

Minding Gaps : Introducing the Women's Studies Textbook Report from ATHENA Panel 1c

Rosi Braidotti and Gabriele Griffin

Panel 1c of the ATHENA network has been working for three years on the ambitious, albeit timely project of drafting an introductory textbook for European Women's Studies. The volume, currently in production, was signed up with the publisher Zed Books in London, and is due for publication next year. The enclosed table of contents gives a perfect overview of its structure.

It is clearly impossible to even attempt a summary of this path-breaking piece of work, but some remarks are necessary.

The first is that the enthusiasm, energy, and professionalism of the ATHENA partners has been extra-ordinary throughout the many drafts and re-drafts that marked the process of completion of this book. It was a genuinely collective enterprise, with enormous input from the main editors, but also from all others. This alone is quite an achievement.

The second remark follows from the previous one, namely: the book reflects perfectly the composition of the ATHENA network, and thus also its limitations. Both in terms of disciplines, themes and theoretical orientations, *Minding Gaps* is an X-ray image of the state of Panel 1c to date. This makes it very situated and hence also very practical: many themes and even disciplines are clearly missing, and even in the areas that were covered, we cannot claim to be exhaustive. Our teaching book is, quite simply, an excellent first step in the right direction. The high scientific quality of the contributors indicates that this first book could pave the road for further joint adventures in the next phase of ATHENA activities.

Last but not least, as we drafted and edited this book, we all became aware of how precious, productive, and thought-provoking had been the discussions we undertook as part of the work for Panel 1c. We were surprised by how much ground had been covered since 1997, and how ideas that were "thrown around" in an attempt to map out the many missing traditions of European Women's Studies, had become materialized in serious, rigorous academic material. The notion that more than any other, gave us the measure of how far we had travelled down the road of joint networking activities was - perhaps not surprisingly - that of "the European dimension".

This notion is so central to everything ATHENA is trying to be and to achieve, that it has represented a constant challenge for all the participants, and more especially, for Panel 1c. What does it mean to introduce a "European dimension" in the teaching of Women's Studies? We think that our teaching manual engages with this complex question in many, different ways - showing that respect for diversity, which is one of the strengths of the ATHENA network. One, simple way in which this is achieved is through the comparative approach, which constructs a European dimension, in a 'horizontal' manner, so to speak. Several of our authors adopted this approach.

Secondly, many authors made a concerted effort to develop local perspectives, using bibliographical sources and key references from their own culture and feminist political traditions. This remains one of the most effective ways of counter-acting the *de facto* hegemony of Anglo-American terms and methods within the practice of Women's Studies. Many of the chapters in this book provide new, under-documented and unduly unknown sources, material, and insights. We believe that much more needs to be done in this direction. Here, the link to research on European gender issues is of the utmost importance.

On a more conceptual level, issues related to "the European dimension" were raised in terms of inclusion in and exclusion from the European Union, and more especially, in the kind of barriers that the EU creates for some, even as it facilitates mobility for others. These aspects of "the European dimension" - thematized in terms of nationalism, racism, the critique of "Fortress Europe", and the legacy of colonialism - are one of the main aspects of this book.

We are quite proud of both the quantity and the quality of what we have achieved as a panel of experts, as academic feminists and as members of ATHENA. With the drafting of this book, we are also extremely interested in getting some feedback from our colleagues in terms of the usefulness of *Minding Gaps* as a tool of teaching and as material for discussion. As always in our profession, the ultimate test-case and what really counts, is the classroom. We are therefore looking forward to the day when this collectively authored teaching manual can be disseminated, hopefully adopted and tried out with the students. Only then, the much longed-for "European dimension" will make sense to us all.

On the next page you will find the table of contents of our book.

Participation of the EU in national research programmes.

Additional instrument, the research projects that we have learned to know, are not mentioned in the framework programme. It could, in the worst case, mean that research projects would be possible only in exceptional cases, for example under some activities under the heading of 'excellence'.

An open question is how networks of excellence will be designed. In some countries, but not in others, high profile research teams are today granted the status of centres of excellence or national research councils. The proposal can mean that these kind of already chosen groups in the future can co-operate with groups in other countries, with very admirable conditions. The proposal can also mean that new ways of networking among excellent groups become possible. This can open the door also to feminist research. Different notions of excellence are of European diversity in the scientific community and in society. It is urgent to discuss what excellence means in different communities and in what ways it would be important to change meanings of it.

Two other instruments, the integrated projects and the opening up of national programmes to other different instruments. For research in humanities and social sciences, the integrated projects seem designed for science and technology. The opening-up of national research programmes is a more interesting instrument, but it is a lot more difficult to obtain political support for it. Some countries, for example the Nordic countries have or have had national research programmes targeted directly to feminist researchers. If more of this kind is created, the national councils are interested in opening the relevant programmes for researchers in some other countries, a step forward is taken. Finally, one might hope that research acts as instruments are reintroduced throughout the programme. Decisions are foreseen in 2001.

For more information, entire proposal, opinions, etc. see: <http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/nfp.html>

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Historical Dossier on the Making of Women's Studies : The United Kingdom

Introduction

Rosi Braidotti

Following what has by now become a recurring feature of the ATHENA joint publications, we are happy to present the next Historical Dossier, concerning the UK. This is one of the most highly developed, best funded and most prolific feminist communities in Europe, as the wealth of material re-printed here clearly indicates.

Nevertheless, the historical progression and development is noticeable, even in the case of the UK Women's Studies community. From the very first GRACE report filed in 1989, to the last update presented by Gabriele Griffin and Jaina Hammer especially for this issue, much ground has been covered. The impression of a fast rate of growth intensifies when the European networking is introduced and begins to take off on a systematic scale. Thus, the SIGMA report from 1995 presents quite a complex picture of a fast-moving situation. What strikes the reader by the time s/he reaches the 2001 report, is not only the degree of fluency and sophistication which has been reached overall by the UK academic feminists, and especially in the collection of data about the genealogy of Women's Studies in the UK, but also a higher level of awareness of both problems and limitations.

What reads as a successful narrative of increasing professionalization and high institutional practice, also offers the added advantage of bringing into focus a new dimension of issues and challenges. Let this be not only a warning about 'the price of success', but also an agenda-setting effort on the part of the UK women and of their European partners.