

**THE MAKING OF EUROPEAN WOMEN'S  
STUDIES**

**A WORK IN PROGRESS REPORT  
ON CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT AND RELATED ISSUES**

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## Key terms and issues in the making of European women's studies

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It is a well-known fact that discussions about gender are dominated by scholarship originated in English-speaking countries and cultures. There are solid historical reasons that may help explain why this situation came about. Women's studies as an intellectual and scholarly field is deeply interlinked with the history of the women's movement. The first wave of the women's movement - the so-called suffragettes - who lay the premises for the emancipation of women throughout the past century was an essentially Anglo-Saxon phenomenon. In many ways, the expansion of feminist principles of equality, justice and respect for the dignity of women evolved within what came to be known as 'the American century'. The English language rules here.

That is not to say, however, that women in other cultures and countries did not do their share of the fight to achieve the same worthy ideals: equality, justice and respect for the dignity of women. Within the European context, the issue of cultural differences plays an enormous role in determining the shape and the course of the history of both the political campaigns and the discourses around gender equality. The issue of the education of women and of women's access to the making of science, scholarship, the production of culture and artistic capital have been central to these debates. The dialogue with the English-speaking cultures on all these topics has been intense but at times uneven.

Women's studies as a term is in fact a North American invention; it was quickly and easily adopted by the Anglo-Saxon world because of the strong cultural ties existing between the two geo-political areas the North of Europe also followed. Whether this concept can be applied systematically right across Latin, Catholic, Southern and especially in Eastern Europe is, however, a very serious question. I am not saying this to be excessively Euro-centric but rather to try and be alert to the differences in culture, religion, political and educational practices, which could well make the American-based model of women's studies not a universally applicable one.

The question can then be raised: to what an extent is the very concept of women's studies today respectful of cultural diversity? How does it relate to and take into account the problems of women in less advantaged or in developing countries? How does it compare to the wealth and variety of cultures, even of feminist cultures, within Europe today? Ever since their beginnings in the late 1980's, the European cooperative projects, joint activities, exchanges and networks in academic women's studies have had to confront this complex reality.

### WOMEN'S STUDIES AND THE ISSUE OF WOMEN'S EDUCATION.

Women's studies as a practice exists for the moment mostly at university level. Women's studies has also been strong in adult education classes, re-entry and access to education classes and in some countries even literacy classes. Throughout Europe, women's studies also exists as extra-mural and extra-institutional training. It is the case however that nowhere is women's studies taught at secondary level.

It is therefore difficult to detach the debate about this subject-area from the on-going struggle for the literacy and education of women. I would put this in terms of questions: on the one hand could we not see women's studies as part and parcel of, completing and accomplishing the process of education of women? What better way to finish one's training than by studying the specificity, the cultural forms proper to one's own gender? And inversely, could we not see a need to extend training on women's studies into all the layers of the educational system, especially the pre-university courses? Should some parts of women's studies not be included systematically into the general school curricula?

Moreover, as relative newcomers into the university what does the women's studies curriculum tell us about the contemporary university system? What vision of the university do we espouse from within women's studies? In thinking and planning for our own growth, what educational values do we uphold? In our relationship to the institution of learning, what notion of the university is at work: is it the idea of a liberal island of progressive thinking or rather the view of the university as a vehicle of social control? Does women's studies lend itself to the growing commercialization of university teaching and research, or does it on the contrary remain loyal to classical ideals of education for its own sake? Where are the feminist blueprints for a university that will answer and live up to the challenges of our times? Could we not see women's studies as a laboratory for the re-working of the very scope and function of higher education?

A critical enquiry about the knowing subject and her place in the order of contemporary institutionalized discourse is particularly needed at this point in time, when the institution of the university as a whole suffers from the post-modern disease: lack of legitimization. The university, even more than any other institution of higher learning, is under increasing pressure to fulfil the requirements of productivity and competition of the market economy. The question of whether it is equipped to do so and of whether this aim is compatible with the university's century-old vocation: the pursuit of excellence *per se*, is an open question.

The moral and economic imperative of training people so that they are employable after they graduate must be set up against one of the most prominent features of the contemporary university system: the obvious feminisation of the student population at least in the humanities and social sciences. Regrettably, the feminisation of the professorial body seems somewhat slower in coming. In fact, the position of women academics in most faculties in these areas still follows the classical patriarchal pyramid: the higher the rank, the fewer the women. As far as the students go, however, the over-presence of girls in the humanities and social sciences coincides with the relative depreciation of these fields in the eyes of the educational authorities and policy-makers, who miss no chance to introduce budgetary reductions. I am struck by the perversity of the system, by this constant association of feminization with depreciation: it is as if the presence of women were synonymous with decline and crisis. The eternal historical delay of women plays a role here: as if we were condemned to occupy the spaces, the monuments that patriarchy has already deserted. Thus, well may we wonder why women are not present in any significant number in the hard sciences faculty (Fox-Keller, 1985, Hubbard 1984, 1990, Nagl, 1987), in mathematics, in all the advanced technologies?

Following the tradition of critical theory (Benjamin; Adorno) I suggest that we approach the question of the crisis of the university with a creative optimism. After all, a crisis is also an opening-out of possibilities for the invention of new forms of discourse. Thus, one of the positive features of the post-modern condition (Lyotard) is that the entire idea of the university



as ivory tower, model of excellence opposed to the vulgarity of everyday culture, cannot be upheld. The distinction between "high" and "low" culture is not only artificial but also inadequate as a representation of our condition. Our era as a whole is marked by the technical capacity to reproduce, distribute and market cultural and intellectual products as "mental goods", which are subjected to the laws of exchange in the market economy. Not only is there no autonomy between technology and the life of the mind, but also the inter-connection of the two is opening out new exciting perspectives for the business of thinking.

The corollary of the above is that the question of what values women intellectuals intend to market and transmit is more urgent than ever. The question of our 'entitlement' to act as discursive subjects has been - at least temporarily - settled positively. The problem now is to find both a consensus and an effective form of mediation about the views of culture, of knowledge, of excellence that is upheld in women's studies at this point of crisis of classical education. What view of the human subject do we defend in a context of increasing "Macdonaldization" of culture? The question that formerly occupied the feminist agenda: "how do we relate to the canon or the great tradition of the humanities and sciences" has now grown to include the question of how to deal with their crisis. What values shall we oppose to it? What is our vision?

The complex relationship that "gender" as an academic field entertains with the institution of the university, and with other symbolic structures is the counterpart of the issues surrounding women's exclusion from socio-political rights, i.e.: what is commonly known as "power". In other words: women's exclusion from the city of letters is symptomatic of our exclusion from citizenship at large. As relative newcomers in the world of legal and intellectual rights, women have the advantage of a more critical outlook. Therefore, before we let ourselves go to joyful celebrations of our "international" perspective, let us pause and ask: are women sufficiently present as citizens in their country to start thinking seriously in an international perspective? Before we become citizens of the world, can we clarify the ways in which we belong to, are involved and implicated with our own national cultures? No discussion of women's studies international perspective is complete unless it rests on a lucid analysis of one's inscription in the networks of power and signification that make up one's culture. Unless we do so we run the risk of postulating an international perspective that would be just a form of supra-nationalism, that is to say, ultimately of planetary exile.

Moreover, as Gabriele Griffin has pointed out<sup>3</sup>, it is impossible to establish a one-to-one relationship between women and 'own country', not only because identifications are not one-dimensional, but also because in the multicultural societies of Europe today they are not easily classifiable in terms of "national" versus "international". Griffin also argues that it is questionable whether, under the impact of globalization and the repoliticization of religious affiliations as markers of identification, the "nation state" still functions as a major point of reference in identity-formation.

It is in the context of the crisis of the concept of the nation-state that I would situate the debate on "internationalism". The European union project is like an ideal horizon, which often raises high expectations. It is as if the lifting of the national boundaries were lifting a burden off our chest; as if a trans-national entity called the EU could come and deliver us from a problem we have never ceased to grapple with: the nation-state. Although I accept that all identifications are

<sup>3</sup> ATHENA meeting, Leeds, November 1999, panel 1c

troubled, contested an politically implicated, I am wary of using the "international" as a way of avoiding local realities. How do we assess our belonging to a nation-state? Why have we written so little about it? The topic of the State has been put on the feminist agenda: why not that of the nation? With the exception of the studies on women in totalitarian régimes (Bock 1986, Thalmann 1986, Koonz 1987) we still lack adequate analyses of our relationship to a nation-state, that is to say ultimately of our own sense of citizenship. How can the European perspective help us focus on our national problems? And what is "Europe", after all, where does it begin? Is not the European perspective just a pretext? Does it not come instead of internal national dynamics that many women's movements lack in the various European countries today? Is it just a form of avoidance?

Fifty years ago Virginia Woolf drew the connection between gender and internationalism: she stated: "as a woman I have no country, as a woman my country is the whole world" (Woolf, 1939). She thus stated the theme of exile as paradigmatic of the female condition. Nowadays, many feminists have taken up this topos (Oakley & Mitchell 1987; Irigaray, 1984; Cixous, 1975). For some there may be the risk of slipping into a new fantasy, a new utopia: "Europe", a dream, a comfortable "aileurs", a no-land. Thus, V. Woolf's statement can also be taken as meaning that, as women, we are all equal in being country-less, home-less: our collective identity as a gender would therefore rest on the lowest common denominator among us, on our not having a national tie. The reflection on citizenship cannot be exhausted by the question of women's vote and involvement in organized politics. It also calls into question the problem of female identity, cultural agency and participation in education and science. What is at stake is precisely the normativity required by the process of becoming-subject. Being a "citizen of the world", however attractive it may sound, can also be an evasive tactic, a way of begging the question.

#### FEMINIST INTERNATIONALISM: THINKING IN NETWORKS

The history of women's ideas, of the discursivity and the intellectual creativity of women, is marked by international connections and dis-connections (Stanton, 1980). The very conceptual and political structure of the women's movement is the result of intense international networking; for instance, the single most important feminist book of this century: S. de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* was published in France in 1949 and, although it raised a few eyebrows and many nasty comments by offended males, it did not exactly trigger a revolution. We have to wait till the mid-60's and the second feminist wave of the American women, for the book to be recognized as an earth-shaking event. Kate Millet (1979), Ti-Grace Atkinson (1974), S. Firestone (1969) all dedicated their first, explosive books to de Beauvoir. This transatlantic connection turned a French book into an American political event and, through that, into an international phenomenon.

One could argue that intellectual history is full of such twists of fate and that the transmission of ideas, especially of revolutionary ones, is always made of such leaps, loops and gaps. This sort of nomadism is implicit in the course of modernity, of the intellectual and political movements that make our era: suffice it to quote the fates of the psycho-analytic and the Marxist movements under the lethal impact of Nazi Germany: they only survived by running into exile and re-implanting themselves elsewhere.

Nevertheless, from a women's studies perspective, the point needs to be stressed; international dispersion and dissemination are forms of resistance, a way of preserving ideas which may otherwise have been forgotten or destroyed, condemned to amnesia or to wilful obliteration, in their original contexts. Ideas, after all, are as mortal as their makers.

Next to the figure of the exile, we should also line up that of the migrant. Western Europe today is hardly a lily-white society. The phenomenon of immigration has created in every European country a series of foreign sub-cultures of which women tend to be the loyal guardians and perpetuators. Migrant women, mostly from the Middle or Far East but also from Southern Europe constitute the bulk of what I would call the "domestic foreigners" in our post-industrial metropolises. They embody cultural values so different from the dominant ones, that they tend to get forgotten in the debates about the "international perspectives" opened by the European integration prospect. It is regrettable that so few communication and exchange networks exist between migrant women and the rest of the organized women's movement. It is as if women's studies shared with our culture - consciously or not - the resistance to the idea that internationalization begins at home: how close are we, in fact, to those migrant women whose rights of citizenship are vastly inferior to our own? How sensitive are we to the intellectual potential of the foreigners that we have right here, in our own back-yard?

Nevertheless, the many-fold ways in which our respective national contexts determine the structure, form and content of women's studies is a subject that deserves more attention than it has so far received. All the work of cross-cultural comparison of experiences done during the UN decade for women has shown the importance of this factor. Unless we are clear about our own national frameworks we are in danger of becoming implicitly ethno-centric. It seems to me that the challenge today is to conjugate the positive aspects of the collectively shared condition of 'new Europeans' with something that I would call the responsibility for and the accountability to our own gender. S. de Beauvoir was already part of a century-old tradition of campaigners for women's rights when she pointed out that freedom is quite a burden in that it requires so much work of self-construction. The world being but a planetary village (McLuhan, 1971) I will not detach the issue of internationalism from the fundamental one of women's self-determination as subjects - in the full sense of the word - of their own countries.

The situation has accelerated especially in Europe, since 1989 and with the speeding up of the European integration process. In former eastern European countries and often "post-communist" societies, the issue of citizenship and of women's contribution to democratic processes has become more urgent than ever. In this fast-changing context, networking at all levels, but especially in the areas of political participation, science and education, plays a leading role as motor of change.

#### DILEMMAS

The whole field of women's studies has been marked by a series of debates and questioning about the aims and scopes of its very enterprise. This has given rise to areas of divergence and uncertainty; let me try to give you some example of these.

#### Terminology

Even the simple and apparently straight-forward "women's studies" did not strike a note of adequate simplicity. Some groups prefer the more explicitly political: "feminist studies"; others

go for "sex-role or gender studies", which aim at greater objectivity by suggesting a higher level of scientific precision. The slightly older "female studies" may sound neutral but is far too limiting in political scope; "feminine studies" will probably please the Lacanians but it does beg the question. "Feminology" was suggested and recently the term "clitoral hermeneutics" was brought forth (Schor, 1987). More than anything else, this semantic euphoria stresses that the term "women's studies" was never more than a compromise solution, revealing the depths of hesitation surrounding the very signifier "woman".

The point about the instability of the category "woman" has been emphasized over the last ten years by the so-called post-structuralist wave of feminist theory; it is complex enough to deserve a better treatment than I can warrant here. Suffice it to say that the question remains: how do we define the referent "woman" and what epistemological value do we attribute to it in developing a field of study called "women's studies"? What does the human being embodied female study, when she studies women's studies? The vicious circles involved in this question are worth lingering in and working through.

The polyvalence surrounding the terminology reflects a much larger variety of views concerning the very nature of the women's movement. It is just as difficult today to analyze and map out the locations of the movement as it is to codify the practices of women's studies. This is due partly to the relative invisibility of the movement in the social sphere and partly to the proliferation of groups and sub-groups which actually defies classification. A special issue of *Women's Studies International Forum* devoted to the assessment of the second wave of feminism identified three main criteria of definition of the women's movement: firstly, it covers the general evolution of the lives and ways of thinking of women in general, even and especially those who do not claim to be feminists. Secondly it refers to the impact that feminist values have had on the cultural and social representation of women in all societies but especially in those white industrialized countries where the "problem without a name" (Friedan, 1963) became a key political factor.

Thirdly it refers specifically to the multitude of groups in the feminist networks. Out of this complex, polyvalent web of meaning-making groups we can detect common areas of concern, or coalitions of interest that make the movement into a political machine governed by the common will to improve the status of women.

#### The agenda and content of the field

Women's studies is a field aimed at challenging the premises and epistemological foundations of the disciplines. Feminism is a form of critical theory. The actual topics covered by the feminist agenda encompass everything from the organization of the brain to socialization and motherhood, without forgetting the feminization of poverty, feminist theology or women's role in musicology. Clearly, it is not by focusing on the topics of the agenda that we can hope to reach a compromise, but rather by stressing common forms of approach and methods.

This point highlights another important aspect, however, of the cultural roots of the term "women's studies": Kate Stimpson argues that what makes it so very American is the pragmatism of the practice, which is firmly implanted in the belief in the unity of thought and action. The origins of women's studies are in empirical, action-oriented eclecticism, in healthy dis-respect for the power of the disciplines.



In her analysis of the state of contemporary feminist theory, Stimpson draws the following lines of development of this field: the first phase is that of the deconstruction of sexism as a source of biases in the production of knowledge; the second phase is the reconstruction of knowledge starting from a woman-centered perspective. The last is the redefinition of the universal from the perspective of gender.

These phases are obviously not chronological but rather discursive and they come to bear significantly on the scientific claims of women's studies as a new area of thought.

The debate over the foundations of the discipline is translated into a political issue: should women's studies be an autonomous area of its own, or should it aim at the integration into the disciplines? The integrationists aim at including women's studies into existing curricula and thus force the disciplines to evolve; the autonomists, on the other hand, believe in radical disruption and in the specificity of women-based knowledge.

In the early stages of the women's movements, such a debate acquired heated political connotations. Here in Europe the arena where a great deal of these discussions were assessed and in some way resolved were the European networks for women's studies. The issues that emerged as points of difference from the Americans are:

the structure and importance of the disciplines and of disciplinarity in the university today. Can we speak, for instance, of a European tradition of reflection and critique of the disciplines that differs considerably from the eclectic pragmatism of the Americans? Is the epistemological and symbolic value that we Europeans give to the disciplines different from the American epistemological "melting pot"?

How far does a new field of inter-disciplinary work like women's studies actually fit in with the university structure?

Is autonomy a better structure for women's studies education than integration? Let me simply quote the prophetic words of Virginia Woolf, who in *Three Guineas* (1939) warned us against integration as being a one-way street into the white, middle-class, heterosexist world of the learned powerful few. As later theorists (Duelli-Klein, 1987) were to point out, integration can become a form of invisibility.

There is also another political issue at stake here: how is the process of institutionalization of women's studies likely to affect the often fragile alliance between women of different classes, races and sexual preferences? How does the confrontation with mainstream discourse affect the working-through of the differences among women?

In this respect one of the points of consensus among women's studies teachers cooperating in the European networks is the creation of a class of trans-disciplinary translators, who can transpose the assumptions and methodologies of one discipline into those of another. This task-force of conceptual translators could well become the core of what could be rightly called a feminist intellectual class. The work of G. Steiner comes to mind here; he argues "the currents of energy in civilization are transmitted by translation, by the mimetic, adaptive, metamorphic interchange of discourse and codes." (1984; 202). And in so far as no translation can ever be perfect duplication, approximations, deletions, omissions - the vast array of subjective factors are integral part of the process of interchange which alone makes intellectual processes possible.

Moreover, hiding the complexities of cultural differences among women under the convenient umbrella of a universal, or global sisterhood (Morgan, 1984) seems to me both unfair and unworkable. This epistemological side, connected to the critical discussion about the signifier "woman" has been made necessary of late by the emergence of the question of "differences among women". This movement has resulted in the rejection of the univocity of the term "woman" also and especially within feminist theory. The political urge to develop this issue has come from specific sectors of the movement: firstly from psychoanalytic feminism (Trigaray: 1974, 1977, 1986, Melandri: 1977, Molino: 1986, Chodorow: 1987, Rose-Mitchell: 1982, Benjamin: 1986 and Flax: 1987) Secondly from the so-called "post-colonial" discourse of third-world feminists (Lorde: 1987, Mohanty: 1987) who have analyzed the way in which the category "Third world women" has been constructed by feminist discourse. Thirdly, the lesbian discourse, its theory and practice (Johnston, 1973; Rich, 1981; Dworkin, 1982; Wittig, 1973; Spivak, 1988)

Another argument for translation as an epistemological stance is that, unless we submit our own discourses to the test of feminist transdisciplinary translation we run the risk of re-inventing the wheel, i.e.: of borrowing sloppily from the terminology and the conceptual framework of other disciplines. Sloppy loans may induce a false sense of creativity; thus, an idea from sociology applied to literature may seem revolutionary, though it is absolutely commonplace in its own original discourse.

It seems to me that the key idea in all these cases is that of cross-disciplinary, or cross-cultural comparison. The focus is on the cultural differences such as they become manifest in our own theoretical practices. As an example, do we think that the Anglo-Saxon idea of "gender" has an equivalent in, say French or Italian? Inversely, is the idea of sexual difference or "différence sexuelle" translatable in a meaningful manner? Instead of taking shelter behind a facile sort of cultural relativism, should we not take seriously the conceptual challenge raised by these questions? Should we not ask whether women's studies, feminist theory or the women's movement as a whole possess a common language? Are we talking about the same sort of project? Do we share the same vision? Is the mixture of critique and creativity, which for me lies at the heart of the women's studies project a trans-cultural, trans-historical truth? Is the term precise enough to re-present the gesture which unifies us in one common political goal?

#### European perspectives in women's studies

These questions prompted the collective work that has been at the heart of the European networks for women's studies especially since 1995. In that year, the Europe-wide evaluation of the field, supported and funded by the Erasmus/Socrates programme of the European commission, allowed us to take stock of the situation. In annex 1 you will find the complete set of recommendations that were approved by the Area Evaluation Conference of Women's studies, which was held at the university of Coimbra. It clearly outlines the position of the women's studies community in Europe on issues of terminology, organizational structure, institutional framework and related issues.

It is clear that the academic status of women's studies varies greatly between the member states of the EC. As recent reports sponsored by the Commission of the EC have shown, women's studies is stronger in Northern European countries and it therefore tends to follow a North-American model both in structure and in the selection of teaching and reading material. The

discussion as to what a distinctly European perspective on women's studies could be, has been at the centre of many debates, which have tended to be rather polarized along a North-South divide. Countries in the South of Europe have been both culturally and intellectually more resistant to assimilating North-American methods and teaching material. Considering the structure of universities in these countries, the question of the creation of specific positions for women's studies has also proved quite controversial. In France, Italy or Spain there are practically no specific women's studies positions, though first-class work on women's studies is done by academics in positions that are 'integrated' in existing departments, and also by feminist groups outside the institutions.

The experience of setting up women's studies in a European perspective<sup>4</sup> has proved to be a delicate exercise in cross-cultural analysis and comparison. In its daily practice, this has turned out to be a labour-intensive process of confrontation of differences among women, which has only just begun: we think it will keep us busy for years to come. One thing that is already clear to all concerned is that the idea of 'Europe' that we have in mind is critical of ethnocentrism and nationalism. Fortunately, most European feminists have taken their distance from the legacy of European nationalism and are deeply concerned by the rebirth of xenophobia, racism and anti-semitism on our Continent. Moreover, without turning our back on our historical heritage, many of us have also voiced pertinent criticism of the increasing isolationism and protectionism fostered by the idea of a 'United' Europe. (Braidotti-Franken: 1991)

It is our hope that these concerns can be put to the task of contributing actively to the construction of a genuine European community spirit, where sexism, racism and other forms of exclusion will be targeted for elimination. As Helma Lutz so eloquently puts it: in the EU today, we need to put an end to that specific European habit that consists in holding onto an ethnocentric centre, confining the rest of the world to the position of a necessary and necessarily under-rated periphery. Lutz explores especially the condition of immigrants in the EC today as a significant case of peripheral existence within the alleged centre of this community. In other words, women's studies is not only education for women, it is the re-education of a whole culture, to help it move away from discriminatory practices, so that it can give the best of itself to the development of a renewed sense of a common European house.

The experience built up over the years of inter-European teaching exchanges has allowed the members of the network to reach a common definition of women's studies. Women's studies is a field of scientific and pedagogical activity devoted to improving the status of women and to finding forms of representation of women's experiences which are dignified, empowering and which faithfully reflect the range of women's contributions to cultural, economic, social and scientific development. Women's studies is a critical project in so far as it examines how science perpetuates forms of discrimination and even of exclusion, but it is also a creative field in that it opens up alternative spaces to women's self-representation and intellectual self-determination.

Our experience has also highlighted another point: that in order to construct effective inter-European perspectives in women's studies, due attention must be paid to cultural differences and

<sup>4</sup> For a detailed account of the experience attempted in Utrecht, please see the special issue on 'Women's Studies at the University of Utrecht' of *Women's Studies International Forum*, vol. 16, n. 4, 1993, edited by Rosi Braidotti. See also the special issue on 'Women's Studies in Europe' of *Women's Studies Quarterly*, vol. 20, n. 3 & 4, 1992, edited by Angelika Koster-Lossack and Tobe Levin.

to the specificity of national contexts. Noting in fact that both the terminology and most of the existing teaching material in this field is of North-American origin and consequently is available only in English, European women's studies scholars have been faced with a double task. On the one hand, they have had to struggle to get this new field of study accepted in their respective countries and institutions; on the other hand, they have had to develop their own instruments for teaching and in research. In this regard, the support that women's studies academics have been able to gather from the Commission of the European Community has been and remains crucial in many different ways. Whereas countries where this field is under-developed have benefited from both the financial and the moral support of the EC, well-endowed programmes in other countries have experienced the EC support as a form of international recognition and therefore of scientific legitimization. In both cases, the impact of the EC 'stamp of approval' is enormous.

The feeling is strong among European women's studies academics that this field can only be genuinely 'European', if it addresses rigorously issues of ethnic identity, multi-culturalism and anti-racism. The issues of cultural and of gender identity are intimately inter-linked and cannot be easily separated. We would even like to go as far as to suggest that no perspective in women's studies can be considered truly 'European' unless it addresses the need to produce non-exclusionary and non-ethnocentric models of knowledge and education. We think that the fostering of a European consciousness can only profit from the enlarged definition of knowledge, which women's studies imply and enact. In this respect, many women's studies scholars feel very strongly that they need to strengthen and to broaden the anti-racist European dimension of their work. More international exchanges are needed in order to develop an in-depth understanding of the cultural diversity of women's studies traditions and practices in the European community today. Moreover, for this work towards a common and yet diversified definition to succeed, discussions are needed in a comparative framework with women from Eastern and Central Europe, from the United States and from developing countries.

In fact, it is important to stress that although as citizens of the EC we do our best to participate in the creation of a shared cultural space that may contribute to lessening intra-European in-fighting and economic competition, we are also perfectly well aware of the limitations and the dangers of a unified Europe. In this respect, a multi-cultural anti-racist approach to the making of European women's studies seems to us essential at this moment of our history. In this respect also, "gender" cannot function alone, but rather as a bridge between different levels and layers of social inclusion and exclusion.

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## Case Study n.1. The uses and abuses of the sex/gender distinction Four case studies from European languages

### Introduction

This first case study illustrates and complexifies some of the issues raised in the previous chapter. The fact that the "sex/gender" distinction has become dominant in women's studies places a special burden on all other feminists cultures to find adequate translations for these key-terms. Such translations are never easy, and more often than not, they prove very confusing.

In the ATHENA Panel 1c our work concentrates on issues of terminology and key-concepts in women's studies, from a multi-cultural European perspective. A great deal of attention is being paid to both the variety of terminologies and political as well as cultural traditions that are available within Europe and to their historical roots. In some ways, Panel 1c aims at historicizing alternative formulations and approaches to gender theories and women's studies practices.

What follows is a selective overview of some of the difficulties involved in translating the dominant "sex/gender" distinction in a number of European languages. The kind of issues raised by these case-studies force the core-work of this ATHENA panel. A such they deserve a closer analysis and more in-depth study than we can warrant them here. One clear message which emerges from this brief comparative perspective, however, is that it is urgent to pursue this kind of local analysis.

Further research is needed not only at linguistic and historical levels, but also in the philosophical assumptions and political systems of thought of the different feminist cultures of Europe.

Until this basic groundwork is accomplished, most women's studies programmes will continue to import and adapt foreign concepts, which express cultural and political traditions linked with the Anglo-American world.

As scholars and citizens of the global economy, we are proud to partake in the *lingua franca* of gender-theory. As new Europeans, however, we also know that this is an area in which we simply need to work harder to produce our own perspectives.

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