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Uneasy Transitions

Women's Studies in the European Union¹

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This paper is a reflection on the current state of the interaction between specialists in European women's studies and their North American colleagues. I will start by situating the women's studies debate within a larger context of transatlantic intellectual transactions, emphasizing two new factors: on the one hand, the role of the European Union, and on the other, the ongoing campaign against "political correctness" in contemporary American politics. After presenting as a case study a brief outline of cooperation in women's studies within the European Union, I will address more specifically the question of feminist multicultural practices and their function in contemporary exchanges between women's studies in the European Union and the United States.

The urgency I feel about these issues is due to the distance I perceive at this moment between American and European political climates in general and feminist debates in particular. As Michael Sprinker put it in his analysis of contemporary American politics, the neoconservatism and the right-wing backlash of the 1990s have undone the links that critical intellectuals in the United States had established with their European counterparts in the 1960s.² Cornel West shares this analysis and remarks that in the United States after McCarthyism, left-wing intellectuals turned to Europe to find a critical tradition and appropriated the Marxist theories of the day, thus inaugurating the phenomenon of "traveling theories" that was to have such an impact on later events.³ Since then, the drift between Europe and the United States has grown so large that Cornel West now has called for a new alliance between different kinds of critical intellectuals.

Pursuing this analysis further, Jeffrey Williams points out that the rejection of the latest "traveling theories" imported into the United States from Europe, namely deconstruction and poststructuralism, is one of the main aspects of the "culture wars" currently being waged by the right in the United States.⁴ In his analysis, what is at stake in this campaign of rejection of European-made theories is, first of all, a turn away from the 1960s legacy of civil rights, women's rights, and social welfare. Second, it marks a rejection of the 1960s flair for theory per se in favor of a generalized appeal to pragmatism, often expressed in terms of "realism." The latter is an expression of the general

anti-intellectualism that is dominant in the 1990s. What is at stake in these media campaigns is the future of liberal education as a whole, and of progressive social thinkers. The campaign against "political correctness" plays a central role in this conservative onslaught, which is especially aimed at women's and black studies and other progressive educational programs.

What emerges from these analyses is a situation in which the areas that are especially targeted for termination in the new Right-wing political climate in the United States are the "Gang of Four," constituted by feminists, Marxists, multiculturalists, and cultural theorists, all of whom are accused of betraying the national cultural heritage, because theirs are "traveling theories" coming from Europe and more especially from French poststructuralist philosophy and deconstruction. This reading of European thought by the American conservatives in turn situates women's studies courses at the heart of a backlash the effect of which—I will argue—are felt on both sides of the Atlantic. It is because I am extremely worried about the terms in which this debate is being constructed and more specifically about the misconstruction of European women's studies within this debate, that I am writing this essay.

One of the reasons why this misconstruction is so effective has to do with the American media's misinformation about the range of cultural and political effects of the European Union. Adopting a catastrophe-prone style of reporting about European affairs, the U.S. press has not sufficiently covered the course of events linked to European unification and more especially their effects on education and culture. I think that, as a consequence of this lack of updated information, real divergences have emerged on the two sides of the Atlantic between their respective understandings, definitions and expectations about "Europe," as evidenced by the increasing use of the adjective *Eurocentric* as a pejorative term in both general and feminist debates in the United States. Rather than giving in to easy polemics, I wish to stress the need to problematize and to historicize the question of what, if anything, constitutes European—as opposed to American—identity at this particular moment of our respective and collective histories.

I would like to raise this question because I do not see the grounds for identities of any sort as fixed, God-given, or essential foundations—be it of the biological, psychic, or historical kinds of essentialism. On the contrary, I see them as being constructed in the very gesture that posits them as the anchoring point for certain kinds of social and discursive practices. Consequently, the question I would like to put on the table in terms of European or American cultural identity is not the essentialist one—What is it?—but rather the critical genealogical one, namely, How is it constructed? By Whom? Under which conditions? For which aims and for whose profit? The political issue at stake is: Who is entitled to claim this legacy, speak on its behalf, and turn it into a policy-making tool?

There is also another added factor, however, which has to do with feminist politics. Feminism has based its political and discursive practices on the notion of "the politics of location." This term, inaugurated by Adrienne Rich, stresses the need for feminists to

think of and devise political practice from a lucid analysis of their specific spatiotemporal locations.⁵ It results in embodied and embedded perspectives, which aim at making one accountable for one's inscription in a set of power relations, in opposition to abstract and falsely universalistic practices. Feminists inspired by Foucault have enlarged this practice in terms of "technologies of the self" and also as "microphysics of power"; others prefer to analyze them in terms of differences of class, race, age, sexual preference, and other structural variables that result in what Donna Haraway calls "situated knowledges."⁶ In all these cases, and more forcefully in poststructuralist feminism, "situated" practices have become a central criterion in feminist knowledge claims.⁷

Not only is the situated approach an important contribution to the analysis of theoretical and political practice after the decline of Marxism, but it also translates into simpler ideas—for instance, that in intellectual debates a little less abstraction would be welcome indeed.

All of this is of the greatest importance in situating the debate about European women's studies within the framework of the European Union. To explain this, I need to go briefly into what I would define as the paradox of European identity.

Following the insight of poststructuralist feminism, I would suggest that Europeans, i.e., people who have been situated in this particular geopolitical location for some time and identify with and feel accountable for its history, are not very gifted in the art of situated knowledges. Quite on the contrary, Europeans have perfected a trick that consists of turning themselves into the center of the universe. The corollary of this obsession with being at the center is that, in the European mind-set, one's location acquires the greatest abstraction, while the rest of the world becomes one huge periphery. Neither the political left nor the feminist movement is an exception. How much time and energy has been spent speculating about, for instance, the terrible status of women in other lands and other cultures, as if the status quo in the here and now of European daily practice were so incredibly perfect? Yet women of color, such as Chandra Mohanty, have warned us very strongly against the ethnocentric habit that consists of constructing the "third world woman" as an object of oppression that requires support or "solidarity."⁸ It is against this flight into universalistic abstraction that feminists have proposed situated perspectives and applied the politics of location.

What I would like to suggest next is that the project of the European Union has a lot to do with the rejection of the disembodied and disembedded ways of thinking that European culture has perfected. Far from being the triumphant assumption of a sovereign identity, being a European in the sense of the European Union is the sobering experience of taking stock of this specific geopolitical and historical location and finally putting to rest the universalistic pretensions that historically have made Europe into the site of nationalism, colonialism, and fascism. In other words, I would like to suggest that the European Union is about accountability and situated perspectives, which is the opposite of ethnocentrism.

Daniel Cohn-Bendit, former leader of the May 1968 student movement in Paris and now a Euro-Parliament member especially active in the field of antiracism, recently stated that if Europeans want to make their unification work, they really must start from the assumption that Europe is indeed the place where they live and that they must take responsibility for it.⁹ Claiming anything else would be a repetition of that flight into abstraction for which European culture is (in)famous: at best, it may procure them the benefits of escapism; at worst, the luxury of guilt. It is important to start from where one is at.

What I mean is that postmodernity as a specific historical location requires that intellectuals think through the simultaneity of potentially contradictory effects. Facing up to these contradictions is the historical responsibility of early twenty-first century transatlantic thinkers who are committed to thinking alongside their world and not to pretending that it does not exist or hoping that maybe it will go away and leave them alone in the contemplation of their Olympian thoughts. One of the significant elements of this historicity that I would like to emphasize is that the entire project of the European Union rests on the premise of the historical decline of the European nation-states. At the end of the Second World War, as Adenauer, de Gasperi, and de Gaulle laid the foundation of the European Union, they were attempting not only to reconstruct the European economy, with hefty support from the United States, but also to prevent more intra-European "world" wars.

Which is not to deny that the single most important purpose of the EU has been economic, but rather that its economic program has been devised as a response to a situation—the transnational economy—that has spelled the death of nation-states as principles of economic organization. Just consider the simple fact that the fastest-growing economies in the world today are not Western; they lie instead quite away from the historically sanctified binary relationship United States–Europe, in Asia and the Pacific Rim.

This results in a process that Cornel West calls "the decentering of Europe," that is to say, its economic and social decline, which can only be understood in terms of the emergence of postcolonial subjects. One immediate effect of the global economy for Europe is the multicultural mix that has occurred in the last thirty years. In turn, this has laid to rest another important cultural myth: namely that European culture is homogeneous, that is to say, invariably white and predominantly Christian. Of course, when one looks at European societies at any one point in time, one will find abundant evidence to the contrary: Successive waves of migrations from the East and the South make mockery of any claim to ethnic or cultural homogeneity, while the persistent presence of Jewish and, more recently, Muslim citizens challenges the priority of Christianity. Nonetheless, the myth of cultural homogeneity has been, and remains, crucial to the making of European nationalism.

Postmodernity explodes all these myths and calls for the kind of political intervention that takes into account transnational economic factors and the evident historical

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decline of national bases as a principle of organization not only of the economy and of organized politics, but also of political opposition.

In this context, the project of the European Union is an attempt at a response to the decline of European nation-states. The project developed from the ruins of postwar Europe as a bastion against Soviet-style Communism and turned into a positive solution to the never-ending problems of European nationalism. The EU carries with it the seeds of antinationalism, and as such it spreads beyond the economic dimension to encompass culture and education as well. Significantly, however, the integration of these areas was much slower and met with more resistance than the economic realm, because it challenges more directly European identity and is therefore more "difficult" and potentially more divisive. As Stuart Hall put it, the great resistance against European union, as well as the American suspicion of it, is a defensive response to a process of effectively dismantling European nation-states.¹⁰ The short-range effect of this within Europe is to unleash cultural and political nostalgia, in a wave of nationalistic paranoia and xenophobic fears, which is the form taken by contemporary European cultural racism.

Just how difficult the process of European cultural integration is can be demonstrated by some elements of contemporary politics, such as the paralysis into which the European political left seems to have sunk, unable to renew its role in the age of the global economy. This results in some significant paradoxes: on the Continent the opposition to the European Union is led, on the one hand, by the authoritarian right, especially Jean-Marie Le Pen and his cronies, and, on the other hand, by the nostalgic left, which seems to miss terribly the topological foundations for working-class solidarity. The "internationalist" tradition of the organized left is of no assistance at the time of the transnational economy. Speaking as a left-wing intellectual, I must say that the political left is as unable as most other political forces at the moment to react with energy and vision to the historical evidence that is the increasing irrelevance of Eurocentric modes of practice and thought to today's world. The left's traditional empathy with the Third World and especially with Third-World socialism reproduces—albeit unwillingly—the center-periphery relationship and seems unable to subvert it. In such a context, more lucidity is needed along with a renewed sense of political strategy, both of which would profit immensely from feminist insights and practice.¹¹

In conclusion, "European identity" today is a contested zone, where issues of entitlement and access, of exclusion and participation, are crucial. "Europe" today means a site of possible political resistance against nationalism, xenophobia, and racism, which accompany the process of European unification.¹²

To return to the question of "traveling theories," I would like to add that the main thinkers of the poststructuralist generation—the very same authors whom the Right uses in its attacks on liberal education in the United States, especially Deleuze, Lyotard, Derrida, Kristeva, and Cixous—argue quite firmly that postmodernity has to do with the shift of geopolitical power away from the North Atlantic. In their philosophical

standpoint, this shift gets theorized in terms of the decline of Eurocentered systems of thought, which is often rendered through the death metaphor: "the decline of Western humanism."

They all tend to point out one interesting fact about this shift of geopolitical power relations that makes their discourse about the end of Western European hegemony radically different from the fascist and right-wing nostalgic discourse about the "decline of the West" at the beginning of this century: namely that what makes the Western philosophical culture so perniciously effective is that it has been announcing its own death for over a hundred years.¹³ Since the apocalyptic trinity of modernity—Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud—the West has been thinking through the historical inevitability and the logical possibility of its own decline, so much so that the state of "crisis" has become the *modus vivendi* of Western philosophers: They thrive on it and write endlessly about it, to the point that if the crisis did not exist, they would have to invent it in order to justify their existence.

In her analysis of the Paul de Man case, Barbara Johnson comments lucidly on this paradox, which in some way captures the complexity of poststructuralist philosophy as a whole.¹⁴ It is the paradox of a philosophical thought that serenely contemplates the necessity of its own death, apparently subverting its own foundations, while at the same time turning this non-foundationalist gesture into the very *raison d'être* for Western philosophy. Simultaneously undermining and underscoring his authority in a mode of ironical self-reflection which is also and without possible contradiction narcissistic self-deprecation, the Western philosopher turns this paradox into a quasi-universal posture.

Reread in a poststructuralist frame, this paradox results in the glorification of the aporic and its edification into a dominant mode of discourse that itemizes the "death of the subject" as the central concern.¹⁵ Consequently, I think nobody, let alone critical thinkers, should take the notion of the "crisis" of the West naively or at face value. This state of prolonged and self-agonizing crisis may simply be the form Western post-modernity has chosen to perpetuate itself.

Gayatri Spivak makes the point succinctly when she argues that

given the international division of labor of the imperialist countries, it is quite appropriate that the best critique of the European ethico-politico-social universals, those regulative concepts, should come from the North Atlantic. But what is ironically appropriate in postcoloniality is that this critique finds its best staging outside of the North Atlantic in the undoing of imperialism.¹⁶

Spivak then goes on to argue that there are forces at work in the North Atlantic region that aim at rewriting universalism as "solidarity," thus reasserting the historical advantage of the center of the empire, in spite of evident signs of economic and cultural decline.¹⁷

In confronting these complexities, feminists and critical intellectuals are bound to

come up with different accounts, which are contingent upon different locations. Confronted with the inevitable diversity of positions and genealogies, instead of panicking or fearing relativism it would be better to turn differences into objects of discursive exchange. Differences should not be homogenized into a falsely unified and self-congratulatory understanding of either European or American identity. In other words—to paraphrase Foucault—attention must be paid to the paradox of exclusion and affirmation, of power and truth, which lies at the heart of the quest for identity, especially in the European context and in issues related to the great transatlantic disconnection.¹⁸

EUROPEAN WOMEN'S STUDIES

The issues raised above weigh rather heavily upon contemporary exchanges in women's studies across the Atlantic and contribute to the lack of information that I have already denounced. In this section, I will provide a counterreading of European feminist practice, based on the experience of inter-university European cooperation in this field. I hope both to expose the inadequacy of the way in which European feminism is constructed in ongoing American political debates and also to provide alternative information aimed at highlighting the positive role played by the European Union in the development of women's studies.

Women's studies developed across Europe in a manner that is both similar and strikingly different from the North American model, following the variety of academic and cultural traditions in the different countries. Although the need to set up women's studies programs emerged from grassroots and students' demand in the 1970s, this field developed into more than the academic wing of the women's movement. As a whole, it grew into a dynamic field of study that aims at the transformation of education and university curricula in such a way as to reflect and further the social changes in the status of women. This diversity does complicate the issue of European cooperation, because it means that women from countries with strong, institutionalized women's studies programs work together with women from universities where women's studies still has a marginal position. Experience shows that it is both possible and desirable to learn from each other.

European cooperation in women's studies involves women and men from diverse national, cultural, and disciplinary backgrounds; speaking different languages; having different expectations about university education; and working with a variety of intellectual and political perspectives. Surveying the programs in this subject area, one cannot help being impressed by the quality and quantity of the work done by teachers and students despite, or maybe because of, these differences.

The discussion as to what a distinctly European perspective on women's studies could be has been at the center of many of these debates. Only Northern European universities have opted for visible and autonomous programs and departments, for both teaching and research purposes. This is due, on the one hand, to the absence in Europe

of anything comparable to the private foundations that have played such an important role in the development of women's studies in the United States.¹⁹ On the other hand, it is also related to the enormous influence of the conventional disciplines and of disciplinary distinctions in the European university system, which is traditionally resistant to interdisciplinarity. Countries in southern 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 institutional 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.

Thus the vast majority of women's studies programs on the Continent are of the "integrated" rather than the "autonomous" kind. What they tend to be integrated into is often departments of American literature or American studies, especially in Southern and Eastern European countries. This results in the paradoxical situation of disembedding these programs from their immediate national context, which in turn means that, for instance in the humanities, the programs that cater to national literatures or cultures simply ignore the feminist input, all too happy to delegate it to the reassuring foreignness of the Americans. Although the situation is better in the social sciences, this pattern of development remains both widespread and problematic.

In an attempt to respect the variety of institutional settings and feminist cultural traditions, the European Inter-University Network of Women's Studies in the EU works at the moment with a rather open definition of women's studies. A sort of consensus has emerged that what is needed in Europe is a coalition between three areas of teaching and research: women's studies, feminist studies, and gender studies.

The different names express different political and epistemological positions; relying on Sandra Harding's system of classification,²⁰ I would say that "women's studies" relies on "standpoint feminism," privileging the view from below in accordance with materialist epistemology. It also rests on an unproblematized notion of women's "experience" as the foundation for feminist knowledge claims. It is by far the most widespread epistemological and institutional structure across the European Union.

"Gender studies" is a compromise term, borrowed from English-language discussions about the social construction between the sexes. More scientific-sounding than its alternatives, gender studies enjoys institutional support, especially in Eastern Europe, where it fulfills the more radical function of setting sexual politics on the academic agenda.

Not surprisingly, "feminist studies" is the least represented position, which tends to gravitate around postmodern theories and deconstruction and work on the critique of identity with a rather radical feminist agenda. By comparison to the United States, this position is absolutely a minority one in European Union women's studies.

In spite of their different names, they all challenge male domination of the academic disciplines, and they all provide methodological and theoretical tools to study the visible and invisible power mechanisms that influence women's access to responsibility in social, economic, political, intellectual, and cultural life. They all aim at revealing the full reality of women's lives, which has been hidden because men were the predominant subjects and objects of knowledge. They all attempt to improve the position of women in society.²¹

Women's studies is a field of scientific and pedagogic activity devoted to improving the status of women and to finding forms of representation of women's experiences that are dignified and 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 insofar 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.

Because of the diversity of cultures and political traditions involved, the experience of setting up women's studies in a European perspective has proved to be a delicate exercise in cross-cultural analysis and comparison.²² One thing that is already clear to all concerned is that the idea of "Europe" that feminists have in mind is far more critical of ethnocentrism and nationalism than the official guidelines from the European Commission would suggest. 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 the Continent. Moreover, without turning their back on our historical heritage, many have also voiced pertinent criticism of the increasing isolationism and protectionism fostered by the idea of a "United" Europe.²³

In fact, it is important to stress that although, as citizens of the EU, feminists do their best to participate in the creation of a shared cultural space that may contribute to lessening intra-European infighting and economic competition, they are also perfectly well aware of the limitations and the dangers of a unified Europe. More specifically, feminists are worried about European racism and ethnocentrism and the exclusionary policies that are currently standard practice in European immigration and asylum laws, and which are becoming ever more restrictive. In this respect, a multicultural, antiracist approach to the making of European women's studies seems essential at this difficult moment of European history. This is one of the points where European women's studies has a lot to learn from the United States, whose reflection on race and ethnicity is much more advanced.

The aim of European multicultural feminists is 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 put it, the EU today needs to put an end to the specific European habit that consists in self-edification into an ethnocentric center.²⁴ Lutz explores especially the condition of immigrants in the EU today as a significant case of peripheral

existence within the alleged center of this community. In other words, women's studies is not only education for women, it is the reeducation 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.²⁵

Whether integrated or autonomous, however, most women's studies departments in Europe share some common features. First, they all depend to a very large degree on under- or unpaid female academic labor: Subsidies for the setting up of women's studies curricula are uneven and insufficient at the best of times. If there is one point of consensus, therefore, it is the need for more resources at all levels.

Secondly, most of these programs are heavily dependent on teaching material and manuals produced in the United States or written in English. There is an enormous lack of introductory material written from a local European perspective and drawing on local feminist viewpoints and traditions,²⁶ especially in Southern and Eastern Europe. In cases when such material exists, it is written in languages that are not accessible to an international audience and often presents huge translation problems and translation costs. Although new initiatives, such as *Nora: The Nordic Women's Studies Journal* and *The European Journal of Women's Studies* are great steps forward, the situation remains critical. On the Continent at the moment there is not one publisher, nor even a coalition of publishers, who are willing or have the capacity to monitor and develop the feminist intellectual production in a trans-European manner.²⁷ All this simply increases the collective dependence on American material and publications.

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 research. I have often mentioned the specific difficulties associated with the translation of the term *gender*, as well as the distinction between *sex* and *gender*, into most Romance, Nordic, and other European languages.²⁸ Having become a compulsory term of reference in international feminist discussions, *gender* nonetheless plays nowadays a crucial role as a "traveling theory," i.e., an object of discursive exchange and of multiple (mis)translations across many feminist cultures worldwide, which is best discussed in a historicized and embedded manner.

In this context, the support that women's studies academics have been able to gather from the Commission of the European Union has been and remains crucial. Whereas countries in which this field is underdeveloped have benefited from both the financial and moral support of the European Union, well-endowed programs in other countries have experienced European Union support as a form of international recognition and therefore of scientific legitimation. In both cases, the impact of the Commission's stamp of approval is enormous.

One should note, as a point of introduction, that the Maastricht treaty places great

emphasis on the need to coordinate a Europe-wide system of education, to train a highly flexible but extremely educated workforce, and to set up a system of qualifications that would be recognized across the borders of the EU. The main aim of the "European dimension in education" is to bring the member states to implement comparable standards of training and thus help reduce unemployment. A related aim, however, which is sanctioned by the Charter of Workers' Rights and upheld by the European Trade Unions' Council, is to defend the principle of social security and help combat exclusion so as to sponsor an equitable idea of European citizenship.²⁹ It should come as no surprise, therefore, that a great deal of the European cooperation programs in this field are supported by the Commission of the European Union in Brussels.

First and foremost among these exchange programs are the interuniversity exchanges, a scheme—called Erasmus—set up by the commission in order to promote student and staff mobility and cooperation between higher education institutions within the member states of the EU. The scheme was extended from 1987 to 1995 and is being continued under the new scheme—called Socrates—of the commission.³⁰ All the interuniversity exchanges were extended in 1992 to include members of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries, that is to say, Austria (which, however, joined the European Union on January 1, 1995), Finland, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland.

These exchanges allow students to follow courses in women's studies at the host university, to work on the preparation of their thesis, or to do practicals. Acquiring cross-cultural experience on the academic level as well as on the personal level was one of the main programmatic goals for students. The students receive funds for travel and living expenses and are granted academic recognition at the home university for the work they do abroad.

The largest of these networks—NOI♀SE³¹—decided to intensify its efforts to develop a common European program of study to develop a joint curriculum in interdisciplinary and multicultural women's studies for all the partner universities of this network.³² This curriculum is currently being taught as a summer school. The central topic of the proposed European multicultural curriculum is the intersection of race, ethnicity, and gender and the issue of ethnic specificity and cultural differences. This reflects the concern for cultural diversity, antiracism, and a multicultural perspective, which are central to understanding the field of women's studies in Europe.

Emphasis is placed on practical, political issues of curriculum development, such as outlining how each feminist academic tries to integrate the ethnicity issue in her work and how "white" and "black" women's organizations can cooperate, or how second generation immigrant women feel about feminist values and ideas. It is meant to raise the consciousness of the many Erasmus students and teachers, to make them aware of the problems with, and possible obstacles, to "pan-European feminism." The participant will be confronted with the multiple faces of Europe in the process of unification.

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, multiculturalism, and antiracism. The issues of cultural and gender identity are intimately interlinked and cannot be easily separated. I would even like to go so 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. The fostering of a European consciousness can only profit from the enlarged definition of knowledge, which women's studies implies and enacts.

In this respect, many women's studies scholars feel very strongly that they need to strengthen and broaden the antiracist 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 toward a common and yet diversified definition to succeed, discussions are needed in a comparative framework with women from the EFTA countries, from Eastern and Central Europe, from the United States, and from Asia and Africa. On the issue of multiculturalism and the intersection of gender with ethnicity, an attempt has been made to establish institutional contacts with U.S. universities within a newly established scheme of transatlantic exchanges.³³

FOR MULTIPLE MULTICULTURALISMS

In this concluding section, I would like to return to the complexities of the ways in which terms such as *eurocentrism* and *multiculturalism* are currently being used as objects of discursive exchange between the United States and Europe.

First of all, one needs to take note of the impact of "traveling theories." Cornel West argues that when U.S. intellectuals in quest of a critical tradition turned to Europe, they not only appropriated, but also invented, the phenomenon of "traveling theories" at a time when postwar Europe "was trying to understand its decline in terms of difference as it had been decentered by the colonized peoples."³⁴ This coincidence between post-colonialism and poststructuralist philosophies is precisely one of the reasons why West approves of poststructuralism. He argues that the advantage of deconstruction is that it can provide new openings, but the risk is one of extreme skepticism and a difficulty in seeing the interrelatedness of different forms of power. The undeniable convergence between the discourse of the "crisis" of the West within poststructuralism and the post-colonial deconstruction of imperial whiteness is not sufficient—though it is a necessary condition—for a political alliance between them. At the very least, it lays the grounds for the possibility of such an alliance.

Secondly, as I argued earlier, in a context of political conservatism in the United States, the campaign against feminism is often disguised as generalized anti-intellectualism; the latter is attributed, in the right-wing anti-political-correctness attacks, to European brands of feminism, especially French. There seems to be a general wisdom among most feminists in the United States that Continental feminist practices, sym-

bolized by "French feminist theories" and "the French postmodern stuff," have done a great deal to alienate the more pragmatic-minded American feminists from their "theoretically sophisticated" European counterparts. This has resulted in a backlash against these theories in the United States and the consequent dismissal of the whole of European feminism.

To complicate matters even further, one must keep in mind that the European non-feminist press tends to believe the American sources quite literally. This means that most newspaper reports throughout Europe cover the phenomenon of political correctness known as "P.C."—as if it were an authentic manifestation of some perverse turn in American feminism. As a matter of fact, nothing could be further from the truth, given that, as Barbara Johnson put it,

political correctness is the name chosen by critics of multiculturalism to attack the ways in which the movement to eliminate racism, sexism, and xenophobia has attempted to implement the right to equal access to education.³⁵

A great deal of this discussion seems to be predicated not so much on an attentive reading of the structures and the agenda of European women's studies, but rather on a side issue, namely the politics of postmodernism in the American academy. The first wave of feminist "traveling theories," which exported to the United States postmodernism, deconstruction, and sexual difference in the seventies, met in fact with an institutional practice of academic co-optation that often purged them of their radical politics. Cornel West is not the only one who stresses the importance of assessing the American reception of deconstruction, which has become associated with an ahistorical and depoliticized formalism in which every text can be turned against itself, undermining its own foundations and thus precipitating itself into a vacuous rhetoric.

In fact, the American reception of these "traveling theories" failed to question the aims of this appropriation. This silence causes great problems. In Europe, postmodernism was perceived to be an answer to the decline of modernism, Marxism, and post-Marxist ideology, and it represented an attempt to redefine leftist politics, or, as Frederic Jameson put it, a chance for the left to reinvent itself. In attempting to explain the form taken by the American reception of these European theories, one important element has to be the fear of the political impact of deconstruction. Butler and Scott speak explicitly of the fear of loss of cognitive mastery as one of the central factors in the right's campaign against radical theories, exemplified by deconstruction.³⁶ This highlights the extent to which these campaigns are merely the expression of cultural privileges and vested interests that poststructuralism attempts to debunk in the ironical mode I already commented on.

Moreover, it is well known that the leading figures of European postmodernism shun this term, yet in the United States find themselves exemplars of it. One also needs to keep in mind that the critiques proposed by Deleuze, Derrida, and others, which may

appear as dominant from an American academic perspective, are far from being so from a European standpoint. These theories have always been perceived as politically radical and have met with a great deal of opposition as a consequence. Last but not least, let us add to this that the theoretical opposition to these thinkers also translates into institutional opposition: Neither Derrida nor Irigaray, nor any of the leading figures of this theoretical generation, achieved his desired institutional success.³⁷ The same thinkers who are perceived as cult figures in the American context are rather marginal in European institutional and academic life. They are even more so—much to my regret I should add—to women's studies programs in the European Union.

I would like to suggest that all the above needs to be analyzed in terms of a commodification of feminist intellectuals, especially in the academy: a convenient division of labor that predates the postmodernism debate. I do think that a serious case of dissonance has emerged between Europe and the United States on the issue of the political utility of poststructuralism and deconstruction, and especially of their feminist theories.

Moreover, as Cornel West put it, to set up a meaningful conversation between multiculturalism and Eurocentrism, monolithic definitions of either must be rejected so as to do justice to historicized and embedded genealogies. The question then becomes:

What do we mean by Eurocentrism? Which particular European nation do you have in mind? Which classes of Europeans do you have in mind?³⁸

And again, even more forcefully:

If one is talking about critiques of racism, critiques of patriarchy, critiques of homophobia, then simply call it that. Eurocentrism is not identical with racism. So, you deny the John Browns of the world. You deny the anti-racist movement in the heart of Europe. Eurocentrism is not the same as male supremacists. Why? Because every culture we know has been patriarchal in such an ugly way and that you deny the anti-patriarchal movements in the heart of Europe. And the same is so with homophobia. *Demystify the categories in order to stay tuned to the complexity of the realities.*³⁹

Cornel West's call for demystification and subtlety can be taken as a plea for what Joan Scott has defended in terms of "the practice of theory," defined as reading critically

the categories that organize and explain our existence, but figuring out how they work to produce their effects. This figuring out is done by readings that map relations of power and the operations of knowledge and difference that sustain them.⁴⁰

In other words, what I would like to expose is the construction of European feminist theories, in a neo-Eurocentric manner, within a broader scheme of commodification of

European thought by the American academy. Speaking as an eyewitness to the marketing of French theories by Americans and as someone who has been critical of the commodification of French feminism from the very start, I feel entitled to restate my case.⁴¹ I have to agree with Cornel West that a distinction has to be made between the American construction of a commodified rendition of European theories as a gesture that reproduces colonial European hegemony and the actual decentering of Europe that these same theories are actually proposing when read in an embedded contemporary European location. To judge, one simply has to take a look at a survey of European women's studies courses and at the programs of European cooperation in women's studies.

As a whole, European women's studies programs do not suffer from the same hiatus between theory and practice as their American counterparts. Moreover this divorce between theory and practice increases the communication problems between American and European women's studies communities. These problems become especially difficult on issues related to multiculturalism, race, and ethnicity, where the Eurocentric legacy in the United States projects a negative shadow upon possible cooperation with feminists who happen to be nonethnocentric Europeans. Speaking as someone who is both a postmodernist feminist theorist, a women's studies professor, and a critic of ethnocentrism, I would want to critique most strongly this set of mutual misconstructions and plead for more respect of the complexities involved.

In conclusion, I would also like to propose that the time is ripe for a transverse alliance along the women's studies front, across the United States/Europe divide. The question is how European feminists' deconstruction of their Eurocentric tradition from a situated and accountable perspective can be a point of theoretical and political alliance with U.S. feminists. Among other things, it could help unmask the commodification of "traveling theories" from Europe in American academic circles. This commodification results in, among other things, a disembedding of the European theorists and gives them a universal pretension that clashes with their explicit political commitment to decentering Europe. It also feeds into the "culture wars" raging in the United States right now, which are targeting women's studies for termination.⁴² In this respect, the project of confronting multiple and diverse forms of multiculturalism, in the quest for diversity, could achieve the aim of both demystification and a flair for the complexity due to respective locations.

NOTES

1. I am very indebted to the 1994-95 members of the School of Social Science at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, especially Evelyn Hammonds and Anna Tsing. Special thanks are also due to Joan Scott for her unfailing support and shrewd criticism. In Utrecht, Gloria Wekker's and Anneke Smelik's criticism of earlier drafts proved crucial.
2. Michael Sprinker, "The War Against Theory," in Jeffrey Williams (ed.), *PC Wars: Politics and Theory in the Academy* (New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 149-71; the citation is on p. 156.

3. Cornel West, *Prophetic Thought in Postmodern Times* (Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 1994).
4. Jeffrey Williams, "Introduction," in Jeffrey Williams (ed.), *PC Wars: Politics and Theory in the Academy* (New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 1–10.
5. Adrienne Rich, "The Politics of Location," in *Bread, Blood and Poetry* (London: Virago, 1987).
6. Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges," in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* (London: Free Association Books, 1990).
7. For an impressive historical overview of the notion of "politics of location," see Karen Caplan and Inderpal Grewal, *Scattered Hegemonies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).
8. Chandra Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse," *Boundary 23* (1984) pp. 333–58.
9. Daniel Cohn-Bendit, "Transit discussion," *Newsletter of the Institute for Human Sciences* 50 (June–August 1995), pp. 1–4.
10. Stuart Hall, "'Race,' Ethnicity, Nation: The Fateful/Fatal Triangle," the W.E.B. Du Bois Lectures, Harvard University, April 25–27, 1994.
11. As argued by Anthony Giddens in *Beyond Left and Right: The Future of Radical Politics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994).
12. Rosi Braidotti and Judith Butler, "Feminism by Any Other Name," *differences*, (summer-fall 1994), pp. 27–61.
13. See especially Massimo Cacciari, *Geo-filosofia dell'Europa* (Milan: Adelphi, 1994).
14. Barbara Johnson, "Double Mourning and the Public Sphere," in *The Wake of Deconstruction* (Cambridge: Blackwell's, 1994).
15. Rosi Braidotti, *Patterns of Dissonance*, (New York: Routledge, 1991).
16. Gayatri Spivak, "French Feminism Revisited: Ethics and Politics," in Judith Butler and Joan Scott (eds.), *Feminists Theorize the Political* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 57.
17. This remark is explicitly aimed at Richard Rorty's notion of "solidarity."
18. I am borrowing this expression from Domna Stanton, "Language and Revolution: The Franco-American Dis-Connection," in Hester Eisenstein and Alice Jardine (eds.), *The Future of Difference* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1980), pp. 73–87.
19. Special praise must be given to the Ford Foundation, whose activities are exemplary. Of special importance are the reports that Ford publishes regularly about women's studies, for example Catharine Stimpson, *Women's Studies in the United States* (1986), and Beverly Guy-Sheftall, *Women's Studies. A Retrospective* (1995).
20. I am relying here on the classification of feminist epistemology provided by Sandra Harding in, for instance, *Whose Science, Whose Knowledge* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1991).
21. For this definition I am indebted to Jalna Hanmer et al.: *Women's Studies and European Integration. Report to the Equal Opportunities Unit, DGV, European Commission*, April 1994.
22. For a detailed account of the experience attempted in Utrecht, please see the special issue "Women's Studies at the University of Utrecht," of *Women's Studies International Forum* 16, no. 4 (1993), edited by Rosi Braidotti. See also the special issue "Women's Studies in Europe," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 20, nos. 3 and 4 (1992), edited by Angelika Köster-Lossack and Tobe Levin.
23. See in this respect, R. Braidotti and C. Franken, "United States of Europe or United Colours of Benetton?," *differences* 2, no. 3 (1990), pp. 109–21.
24. Helma Lutz, "Obstacles to Equal Opportunities in Society by Immigrant Women, with Particular Reference to the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Germany, and the Nordic

- Countries," paper presented at the meeting of the Joint Specialist Group on Migration, Cultural Diversity and Equality of Women and Men, Strasbourg, October 1994.
25. See also the very important report *Confronting the Fortress: Black and Migrant Women in the European Community*, a report to the European Women's Lobby, produced by the European Forum of Left Feminists and Others, September 1993.
 26. A notable exception is the excellent volume edited by R. Buikema and A. Smelik, *Women's Studies in Culture. A Feminist Introduction* (London: Zed Books, 1995; Amsterdam, Coutinho, 1994).
 27. Special schemes devoted to the development of cultural programs with the former Soviet-block countries have been available at the Commission of the European community for years, especially the Tempus program. They have not shown, however, a great deal of support for feminist issues and concerns. In an attempt to improve the situation, the Council of Europe (located in Strasbourg) set up the European Network for Women's Studies, which was also heavily subsidized by the Dutch government. ENWS did extremely important work in developing ties to higher education institutions in Eastern Europe. Of special relevance is the report of the workshop "Establishing Gender Studies in Central and Eastern European Countries," held in Wassenaar, the Netherlands, in November 1992; the report was published by the Council of Europe.
 28. See, for instance, the chapter "Theories of gender, or: 'Language is a Virus,'" in Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).
 29. For an interesting summary of the EU policy on this matter, see Donald MacLeod, "Learning to be Europeans," *The Guardian Weekly*, October 23, 1994, p. 22.
 30. As coordinator of the NOI♀SE Network and with the assistance of Christine Rammrath and Ellen de Dreu, I chaired the Area Evaluation of Women's Studies in Europe for the Education Division of the Commission (DGXXII) in the academic year 1994-95. This evaluation officially concluded the Erasmus phase, with a detailed analysis of achievements and shortcomings of each Erasmus network, a detailed national report from each member country of the European Union, and a concluding conference held at the University of Coimbra, Portugal, in June 1995. After such a positive evaluation, the commission agreed to fund the creation of a European Thematic Network in the Area of Women's Studies, which is officially due to start in January 1997.
 31. For a fuller introduction to the NOI♀SE network, which is coordinated at Utrecht University see Rosi Braidotti, Esther Captan, and Christine Rammrath, "Introduction: A Noisy Tale," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 374 (1994), pp. 209-14.
 32. Which to date are: Antwerp (Belgium); Bielefeld (Germany); Bologna (Italy); Dublin (Ireland); Madrid (Spain); Odense (Denmark); Paris (France); Thessaloniki (Greece); Turku (Finland); Utrecht (the Netherlands); York (United Kingdom).
 33. This scheme is jointly sponsored by the Division of Education (DGXXII) of the European Commission and by the International Education Office (FIPSI) in Washington, D.C. A consortium of U.S. and European universities, led respectively by Rutgers and Utrecht, submitted an application in 1996. At the time of writing, the outcome is yet unknown.
 34. West, op. cit., p. 137.
 35. Johnson, op. cit., p. 23.
 36. Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott, in Judith Butler and Joan Scott (eds.), "Introduction," *Feminists Theorize the Political* (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. xiii-xvii.
 37. Derrida was refused chairs at the University of Nanterre, at the Sorbonne, and at the College de France; Irigaray never held a teaching position since she was sacked by Lacan in 1974; Deleuze, Lyotard, and Cixous went on teaching at Vincennes/Saint Denis, which is a university of the French education ministry and is conse-

quently very marginal to the whole French system. Most of them hold regular jobs in well-endowed, mostly West Coast, universities in the United States.

38. West, *op. cit.*, p. 5.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
40. Joan Scott, "The Rhetoric of Crisis in Higher Education," in Michael Bérubé and Cary Nelson (eds.), *Higher Education Under Fire* (New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 293–304; the citation is on p. 302.
41. See, in this respect, the very critical review I coauthored with Jane Weinstock of the anthology *New French Feminisms*, "Herstory as recourse," *Hecate* 2 (1980); reprinted in *Camera Obscura* 7, 1981.
42. I am thankful to Susan Foster, Sue-Ellen Case, and Susan Jeffords for helping me with this formulation at the conference "Women, Sexuality, and Violence," held at the Annenberg Center, University of Pennsylvania, March 28–April 2, 1995.