

## Shahla Haeri, Director

Another academic year at the Women's Studies Program ended on notes of high achievements for the faculty and staff, collectively and individually. Following the WSP's vision of multidisciplinary approaches to knowledge and learning, we invited distinguished, talented, and creative individuals to Boston University, supported by a grant from the Humanities Foundation at BU.

Personally, I had the pleasure and honor of being involved in a series of talks and presentations organized by the Global Women's History Project at Westfield State College. In March I screened my video documentary, *Mrs. President*, and attended,



Shirin Ebadi (above center), the Iranian woman lawyer who won the Noble Peace Prize for 2003. (President Vicky Carwein of Westfield State College, above left.)

later in April, in a three-day conference on Iran and Iraq. Lastly, in May I acted as the translator for

For the academic year 2005-2006 I have been awarded a Research Fellowship in Women's Studies in Religion Program at Harvard Divinity School for my project titled *Religion, Politics, and Women in Iran: Edging toward Democracy?* So, I shall be on leave next year, and in my absence, Dorothy Kelly, Professor of French and a former director of the Women's Studies Program, will be the acting director.

## Elaheh Koolaee

The Women's Studies Program was honored to invite Dr. Elaheh Koolaee, who talked on September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2004, about women and political participation in Iran. She is Director General of Education Affairs and a professor of Political Science at Tehran University. Dr. Koolaee is a specialist in Iran-Russia, central Asia and the caucous and has written 13 books on different aspects of this long-standing relationship. Dr. Koolaee was one the 11 female members of the 6<sup>th</sup> Parliament, and as a Reformist, she refused to wear the customary chador, opting for the headscarf and full body cover. Her application to run for a second term was rejected by the Guardian Council, an exclusively all male body that vets the candidate.

## Ayesha Siddiqi

As part of the WSP's speaker series Dr. Ayesha Siddiqi gave a talk on November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2004 entitled, *Modernity in an Age of Militarization in Pakistan: Implications for Women*. Dr. Siddiqi is a defense and security analyst for the Pakistani weekly, *The Friday Times*, and is currently a Fellow at the Woodrow Wilson Center at Washington, D.C. Her discussant was Professor Husain Haqqani, a former advisor to Pakistani Prime Ministers Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto. He is currently teaching in the International Relations Department at Boston University. The talk of these

two distinguished scholars and professors generated much interest, and was followed by lively discussions.

### Nisha Ganatra

On October 20<sup>th</sup> 2004, Nisha Ganatra graced the Women's Studies Program and its students with a screening of her film *Cosmopolitan*. There was a great turnout at the event. Student from the Women's Studies Program and other



departments within Boston University thoroughly enjoyed the screening of her film. *Cosmopolitan* is based on an award-winning short story by Akhil Sharma.

Nisha Ganatra (above right) was born in Vancouver; and went on to study at NYU's graduate film school with, among others, Spike Lee, Martin Scorsese, and Barbara Koppel. Nisha's short film, *Junky Punky Girlz*, won several awards. She says "The inspiration for making *Junky Punky Girlz* was the isolation that I was feeling being in a space between two cultures."

(The WSP gratefully acknowledges support from The Humanities Foundation at Boston University.)

### Roya Hakakian

On April 12<sup>th</sup> 2005, the WSP hosted a presentation by Roya Hakakian, who talked about her recent book *Journey from the Land of No: A Girlhood Caught in Revolutionary Iran*, and her personal experiences as a Jewish – Iranian woman. Ms. Hakakian has worked for some of the most prestigious network television



programs, including 60 Minutes Sunday and 60 Minutes II, as well as on A&E's "Travels With Harry", and ABC Documentary Specials with Peter Jennings, Discovery and The Learning Channel. Commissioned by UNICEF, Roya's (second from left) most recent film, [Armed and Innocent](#), is on the subject of the involvement of underage children in wars around the world, and has been selected among best short documentaries at several festivals, most recently as an official entry of the 2003 Telluride Mountain Film Festival. She is also a founding member of the Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, and a term member at the Council on Foreign Relations.



## *Ludmila Shtern*

On April 19<sup>th</sup> 2005, the WSP and the Institute for Human Sciences hosted a presentation by Dr. Ludmila Shtern (below left); her recent book *Brodsky: A Personal Memoir* was the topic of



discussion. This book is about the Nobel Prize winner Joseph Brodsky and his generation. Dr. Irena Grudzinska Gross (above right), a professor of Modern Languages & Literature and executive director of Institute for Human Sciences at Boston University gave commentary.

Born in Leningrad, USSR, Dr. Shtern received a PhD in geology and worked as a field geologist before immigrating to the United States in 1976.

Currently, Dr. Shtern is a Resident Scholar at the Women's Studies Program at Brandies University.

(Also funded by the Humanities Foundation at Boston University)

## *Cultural Perspectives: Lecture Series on North Africa, the Middle East and South Asia.*

### *Sharmila Sen*

Assistant Professor at Harvard University spoke on October 27<sup>th</sup>, 2004. The topic of discussion was *Love, Death and Tea at the India-Pakistan Border*. Dr. Sen analyzed the representation of actual and imaginary borders in South Asia literature and films, weaving her own personal experiences with border crossings into her narrative.

### *Amira El-Zein*

Assistant Professor at Tufts University spoke on November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2004. The topic of discussion was *Interactions of Jinn with Humans in Islam*. Dr. El-Zein spoke about the historical role of jinns in the lives of Muslims, and extended her discussion to the existence of similar creatures in other cultures and mythologies.

### *Naghmeht Sohrabi*

Visiting Scholar at Skidmore College spoke on March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2005. The topic of discussion was *Signs Taken for Wonder: 19<sup>th</sup> Century Persian Travel Literature to Europe*. Dr. Sohrabi discussed the genre of travelogues in Persian in the context of nineteenth century Iranian social and political history.

(The Modern Foreign Languages & Literature and the Women's Studies Program jointly sponsored these events.)

### *Visiting Scholar*

#### *Assieh Mir*

Dr. Mir started her appointment with the WSP in the Spring of 2005. She holds a Ph.D. in Political Science from Tehran University in Iran. She has recently completed a project on "women and non-violent transformation in Iran". It was part of a major research on women's role in the prevention and resolution of conflict in fifteen countries sponsored by Women Waging Peace, an initiative of the Women and Public Policy Program at John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University. The finding of this project is soon to be published.

At present, she is engaged in designing a study on the relationship of gender and proclivity to democracy. This is a cross-sectional study of women's advocacy for democracy in Iran.

### *Research Assistant*

#### *Rajashree Ghosh*

Rajashree joined as a Research Assistant in the WSP as of Fall of 2004 and has been actively involved in contributing to the many phases of developing of the UNITWIN proposal, which having gained the support of President Chobanian and Dean Henderson, was submitted to UNESCO in April of 2005. This proposal is aimed to establish a partnership between Boston University and other universities in India. (See Pg. 4)

Her commitment to development concerns and gender equality lends an added strength to the

tasks that she undertakes. Her contributions in research are in the area of health, Education and environment. Her expertises are in teams, client



systems and in the action research work, which has taken her to many government and non-governmental organizations in different parts of India. She has also worked with the United Nations' World Food Program (India Country Office) and was able to bring expertise into the food aid program.

### *Faculty Activities*

#### *Diane Balser*

Professor Diane Balser continued this year to teach Women Society and Culture, Global Feminism and Women and Politics. Students in the Women and Politics seminar had internships with women public policy makers and other women leaders. Professor Balser travels widely in the United States and Europe, leading gender and leadership workshops for women and men. In March she led a workshop in the Netherlands. During academic year 2005/2006 Professor Balser will be on a leave of absence from Boston University. She will be the acting CEO of Brit Tzedek v' Shalom, Jewish Alliance for Justice and Peace, a Jewish Peace Organization in the United States. During the year she will be traveling to Israel, meeting number of leaders male and female who are engaged in the Middle East Peace efforts.



*Brenda McSweeney*

Another eventful year! Summer 2004 was spent mainly in Paris, where I had captivating meetings with UNESCO colleagues, with the goal of setting up a Gender UNESCO/UNITWIN – University Twinning and Networking scheme – between BU's Women's Studies Program and several Universities in India, in Punjab, West Bengal and New Delhi. This entails internet exchange of ideas already underway in the arena of Gender, Culture and People-Centered Development among students, faculty and development practitioners, to strengthen gender and development analysis – and action!

WSP's first international internship program has been launched! I met in Paris with the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) Gender Focal Point, who was most pleased with the contributions of BU Grad Amanda Vanderhorst. During Summer of 2005, Bart Admonius – a WSP minor, will be intern for UNIDO's in Prague on gender and employment opportunities in the renewable energy sector.

Fall semester found me once again in India (this time analyzing gender aspects of several innovative grassroots development programs in far-flung corners of the country). This period has been most fruitful in bringing fresh local-level gender and development perspectives into my thinking – and our WSP Seminar interactions! The students are currently sharing their feedback with villagers in West Bengal on a Program in Shantiniketan called Creative Manual Skills for Self-Reliant Development.

*Barbara Gottfried*

One of the great things for me about teaching Women's Studies at BU is that I have been able to parlay some of my favorite leisure interests, especially film and literature, into courses to teach [that is, work]. This past Fall I taught Women and Film, and as part of a grant from the BU Humanities Foundation, arranged to bring the young film director Nisha Ganatra to campus. During class, we watched Nisha's feature-length film, *Chutney Popcorn*. Nisha then joined us and answered students' questions about the film and about her experiences in the highly competitive world of independent film-making. Later Nisha presented her made-for-HBO film *Cosmopolitan* to the campus community, and engagingly and generously answered student questions both after the film and at a reception we held for her. Two Women's Studies minors then joined us for dinner at the Elephant Walk in Brookline.

For Summer Session II [July 6 – August 12] I have taken another of my pleasures, Balkan music and dance, and woven a course around them entitled "The limits of Citizenship: Balkan Women Between Tradition and Modernity." The course, which may be taken for either WS or International Relations credit [or both], will explore the impact of the region's political and cultural struggles on its women through scholarly research on women's rights, the legacy of ethnic cleansing, rural vs. urban women's lives, women as transmitters of culture, the influence of Western feminism, and the collapse of communism and challenges of Western capitalism, as well as through literature, film, and memoirs. Best of all, the last ten days of the

course will be spent touring Bulgaria and attending a once every five years folk dance and music festival in the preserved mountain village of Koprivshtitsa. For further information, please email me [gotfried@bu.edu] as soon as possible.

This coming Fall [2005] I will again offer "Asian Women's Literature and Film" as WS 305 ["Critical Issues in WS"]. If you have already taken a WS 305, but its contents were different, you can take this one as well, even though the course number is the same. We will read novels and watch films from India, China, Vietnam, Japan and elsewhere, and who knows, maybe we'll work in a travel component for the course over winter break. . . .

### *Teaching Fellow*

#### *Courtney Sepanski*

Teaching this Women's Studies course has been the most enlightening experience of my graduate career, because it has allowed me to interact with and challenge young women and scholars to critically analyze the gender issues in the world around them. My particular interest in how the female bodies is constructed, utilized, and expressed in contemporary American society made our class an engaging forum for students to expound upon the issues of corporeality and sexuality in relation to a diverse body of texts. We studied



fine and folk art, film, novels, memoirs, poetry, music, and material culture from the end of American Second Wave feminism onward to develop an understanding of the debates over female sexuality and language as well as a concept of how race, class, ethnicity, and sexual identity color feminist perspectives and expressive mediums. My hope for our class was to encourage students to consider the breadth of what both feminism and aesthetic expression could be and what factors influence their definitions, recognize how concepts of gender infiltrate self and expression of self for women continually, and think and act critically in regards to the role of gender and self-expression in their own lives.

### *Students*

#### *Shiwali Patel — Ecuador*



My experiences in Ecuador were absolutely amazing. Last fall, I participated in the Quito Language and Liberal Arts Program; I was very excited and nervous to start on a new journey, and to become completely immersed into a new society- not a mention to speak and learn in Spanish! It was a challenge. We enrolled in Universidad San Francisco de Quito in Ecuador and took classes with Ecuadorian students and foreigners who like us, were also studying abroad. We traveled inside the Amazon Rainforest, to Galapagos and many more places. It was incredible. To supplement my interests in women and gender, I researched for my class, *Problemas Sociales en el*



Ecuador, child prostitution and titled my first Spanish research paper "La Prostitución de las Niñas y Adolescentes en el Ecuador." For me, it was quite an accomplishment, even though the paper wasn't too long.

I also learned a lot about the cultures and different levels of society in Ecuador- especially race and class. When I arrived, it was difficult for me to feel comfortable because of the racism. In Ecuador, from my experience, the people's racist attitudes towards the *indigenas* and *afroecuatorianos* were so visible, perhaps even more than here. I felt really uncomfortable because it made me notice my own differences and skin more, and not in a positive and empowering way. Though after consulting with my sister and friends, I realized that this should be taken as a learning experience- to better understand how people here in the US experience racism differently from me.

### *SJD Writing Prize*

In the Spring of 2005, the Women's Studies Program awarded the third annual Sarah Joanne Davis Scholarship prize. There are two Prizes, \$250 each, one for a paper in the Humanities and one for a paper in the Social Sciences. The winner for the Humanities went to Megan Campbell, A Political Science Major, class of 2005, for her essay entitled: *Safe, Rare and Legal: A Cross-National Study of Abortion Rates and Policy*. She currently serves as President of the BU Women's Center and Vice President of Actions for the Boston Chapter of the National Organization for Women. After graduation she would like to work as a feminist activist before working to obtain a

master in Public Policy.

The award for a paper in Social Sciences went to Tessa Benau, Psychology Major, class of 2005, for her essay *Interpretation Of A Problem: An Analysis of the History of Theoretical Research on Poor Women*. Congratulations to both of them!

### *Program Coordinator*

### *Maryam Shahsahebi*

Maryam has joined the Women's Studies Program as of Fall of 2004. She has Bachelor's of Arts in Consumer Affairs from California State University, Long Beach, and is currently perusing a Master's in Science in Advertising here at Boston University. She thoroughly enjoys working with the students and the faculty at the WSP, and hopes to use her experiences at the Women's Studies Program to shed new light on gender targeted advertising.

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