

# Doing the document: Gender studies at the corporatized university in Europe

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**Rosemarie Buikema and Iris van der Tuin**

University of Utrecht, The Netherlands

*Rosemarie:*

*Christmas Eve, 2011. 7:30 p.m. I have been sitting in front of my computer on a phone call with our British consortium partner for more than an hour now. We are in the process of submitting an EU FP7 ITN and I am going through a long e-mail our partner sent earlier that day in which she lists the points we still have to discuss before she will be able to get the signature of her university's officials. Right now she is explaining the complexities of the PhD quality assurances and other requirements in her country. My mobile beeps. Maybe this is a cry from the kitchen; C. was thinking we'd finally have a proper dinner together. But no, the kitchen is trained to be silent. It is Iris instead, SMSing that she just managed to cut the summary down to the allowed 250 words and will now check the B2 part of the application. That's great. While I am sitting here solving problems larger than life, the application machine keeps running smoothly. I quickly reply with a smiley. In the meantime I get to point 8 of the list with Britain. Our consortium member is explaining that she has been running back and forth that week, cancelled a trip, contacted her head of department, her dean, the doctoral school coordinator and a couple of members of the support staff, even made several phone calls to the national EU contact point herself and is still not sure which route she should take to reconcile local, national and European legislation. The last thing she wants is to blow up a possible consortium agreement in advance, but Britain is not an easy partner when it comes to the development of joint degree programmes.*

What do vignettes like these tell us about the environment of gender research in the 2010s? Let us unpack our recent experiences with research applications to the European Commission in order to find out what the characteristics of the university (the cause) are that make us caper about like this on a Christmas Eve (its effects).

**Corresponding author:**

Rosemarie Buikema, University of Utrecht, Muhtstraat 2A, Utrecht, 3512, The Netherlands.

Email: r.l.buikema@uu.nl

## Mainstreaming

Contemporary gender researchers like us appear to be fully included in the treadmill of academia. On top of our daily responsibilities at work (and in our private lives), we are just as eager to get research funding as our male or mainstream colleagues and work as hard to meet the criteria of quality assessments of research and teaching. And we are successful in many ways: we publish enough articles in A-journals each year, European Gender Studies has its own ERIH list of top journals<sup>1</sup> and, until recently, we managed to get competitive research monies from our national governments and/or the European Commission. Should we conclude that academia has become more open to critical perspectives? Or did academia's particular norms and values that pass for unbiased universality change in the last couple of years? That is to say, has it changed in such a way that it is now to be characterized as a *different* 'culture of no culture' (Traweek, 1988)?

Since the Bologna process, European universities promote purpose and productivity, measurable outputs with economic benefits, collaboration and outreach to civil society, and an international, European climate (Keeling, 2006). It is certainly possible for gender researchers to claim all of these characteristics. But, then, to what extent are we being the critical researchers we think we are? To what extent has criticality become a false essentialism, an identity that we live by but do not actually perform? What is this 'Gender, Inc.'? Joan Scott has formulated the paradoxes of 'mainstreaming' as follows:

... the university into which we have been incorporated is itself undergoing major structural change. Having been critics on the outside, we are now advocates on the inside, looking to preserve the institution – as a faculty-governed, tenure-granting, knowledge-producing space of critical inquiry – from those who would reorganize it according to corporate models. ... The need to prevent the 'ruin' of the university casts feminists more often as defenders of the status quo than as agents of change. ... Our protectionism sometimes even leads us to collaborate with those administrators who are intent on commodifying the life of the mind. (Scott, 2011: 29)<sup>2</sup>

How to go about all of this is a difficult question. Can we still rely on the established methodologies of feminist engagement with the university?

## Feminism and the university

*Rosemarie:*

*11 p.m. I have had dinner in the meantime. I read Iris's text additions in the B2 part and am now reading my e-mail before starting to prepare for a bit of sleep. There will be friends for an Xmas-brunch tomorrow. Our Austrian partner e-mails: 'Thank you both – I got both your mails. I am supposed to be on holiday tomorrow – hope it's ok that I do this after Xmas. Hopefully Wednesday! I can help describing what each PhD candidate will be doing, but my original concept that one would do X. and the other Y., doesn't work anymore, now that Y. has pulled out. But my contact person at X. says there is enough work for both to do oral history. So I'll try to think of two oral history projects that will work with writing the biography of a place. Will get back to you asap!! All best, B.' And another e-mail from Germany. Hurray, the German colleagues have managed to get their documents together! 'Dear Rosemarie, dear Iris. Please*

*find enclosed all the letters and other documents you asked for. We wish you a merry Christmas and a happy new year!!! Sincerely, G. (working for the last day this year!)* I shut down the computer. I'd better taste the wine for tomorrow ... I'll SMS Iris, maybe she is still awake and also needs a sip.

Feminism can pride itself on an extensive history of critical and creative engagement with the university. It is not very hard to generate a feminist genealogy of projects of the past for the purposes of understanding the current academic system in Europe and its effects on gender research. For starters, a feminist academic space was first created following the dual-track strategy devised by the earliest academic feminists. Women's studies had to be integrated into the existing disciplinary structure as well as remain autonomous so as to develop a discipline of its own. We are still working in this Janus-headed mode (see *Reference Points for the Design and Delivery of Degree Programmes in Gender Studies* [2010]), but *what* is the realm into which we seek integration? We are not meaning to be nostalgic about a sacred university system – one that is seemingly unaffected by the market economy. The issue at stake is *this new paradigm of running a university*; the 'corporatized university' defined by economic determinism; which generates vehement competition and precarious jobs. Both the competitive mode that tenured staff are entrained in and the flexibility that is asked of the non-tenured are predicated on a running-after-the-money that is mind-boggling.

One goal of the critical and creative engagements of feminist research practitioners within university contexts is giving the culture of no culture a face. Naming the evident as not so evident is part of the feminist project. Let us quickly mention equality projects calculating percentages of women employees in all academic ranks (famously Wennerås and Wold, 1997 and recently Van den Brink, 2010), difference projects working on the embodied nature of the (institutional) life of the mind by 'French feminists', and feminist discourse analyses of, for instance, the very notion of academic excellence (e.g. Brouns and Addis, 2004). We want also to mention briefly the analogy of this kind of work with the continuing tradition of feminists calculating the invisible and often unpaid labour done by women in the household.<sup>3</sup>

With this Open Forum piece, we want to add to the projects we have just mentioned and situate ourselves in the current-day university paradigm. Taking a bottom-up approach from our own institutional and personal lives, gathered in the vignettes, we try to get a grip on the changes in academia. These changes have been implemented in a manner so swift that they are hard to track. We were complying with them before we knew it. This article has been written in an attempt to pause and respond, to question after *what it is* that we are engaging in. The operationalization we have chosen for this meditation is Sara Ahmed's work on 'doing the document'. We will try to show how a corporatized university works by allowing gender research to claim a certain space which parameters our research to comply with economic determinism. This suggests that the university has changed and the field of gender studies has been mainstreamed with it, but the question of the power of definition remains an issue for feminists to take into close consideration. We wonder where we were at, when paradigms changed. Now we can only notice that the definition of scholarly excellence has changed and that gender research *is* mainstreamed, but for how long and what is it that we are prompted to do in order to stay on board? And to what extent is the very core of a feminist epistemology

being affected? The research project from which we will take our clues and that we are seeking funding for, that is, the project that leads us astray in our attempt at being both critical about and pragmatic towards market-driven mainstream infrastructures, is called INTER(P)LACES.

## Doing the document: INTER(P)LACES

*10 January 2012. After months of negotiating research goals and methodology, acquiring non-academic partners, visiting museum houses to keep them informed about the process, getting the budget through the university's financial controllers and a whole lot of other infrastructural concerns, the consortium has now officially been established. All formal documents and letters of commitment have safely arrived. All museum houses have agreed to open their archives and private spaces, and have designed research projects that suit their entrepreneurial goals. They are, in the end, excited about the possibilities to utilize their space better. They are looking forward to co-operating with the academic partners. We are now at the stage where we finally submit the application and are struggling to interpret the legibility of some of the last headings in the application form. What means what, i.e., which details should be where. We contact our EU consultant, who had trained us in writing EU proposals, to use a few more hours of coaching funds. We urgently ask her if she can help us to allocate the so-called 'work packages'. The consultant replies: 'Dear Rosemarie and Iris, I quickly scanned the S&T part as you requested me to do. It looks fabulous already. The only thing which strikes me is that you describe the Individual Research Projects mainly in B2 (S&T), while you don't refer to them in B3, the chapter about the training schedule. Every evaluator will want to read an elaborate description of every Individual Research Project. So do mention a title for every IRP, followed by a short description of what every fellow will be doing exactly, and think of mentioning the secondments. You did put this information in B2, now divided between table 9 and 10. I am not quite sure the evaluators will buy this. So if you still have the time and energy to rewrite that part I would advise you to do so. And once you're rewriting the IRP's try to insert them in B3 instead of B2. If time allows me I'll read the other parts of the application and let you know. All best, D.'*

In '“You end up doing the document rather than doing the doing:” Diversity, race equality and the politics of documentation', Ahmed studies the making and circulation of 'diversity documents' in UK Higher Education. In 2000, these documents became required for each institution so as to foster inclusive institutional space. Ahmed claims, however, that the documents rather 'create fantasy images of the organizations they apparently describe' (Ahmed, 2007: 607) and therefore 'such documents can be used as supportive devices, by exposing the gap between words, images and deeds' (Ahmed, 2007: 607; emphasis in original). Ahmed's is an interesting proposition for operationalizing our study of the corporatized university through our own experiences with the development, writing and submission of research applications to the European Commission (EC) within the 7th Framework Programme (FP7). Because, just like the diversity documents that Ahmed has been studying, our applications have only been filed somewhere. We do not see the INTER(P)LACES project that we have been

drawing up in minute details around us, just like the UK universities have not become ethnically inclusive. A diversity policy paper is obviously not the same as an application for research, but the analogy is not in their respective identities; the analogy is in their shared non-performative effects. Therefore, we ask: what do EC applications do? Are these documents models that allow for gender research to intervene in the context and content of contemporary academe or do they do nothing but re-instate existing power relations?

The case study that we are working from has 'INTER(P)LACES' as its acronym. The drafting of the project proposal is led by the Graduate Gender Programme of Utrecht University and Castrum Peregrini, an Amsterdam-based cultural centre.<sup>4</sup> INTER (P)LACES is currently a European consortium that aspires to train graduates in Transnational Memory Studies (TMS) and Cultural Heritage Management from a feminist perspective. Starting from the founding assumption within TMS that memories are always mediated and thus subjected to processes of in-and exclusion, we stage the project as a means to educate future scholars and cultural entrepreneurs in the bridging of linguistic, visual, spatial and material turns in the Humanities. We focus on the ways in which buildings (*places*) are *interlaced* with layers of meaning and we focus on the processes of inclusion and exclusion performed linguistically, visually, spatially and materially. We are looking at Europe in its post-Second World War, post-colonial and post-Soviet complexities. By now, the consortium consists of 22 academic and non-academic partners from four European countries, plus one university from the USA (notably Harvard University).<sup>5</sup> INTER(P)LACES has been designed to be submitted to FP7 People, a fraction of FP7 as a whole.<sup>6</sup> In this article, we focus on our 2011–2012 experiences, which include an application for an MC ITN (Marie Curie Initial Training Network) – an application that entails devising a structure of three mobility periods for each prospective student – and an EMJD (Erasmus Mundus Joint Degree), which has two mobilities. What have been our investments in the doing of these two INTER(P)LACES documents and what do these investments tell us about the state of our academic context?

## Investments

*3 May 2012. We receive the ITN rejection letter a few weeks after already having gone through the whole circus again for the EMJD application. We recycled parts of the ITN – embracing the motive 'there is triumph in trying' – to enhance our chances to set up the so much wanted PhD training programme in European Transnational Memory Studies and Cultural Heritage Management from a feminist perspective. In the letter, we read that for the ITN we score high on implementation, whereas the evaluators are critical about the theoretical approach and methodology: 'This is an interdisciplinary and intersectoral project that addresses a number of relevant training needs and research fields. ... However, there are ambiguities regarding the appropriateness of research methodology and approach, as the proposal does not clearly detail the way in which they complement each other.' We have used the same theoretical and methodological tools for the EMJD. We get a bit worried.*

*24 July 2012. We receive the feared-for letter from Brussels: 'You have submitted a proposal under Action 1 in the framework of the Erasmus Mundus Call for proposals*

*EACEA/42/11. I regret to inform you that your proposal has not been selected. The agency received 133 proposals under Action 1B out of which 9 were selected for funding. ... Sincerely yours, J. Fronia, Head of Unit.' What we see next is that we score the highest possible award for our Academic and Research Quality: 'The main objectives are clearly described. ... The innovative aspects concern the methodology and the contents of the programme itself as it starts from a spatial angle and puts its scientific focus on the material environment assuring by this way future employability.' We also see very good scores for 2. Partnership experience and composition, 3. Provisions for EMJD candidates and fellowship holders. But we could have done better for the criteria concerning 4. European integration and, yes, 5. Quality assurance. Gender studies did not help either: 'The strong dominance of gender study experts is not well explained, since gender studies are not a focal point of the proposed research.' The evaluator is not impressed ...*

### **Time and money**

The paradoxical situation is that we live in an age of economic determinism, yet it has proved impossible to calculate the price tag of the two INTER(P)LACES applications *for our own institution*. Let us summarize our findings.

The diverse web pages of FP7 tell us that the ITN round of 2011–2012 attracted 1022 applications, of which 12.4% were successful. The call for EMJD proposals generated 133 applications and 6.7% of these have been granted. Both schemes work with 'proportional distribution', which means that when 10% of the applicants come from the Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH), 10% of the money goes to the SSH. This model for budget allocation is framed as 'freedom of research' in the accompanying EC documentation.

If we look at the time spent on the application, we can be sure that in 2011–2012 the main applicants – the authors of this piece and Lars Ebert of *Castrum Peregrini* – have each worked three months full-time on INTER(P)LACES. Apart from us, the following categories of people have been working on the files: partners (academic and non-academic); drop outs; consultants for EU applications ('ghostwriters'); administrative staff at all partner institutions, including employees of EU Liaison Offices, deans and rectors, directors of research and financial controllers; employees of National Contact Points; the ones handling the document after it has been submitted to the EC; and finally the reviewers (two or three per project). This indicates that the people-hours spent on an application – even if unsuccessful – can be estimated at over 1000. Let us stress that for the ITN we have to multiply this by 1022 applicants (1,022,000 hours in total) and for the EMJD with 133 (133,000 hours in total). In sum, 1,150,000 hours have been spent on the ITN and EMJD in 2011–2012.

### **The body**

The gap between the actual time spent so far on INTER(P)LACES and the time we have been repaid for by our institution for the writing of the document has severe effects on our academic and personal lives. As good-old Marx has pointed out, the alienation of a

capital-driven system is one that cuts workers off from the production process; every worker tightens a screw, but nobody really builds the car. The INTER(P)LACES document has become a product that we can no longer oversee and relate to. We and the consultants have each become the specialist of fragments and, perversely enough, the important content-sections of the PhD projects have become completely deprioritized! Not only have we lost touch with the concrete product of our intellectual labour (the document), but we have also lost a sense of living a productive intellectual life in general.

The fragmentation of our intellectual life at the institution today can also be understood through the good-old psychoanalytic concept that signifies the perverse pleasure for (illegitimate) (body) parts. The perversion here must be sought on two ends of the research application spectrum: with us and with the evaluators. A focus on the nitty-gritty of the application (numbers, cash flows, consortium agreement, etc.) does not seem to sit well with zooming out to the bigger picture. There always seems to be a flaw in the application that the evaluator can get gratification from, and we recognize this process. To what extent does this imply: *facilitating* work in academe for applicants and evaluators alike? Applicants need to be able to balance the macro and the micro aspects of the application in order to prove worthy of funds, and evaluators need to be able to resist the pressure to find flaws in the work of well-meaning applicants that will anyway get the chance to settle (financial) details after the funding has been offered.

Both alienation and perversion surely lead to the compulsions and excesses of working on Christmas Eve or New Year's Eve in order to meet the deadlines set in the first weeks of January. They surely have got our partners from Castrum Peregrini to drive through Europe to meet other extra-academic partners in person so as to calm them down and keep them on board after the application has been sent in or rejected. Our obsession with (parts of) the document overtook our investment of the consortium members and our significant others from view.

## Politics

Our main investment however has been the implementation of feminist thought and practice in TMS. What does it tell us that 'gender', in our complex definition as individual-statistical, social-structural and symbolic variable, does not get through the EU grant process?

*Since our wordcount tells us that our space is up and our editors kindly remind us that they're bound to the constraints of the publishing industry we will resist the temptation of doing the document once again here. Instead of forcing our argument into the right format we'll hopefully address the sixty-four thousand dollar question in another EJWS Open Forum ...*

*To be continued*

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## Notes

1. ERIH stands for the European Reference Index for the Humanities. The Gender Studies list (revised in 2011) can be found at: [www.esf.org/research-areas/humanities/erih-european-reference-index-for-the-humanities.html](http://www.esf.org/research-areas/humanities/erih-european-reference-index-for-the-humanities.html) (accessed 9 January 2013).
2. See for a similar analysis Mary Evans (2004).
3. An interesting intersection of feminist economics and feminist artistic production is of course the film *Jeanne Dielman, 23, quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* by Chantal Akerman (1975), screening the chores as if in real time.
4. [www.castrumperegrini.org](http://www.castrumperegrini.org).
5. The other universities involved are Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Alpen Adria Universität Klagenfurt and the University of Sussex.
6. [cordis.europa.eu/fp7/people/home\\_en.html](http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/people/home_en.html).

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