity School in 1985-1986. She was a Henry Luce Fellow in Theology at Harvard from 1987-1989. She is the author of nearly 50 scholarly essays and seven books. Her most recent book is *Faith-Based Initiatives and the Bush Administration: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*, co-authored with Jo Formicola and Paul Weber (Rowman & Littlefield, 2003).

**Nayereh Tohidi** is Associate Professor of Women's Studies at California State University, Northridge. She is also a Keddie-Balzan Fellow at the Center for Near Eastern Studies at UCLA. She has written extensively on gender, religion, democracy and women's rights in the Middle East and post-Soviet Central Eurasia, especially Iran and Azerbaijan. She is the recipient of several grants and research awards, including Fulbright Scholarship in the former Soviet Union; Research and Lectureship at Harvard University; post-doctoral fellowships at the Hoover Institute of Stanford University and the Kennan Institute of the Woodrow Wilson Center. Her recent book *Globalization, Gender and Religion: The Politics of Women's Rights in Catholic and Muslim Contexts* was published by Palgrave Press.

**Elina Vuola**, Dr. in theology, works as a research fellow of the Academy of Finland at the Institute for Development Studies at the University of Helsinki. In 2002-3 she worked as research associate and visiting lecturer at the Women's Studies in Religion Program of the Harvard Divinity School, USA. Her research concentrates on the interplay of feminist theory, feminist theology and women's religious identities. She is especially interested in this dialogue in the Latin American context where she also forms part of the visiting researcher team of *Departamento Ecu mico de Investigaciones* in San Jos , Costa Rica. Her book *Limits of Liberation. Feminist Theology and the Ethicas of Poverty and Reproduction* came out in 2002 (Sheffield Academic Press and Continuum).