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Foreword

Claude Féral

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Foreword

*A*s written in the foreword of the proceedings of our first international seminar which was held in December 1994, our university and several major South African universities have indeed moved on towards an increasingly fruitful relationship:

— a general agreement of cooperation was signed at the end of 1995 between the University of Reunion and the University of the Western Cape, where our Professor of European Law, Professor Xavier Philippe, has been teaching for two years now as an associate professor.

Our President, Professor Patrick Hervé, invited the Vice-Chancellor of the University of the Western Cape, Professor Cecil Abrahams, to our December 1996 seminar on "Women in Multicultural South Africa" in order to explore further possibilities of reciprocal exchange.

— an agreement establishing a cooperative relationship has been signed between our university and the University of South Africa in Pretoria, where a contributor to the seminar, Sibusiso Hyacinth Mdluli, teaches in the Department of French.

— after the July 1997 visit to Reunion Island of its Director, Professor Jean-Louis Cornille, the Department of French of the University of Cape Town is eager to establish official links with our "Département de Lettres Modernes". A written agreement will but formalize the already existing informal and effective support given by our colleagues of the Department of French of UCT to the young researchers we have been increasingly sending them every year since 1992.

— special mention should be made of our projects of exchange with the South African University of the North after the visit to Reunion Island, in July 1996, of Patricia Mathebula of the Department of French.

We regret that a number of last minute untoward events and unfortunate incidents prevented Vice-Chancellor Professor Njabulo N'Debele, Patricia Mathebula, as well as Thoko Hlatywayo, of the Gender Awareness Committee, from participating in the December 1996 seminar.

The organizers of the December 1998 seminar will certainly do their very best to avoid the repetition of such misadventures...

Such reciprocal and fruitful exchanges have encouraged the development of study and research on South Africa in the three Faculties of our university. Every year, in the Department of English, an increasing number of students register for the 3rd year course on South African Literature and Civilisation, then proceed with field-research in their 4th year of "maîtrise" (Master's) thanks to a substantial scholarship granted by the "Conseil Régional".

In 1996-97, six students wrote a "D.E.A. thesis (1st year of Doctorate in the French system) on South African Literature and Civilisation topics. Three PhD students are currently doing research on South African civilisation.



As it was specified in the call for papers, the aim of the December 1996 second multidisciplinary seminar was to create a meeting point for researchers, academics, writers and socio-economic personalities around the multiple questions confronting South African women in view of the recent history of this country. While welcoming radical feminist points of view, the seminar's vocation was above all to suggest a multiplicity of perspectives on the legal position of women, the economic role of South African women, women's rights, the place of women in the family unit and in education, the image of women in literature, in advertising, in the media and cultural traditions, the contribution of women in the fight against apartheid and in the building of a new South Africa.

The opening conference, "Writing in South Africa Today," by South African writer Mike Nicol, stressed the necessity of a rediscovery of South African history and raised questions on historical truth. It was followed by an exciting debate. Similar debates were to follow all contributions which were critically appreciated by an audience whose knowledge and sensitivity revealed the depth of the relationships already existing between Reunion Island and South Africa.

"Women in Multicultural South Africa" were envisioned from various points of view : from a legal point of view, by Najma Moosa, Elaine Dubourdiu and Antoine Bullier, from a socio-linguistic one, by Sinfree Makoni and Sibusiso H. Mdluli, from a sociological one by David Johnson, enriched by Jean-Pierre Cambefort's comparative perspective on the situation of women in Reunion. Peter Hawkins analysed humorously an approach of gender roles in the new South Africa, while Synclair Wynchank showed the difficulties met by women medical doctors in this country. The study of a film by Anny Wynchank and literary contributions by Cecil Abrahams, Jacqueline Bardolph, Lindley Couronne, Jean Sevry and Marijke van Vuuren revealed contrasting images of women in fictions and illuminated some aspects of the role of women in society, of its perception at different periods and of its future.

Two interesting papers read during the seminar could unfortunately not be published in the proceedings and we regret it:

- one by Mary Simons (Department of Political Studies, University of Cape Town) on "The Place of South African Women since 1994: the Contradictions Between the Constitutional Space Created for Women and the Restraints of Cultural Practice;"

- the other one by Tania Flood and Natasha Primo (Gender Equity Unit, University of the Western Cape) entitled: "Advancing Women: the Position of Women in the 'New' South Africa."

Our Research Group on South Africa (G.R.A.S.), the whole academic community and our multicultural island as a whole were very happy and honoured to welcome the participants in the December 1996 international seminar; I and my colleagues thank them very warmly.

The third G.R.A.S. international seminar is scheduled for early December 1998.

Taking up the idea clearly expressed by Jean Sévry that the question of gender overlaps those of social class and race, and that education for all may be the best possible answer to these issues, the chosen theme is:

**"Language and Education:
Basic Parameters for a Multicultural
South Africa."**

