

THE GEOPOLITICS OF GENDER STUDIES: RINGS CONFERENCE 2016
UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE, CAPE TOWN
ABSTRACTS

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

The Geopolitics of Gender Studies: Embracing Advances and confronting Reversals



Josephine Ahikire

Dean School of Women and Gender Studies

Makerere University, Kampala

Josephine Ahikire is Associate Professor and Dean, School of Women and Gender Studies, Makerere University, Kampala Uganda. Has over eighteen (18) years of teaching Women and Gender Studies, Makerere University in the field of feminist theory, gender and politics, livelihood and cultural studies. Has extensive experience in feminist research and has published widely in the fields of gender and politics, labour and cultural studies. Recent publications include a book entitled: *Localised or Localising Democracy: Gender and the Politics of Decentralisation in Contemporary Uganda* and another co-edited book entitled: *Gender Poverty and Social Transformation: Reflections on Fractures and Continuities in Contemporary Uganda*.

Gender studies as a field of scholarship has made inroads into the academy and beyond. In contrast to the last two decades or so where social science discourse was overtly blind to the gender variable, the current period shows that there is, in general a tacit agreement that gender as a category of analysis, can no longer be ignored. Much as there is still resistance and hostility to feminist inspired work, there is at the same time increased legitimacy and indeed the feminist challenge in the field of knowledge has gained momentum on the global scale generally and in Africa specifically. What I have argued before is that, gender studies has had a 'capillary effect' into the academy and general development discourse and has produced some of the most powerful transnational conversations around issue and strategy. Yet, paradoxically too, this success seems to be its source of vulnerability. This strength/vulnerability seems to make it very difficult for Gender Studies to transcend critical boundaries in order to create broader legitimacy in the academy and the world. The key note will address five key issues in this regard. These are: The relationship between gender studies and the women's movement; African feminism in context; gender studies versus UN feminism and the mainstreaming crusade; what to make of the rising social conservatism; and harnessing the geopolitics of gender studies.

ABSTRACTS

Anália Torres & Paula Pinto, University of Lisbon

The geopolitics of gender studies: the Portuguese case

In this presentation we argue that analysing the position of Portugal in our globalised world might offer an interesting standpoint to understand how careful one has to be when identifying patterns or comparing and classifying countries concerning feminist and gender issues.

While we can recognise in Portugal features of a traditional catholic and patriarchal country, we can also find other marks helping to explain, for instance, why a law on abortion at the request of women passed after a referendum (2007), why gay marriage was approved in 2010, why a more liberal approach to gender identity issues such as sex and name change in a gender identity law passed in parliament (2011) or, more recently, why the access to medically assisted reproduction was opened to single women (2016). Changes of the last recent years are then intersected with historical and paradoxical trends.

In fact, the country is the south of the global north, and the poorest of the richest. It was the last colonial empire and receives immigrants from ex-colonies, as well as from Eastern European countries, and yet it still continues to “export” emigrants to other wealthiest parts of the global north.

Having endured a dictatorship up until 1974, which imposed on women traditional gender roles, high inequalities and generalised poverty, the right wing regime was smashed by a peaceful revolution that ended a 13 years long colonial war. During the colonial war men were compulsorily drafted and women had the opportunity to replace them in qualified and non-qualified jobs, a condition that later had relevant consequences on the attachment of Portuguese women to the labour market.

After the revolution working women participated significantly in movements claiming for social rights, higher salaries, equal pay rights, or better housing. Some small middle class feminist groups tried also to push for some changes concerning a feminist agenda, but they were more effective in modifying patriarchal laws than in challenging sexism and traditional roles. This, however, does not diminish the relevance of law reform since the dependence of women on fathers or husbands was also clearly stated by the law, and many jobs, including those of judges or prosecutors, were barred for women up until 1974.

Since 1995, a number of very progressive legal and policy measures have been passed to improve work-life balance and promote equal rights, notably in the family context, including the introduction of new fathers' leaves, and an extension of parental leaves when shared by mothers and fathers. How to understand these policies and what has been their real impact in shaping gender relations? Are they just a manifestation of ‘state feminism’ or are they having a real impact on promoting greater gender equality? How progressive is the country now concerning feminist and gender issues? In this paper we aim to address these

central questions through an assessment of the social, economic and legal changes that have taken place in Portugal over the last two decades, and their effect on gender relations and gender equality.

Angelika Sjöstedt Landén, Katarina Giritli-Nygren & Lotta Brännström, Mid Sweden University

Doing gender studies across regimes of oppression: challenges and openings

How can we make networks of solidarity that work across different kinds of regimes of oppression? In this paper, we discuss the conditions of possibility for doing border-crossing scholarly cooperation and the ways in which we can challenge the different kinds of brick walls that we experience in institutional, national and other contexts, and that we need to get up against (c.f Ahmed 2012). In earlier work, we have written about the internal activism and strategies of ambivalence needed to adopt in order to navigate the changing academic landscape to make gender studies part of our university at all (Fahlgren, Giritli-Nygren & Sjöstedt Landén 2015; Sjöstedt Landén & Giritli-Nygren 2016). One aspect of doing that is also the international networking practices which on the one hand are very idealised in academia through the promotion of 'internationalisation' for excellence (Mählck 2013) but there is also a strong need to critically assess what the conditions and possibilities for feminist scholarship that arise in the landscape of internationalisation across different regimes of oppression are. Efforts to make feminist unity in the name of gender studies across different sets of borders also inevitably unveils the cracks and differences dividing feminist communities. How do we account for this while doing solidarity that can cut across regimes of oppression? We elaborate the concepts of oppression (Yuval Davies 2006) inequality regimes (Acker 2006) and overing (Ahmed 2012). Examples span between cooperation with scholars acing in northern and southern hemispheres as well the north and northernmost north constituting a community of 'northern circumpolar' relations of feminist scholarly cooperation. We take examples from the experiences of working in a variety of international networks of feminist scholars and activists that aims to transgress boundaries of academic and national regimes such as interconnections with Saami communities; efforts of setting up northern circumpolar connections as well as connections and communities of feminist scholars crossing the equator. It is therefore not to say that this is something we are doing 'elsewhere', but examining our own positionality and conditions of possibility for going forward with such work (see Essed 2013). However, Essed (2013) points out that social justice, not least, anti-racist work is a kind of leadership. We want to cling to this thought very strongly! But how do we actually do it? What are the strategies?

Blanka Nyklová, Institute of Sociology of the Czech Academy of Sciences

Implementing gender equality: Geopolitical perspectives

As the 2015 monitoring report on the position of women in Czech science reads, although the total number of people employed in research keeps rising, in 2014, “the proportion of women among people employed in research was the lowest since 2001. Women accounted for 30.9%, which is 5.7 percentage points less than in 2001” (Tenglerová, 2015). The percentage of women employed as researchers in natural sciences hit a new bottom in 2014 with 26% (Ibid.). The figures fail to reflect the fact that the number of women among university MA and PhD students of natural sciences has grown in the CR and reaches over 40% in both levels. In other words, the problem is clearly not a lack of interest in STEM disciplines on the part of women students, which is something often assumed in the local context (Jarkovská, Lišková, & Šmídová, 2010). The National Contact Centre for Gender and Science (NKC) has long been a leading department in STS research using a gender perspective in the Czech academic environment. Among other things, it has focused on analysing conditions especially within public science through a lens of gender concerning both the content of knowledge produced and the gendered nature of scientific institutions and policies (Linková & Červinková, 2011; Linková & Stöckelová, 2012; Vohlídalová & Červinková, 2012). Since this area is arguably underdeveloped in the given context, the focus is frequently on the gathering of basic statistics but also on the local applicability of universally applied concepts, such as the leaky pipeline, glass ceiling, causes of attrition, etc. Besides research, the NKC also provides counselling and assistance with project applications in the area of implementing cultural and institutional change in order to create gender equality within academic institutions.

The presented research is an outcome of such a gender change-directed project, which is currently under way at a Czech university offering education and research mostly in the field of chemistry. The paper focuses on presenting both some of the outcomes of a discursive analysis of twenty semi-structured interviews conducted by three members of the NKC, including the presenter. In this respect, we focus on how the researchers reflect on the gender culture present at their institutions with a special focus on what they see as crucial for its binary nature. Moreover, it also looks into the geopolitical aspect of the implementation efforts. The project is international, which brings many issues posed among other things also by hierarchical asymmetries of a geopolitical nature. At the same time, more challenges emerge from the clash between the gender culture to be implemented, which is largely defined implicitly and the one actively embraced by the researchers. The interviews took place in an environment where newly implemented science policies stress excellence ignoring its gendered consequences (Husu & Koskinen, 2010) and where family policy takes the extreme form of up to a four-year parental leave combined with little support for childcare facilities in the past twenty years.

Caroline Wamala Larsson, Karlstad University

Financial Inclusion or Social Exclusion? Transacting Social Relations through Mobile Money in Uganda

The last ten years have seen an explosion of mobile banking services across Sub-Saharan Africa. Millions of previously “unbanked” citizens have access to previously inaccessible financial services thanks to the mobile phone and mobile banking. This chapter analyses the empowering aspects of mobile banking at the same time as highlighting some largely ignored consequences. The mobile phone obliterates space and distance as it brings services to outlying areas, and in a short amount of time. As the mobile phone eliminates specific spaces and distances, which new ones is it creating? My findings suggest that Uganda - like any African country - relies on physical contact to be able to build, communities, relationships and networks. Yet the mobile phone enables a complex production of distance and contact/nearness.

Data in the form of observations and in depth interviews with 21 motor cycle taxi drivers - popularly referred to as *boda bodas* in Uganda will inform this presentation. My data includes stories of relatives that previously had physically attended a funeral and provided their financial contribution in person, but who now are opting for mobile money with added apologies why they are unable to attend such occasions. Relations are being maintained through the mobile phone in various ways to such an extent that petrol giant Shell Company in Uganda identified MTN (a local mobile service provider) as its biggest competitor. Fewer and fewer people are travelling between villages and urban areas because communication and financial remittances can be managed through mobile phones. Such stories present opportunities to investigate how emerging economic practices such as m-banking are used to re-produce maintain and re-constitute both social relations and monies themselves. In a country like Uganda, m-banking is ubiquitous and - like ICTs more generally - is believed to afford and create opportunities for social inclusion where dissemination of ICTs have been justified with arguments that they counter social exclusion.

The case of m-banking in Uganda thus provides an empirical possibility to critically inform theoretical debates in three areas: social relations and money in sociology and gender studies; social inclusion through connective technology in media and communication studies; and techno-determinism in the area of ICT4D. More precisely I aim to analyse intersections and entanglements between m-banking and social relationships. The mobility of banking services at the same time generates financial benefits while social relations take on more attenuated and contingent forms. Who is excluded and included not only depends on whether we look into social or financial factors, it also depends on the place and space since financial flows enabled by m-banking to a large extent travel from urban to rural regions. As we begin to systematise the empowering and development features of mobile money, we are similarly presented with a reconsideration of space and place.

Christine M. Jacobsen, University of Bergen

Critical self-reflexivity and/in ontographic methodology

Critical self-reflexivity and context-sensitivity have been in-depth theorised in Gender Studies as situated knowledges or politics of location. In this paper I discuss the recent move from 'reflexivity' towards 'recursivity' developed within the so-called 'ontological turn' in anthropology, and its potential contribution to rethinking self-reflexivity and positionality in gender studies. What are the potential epistemological and political consequences of the 'ontographic' call to adopt the ways in which others make worlds rather than attempting to represent them in a less violent manner?

Christine Quinan, Utrecht University

The Geopolitics of Se(X) Registration

Sex is one of the few identity markers systematically registered by nation-states and non-state actors. While registration is almost always based on a binary system (male or female), both administrative registration practices and biological and legal understandings of sex as binary are currently subject to debate, forcing questions about what it means to be a “citizen” for those who do not fit into clear categories like “man” and “woman”. In many contexts, LGBTQI organizations have initiated this debate, often drawing upon human rights standards, including the unofficial Yogyakarta Principles. While no country has decided to abolish sex registration as such, many nation-states have introduced partial modifications, such as the possibility to change one’s legal sex without physical changes or without expert declarations (Argentina, Denmark). In some nations, the options M and F have also been extended to include other possibilities on legal and travel documents, including ‘X’ (New Zealand), ‘third gender’ (India), and ‘non-specific’ (Australia).

These institutional and structural changes are often initiated with reference to human, constitutional, and/or fundamental rights and freedoms. With a particular focus on the X in passports, this paper will explore how these sorts of changes may affect transgender and gender-nonconforming people, particularly when traveling and crossing international borders. While the mechanism at stake is crucially embedded within a Western-centric secular discourse, I will ask if it may also be seen as an affirmative appropriation of the space between civil and human rights to which transgender and gender-nonconforming people might lay claim. The work of historian Afsaneh Najmabadi (2015) allows us to see how the ‘space’ created by the X option - pre-charged with governmental power as it may be - can be deployed to destabilize such normalizing gestures of governmental control. At the same time, it is worth heeding the advice of trans studies scholar Eric Stanley (2014) who warns of jumping to too-quick conclusions about these expanding options, including the Yogyakarta Principles on Human Rights related to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and the X in passports. Here, I will be interested in asking if these changes could be considered “progress” or if they are merely performances of transgender acceptance that obscure a neoliberal focus on profitability and surveillance.

This paper aims to demonstrate how human rights discourses inform the potentially violent politics of a sex registration scheme that actively shapes ‘acceptable members’ of ‘the human family’ (Asad 2003), but also how the deployment of other options (specifically the ‘X’) can make an appeal to social justice that may overrule the jurisdiction of the nation-state. Here, I will also interrogate which future directions might be desirable for sex registration policies and practices in a way that respects, ensures and enhances the ‘human yet non-Human’ integrity of people worldwide.

Deirdre Burne & Kendall Petersen, University of South Africa

Feminism at the Margins: Lessons from Intersectionality and Decoloniality

This paper seeks to tease out the complexities of relationships between feminist discourse, intersectionality and decolonial theory in the context of post-apartheid South Africa. These matters are formidably complex: gender theorist Anne Phillips correctly notes that “culture is employed ... to limit the claims of gender equality” and also that “gender equality is also often employed to limit the claims of cultural diversity” (2009). Here Phillips appropriately summarises the reciprocal influences of discourses of cultural diversity and gender equality. In post-apartheid South Africa it is also necessary to consider how discourses of racial identity and diversity modulate claims of gender equality, in line with what we have learned from the theory of intersectionality (Crenshaw 2012). Finally, we also need to explore the way relationships between former colonisers and those who were formerly colonised are gendered (Lugones 2010). In the context of all these discourses, it is important to ask whether feminism and gender studies still have a role to play in twenty-first-century South Africa. In an attempt to answer this question, the paper takes the recent case of the so-called “virginity bursaries” which was ruled as unconstitutional by the highest court in the land, as a case study. Various perspectives on the case are explored, including discourses of cultural specificity and integrity, human rights and decolonial arguments. The paper argues that young girls’ need for agency and sexual health are compelling arguments against the bursaries, but does not find support from the discourse of human rights. Ultimately, the paper supports a nuanced version of feminism that is sensitive to cultural diversity and to the need to decolonize, not only its own discourse but the nation as a whole.

Desiree Lewis, University of the Western Cape

Neo-liberal Challenges to South African Academic Feminism

In the context of the FeesMustFall Movement, the impact of neo-liberalism has often been incidentally or unevenly addressed by student activists. Yet many progressive academics have long struggled against its impact in de-politicising and homogenising research and teaching, and eroding universities’ critical cultures of debate and contestation. This paper considers how the neo-liberal evolution of South African universities has affected feminist academic projects in various ways, and what challenges are raised for energising feminist academic projects in the present. I focus on neo-liberalism in the following ways: its role in redefining knowledge within the knowledge economy and according to the needs of the market and national development; its entrenchment of audit cultures that weaken critical and independent teaching and research and entrench cultures of acquiescence; and its normalising of a culture of extreme competitiveness and individualism. I also consider how the drive towards the “neo-liberal good” generates - even among many progressive academics and students - complex relations of dependence, co-dependence and complicity with the embedded hierarchies and technologies of management in the academy.

Eliza Steinbock, Leiden University

“In the Name of Diversity and Inclusion”

Universities have long sought to identify themselves as top-tier by touting diversity and inclusion statistics, particularly of their student body. In terms of branding, this “rainbow-washing” (if I may coin a term) arrives via happy images of multi-racial campuses that decorate website banners, and the highlighting of international exchange programs. With the “we are the world” tone suggesting a university that celebrates its diversity (if not openly capitalising on it), it is easier to overlook the ways that hired teaching staff and the curriculum reflect monocultures of Northern/Western scholarship, whiteness, heterosexual presumption, class background, and all-male committees/leadership. However, without a change in curriculum and teachers, I argue there is no basis for celebrating the student experience of “diversity and inclusion.” In my talk I’d like to discuss the draft of my business plan for a new Research Masters program in Gender and Sexuality Studies that must necessarily speak to the “diversity and inclusion” initiative at Leiden University. How to do so, convincingly, without failing to address the “rainbow-washing” problems? Also, I’m looking to collaborate with other departments from within Leiden’s faculty of the Humanities, which is especially known for its area studies expertise due to colonial histories, and has recently moved to integrate an African Studies Center and Islamic Studies Center. The background to this project is the new geopolitics of Dutch-based feminist activism that now publicly and on committees has articulated steps to decolonize the university and address “white innocence” in scholarship (Wekker 2016). I will share how I’m hedging my cynicism with the potential for breaking down the university’s negative resistance to acknowledging the importance of global gender studies.

Eva Midden, Utrecht University

Among new believers: conversion to Islam and the negotiation of national, religious and gender identities

It is argued that on a yearly basis, approximately 500 people convert to Islam in the Netherlands. The majority of this group is female (van Nieuwkerk, 2006). Because religion is not registered in the Netherlands, it is difficult to estimate how many converts there are exactly, but it is considered to be a practice that is growing in popularity. As the discourse on migration and integration in the Netherlands has increasingly transformed into a debate about the role and position of Islam and Muslims in the Netherlands, Dutch converts occupy a controversial position in Dutch society. In this context they are not only confronted with questions of national identity (are they still Dutch?) but also of emancipation (is this a conscious and free choice and how does it influence women's emancipation?).

This presentation aims to investigate how multicultural issues of in/exclusion in relation to national identity have increasingly become about the opposition of religion and secularism. Gender is essential in this conjuncture, as many religious and secular markers are gendered and, most of the time, specifically focused on women and their bodily practices. By reading the experiences of Dutch converts to Islam through postsecular theory, this presentation will not only deconstruct this relationship between national identity, religion, and secularism, but also put forward the more affirmative, multicultural identities that these women negotiate and articulate. As a starting point for the analysis the new Dutch television programme 'From Hagelslag to Halal' (from Dutch chocolate sprinkles to Halal food) will be investigated. In this programme a group of Dutch converts, together with their mothers, travel to Jordan, to work on their newly defined relationship and to develop mutual understandings. It will be investigated how these women experience and negotiate their multiple belongings and to what to what extent their conversion produced new mechanisms of in and exclusion.

Heike Kahlert, Ruhr University Bochum

Gender Studies, Gender Equality Politics and the Demand for Excellence in Scientific Organisation(s)

New Public Management and new forms of academic governance have been dominating the agenda of higher education reforms in Germany and many other countries for several years. They are producing a shift in the way universities, scientific knowledge and 'ideal researchers' are characterised. A strategic focus of the latest state-run programs has been to promote competition between scientists and scientific organisations. Both have to be visible, enterprising, creative and of course international. The associated discourses on 'excellence' seem to get out of hand, as evidenced by mission statements of even provincial universities and new competitive funding models. Everyone and every organisation in academia has to be or become excellent. Embedded in this discourse on scientific excellence are ongoing reforms with regard to gender equality as well as to gender studies. In science politics and research funding, gender equality politics and gender studies are mostly considered to be strongly linked and co-dependent. To some extent they are even considered to be the same. And in times of excellence demands in scientific organisation(s), both are required to contribute to the excellence of universities and science itself. On the other hand, at least the German scientific literature problematises the relation between gender equality politics and gender studies, but most of the reflections are build on theories. Empirical research on this topic is lacking.

This observation marks the starting point of my presentation, which will focus on the organisational practice of gender equality politics with respect to gender studies. In doing so, I will not only take into account gender equality officers and gender researchers as agents, but also consider further relevant actors from university management and science politics. Based on case studies of selected German universities I will show how gender equality politics and gender studies are connected and disconnected within organisational practices and management strategies of universities. Leading questions for my paper are: How are gender studies and gender equality politics anchored in the academic governance of the analysed universities? What meaning(s) is/are ascribed to gender equality politics in order to establish and develop gender studies in scientific organisation(s)? How are thereby gender studies and gender equality work linked or separated? What alliances and tensions between gender equality politics and gender studies are emerging? What roles do the rectorates, chancellors and ministries play in this process? And how do gender scholars reflect on their contribution to the excellence of the scientific organisation(s) they are working in? The presentation will be based on results from two research projects: (1) "Gender research and the new governance of science" which has been funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research from 2013 until 2016 and (2) "Excellence and/or Equal Opportunities for Men and Women: National Policies and Discursive Practices at Universities (Germany and Switzerland)" which has been funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG) and the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNF) since 2014. Empirical data for the presentation will originate from policy documents and qualitative interviews with scientific and administrative stakeholders and staff at different scientific organisations and federal ministries.

Irma Erlingsdóttir, University of Iceland

Feminist Knowledge Production: The Case of the United Nations Transnational Gender Studies Program in Iceland

In the paper, I discuss the experience of establishing and running a United Nations Gender Equality Studies and Training Programme at the University of Iceland (UNU-GEST). The programme was launched in January 2009 as part of the Icelandic government's development cooperation policy, and it became formally part of the United Nations University in 2015. The students come from "developing" and conflict/post conflict societies. The purpose of the programme is to explore ways to think about and facilitate positive societal changes, the ideologies and practices they produce and how they construct "femininity" and "empowerment." It includes a critical engagement with the social, economic, cultural and political processes that contribute to the subordination of women.

UNU-GEST promotes a transnational knowledge production, which takes into account the transmission and reception of cross-cultural values. The need to break down barriers between "developed" and "developing" countries is reflected in the philosophy of the programme. The goal is to find new ways to deal with development and post-conflict "reconstruction" efforts and to counter "West and the Rest" discourses as well as ideas that smack of political and cultural supremacy. The "Nordic model" - which informs some of the ideas of the programme - has been seen by many as politically progressive in terms of gender equality. Yet, as Drude Dallerup has stressed, it does not mean that it is suited for all other cultures. As an Icelandic government-funded academic programme, which is associated with the United Nations University, UNU-GEST is not free from the problems posed by the geopolitics of North-South terminologies and inequalities. Hence, I offer self-critical perspectives of the programme as well as its potentials for feminist cross-cultural engagement.

Irmgard Rehaag, Universidad Veracruzana

The geopolitical dimension of gender and care

The care is a need and typical of the human being, a permanent and daily activity of the life, which has accompanied the humanity along its history, obviously adopting different characteristics and relations depending on the place and the historical moment. The care is a basic work for the survival of the persons in all its dimensions and without realizing the work of the care, which is related straight to the maintenance of the bodies, the humanity would have disappeared some time ago.

Historically, the care of the people and the activities that this implies have been assigned to the women, and consequently it has been considered to be a devaluated work to the effect that it does not have the social and political recognition.

Analyzing the relations in which the care is realized it highlights the fact that there are relations of power. The introduction of the element power in the analysis makes the subject-matter more complex, since it is deeply a political question. The most fundamental matter of our existence - the care - is what receives in the politics and the social theory an extremely derelict position.

The care like employment on a global scale underlined the inequality and discrimination through that the women live. Generally it is the women without school and migrants who realize the above mentioned work in unfortunate conditions, receiving a salary much lower than other jobs. The capitalist societies solved the topic of the care locating it in the private sphere, of individual form, and like that making it invisible. On the global market there are the migrants those who occupy the care works in the industrialized countries, leaving often in its countries and houses of origin the family supervised by taking care of its own children.

It is intended to initiate a joint investigation between the University of Paderborn and CEGUV for a project. The subject Gender and Care, as an object of the common research project shows many interesting questions in both different cultural contexts (Germany and Mexico), because despite considerable differences, conditioned by the respective historical, socio economic and political background, a common constant comes out which distinguishes itself in the fact that is to be found in both everyday realities Gender-stereotyped of the female competence over Care, as well as a less assessment of the work, and a bad payment. Exactly here the developing-political relevance of the research project appears, because the inclusion of the geopolitical dimension will produce a lot of new knowledge for the investigation of the complicated subject Gender and Care.

Jeff Hearn, Örebro University & Richard Howson, University of Wollongong

The Geopolitics of Critical Studies on Men and Masculinities: Continuities and Change

It is an over-simplification, but not a gross one, to say that an explicitly gendered and critical field of study on men and masculinities began to develop in the late 1960s and early 1970s by both women and men working in various geopolitically differentiated regions, such as Australasia, especially Australia, North America, and North-West Europe, especially Germany, the Nordic region and the UK. In the context of this paper, the geopolitical focuses on how the geographical location of knowledge(s), and takes into account locational aspects that impact on and influences the development, maintenance and demise of such knowledge(s). Early developments drew from and included critical feminist texts (e.g. Friedman and Sarah, 1983), texts by men (e.g. Snodgrass, 1977; Tolson, 1977), edited collections of work by women and men (e.g. Hearn and Morgan, 1990, following the first international conference in 1988), and texts on the relations between masculinities and feminism as well as, gay and queer identities and practices (e.g. Edwards, 1992). Moving this early research into teaching curricula in universities began sporadically, from at least the early 1980s, if not earlier. Interestingly, from the beginning gender-subversive concerns, such as effeminism and transgender, were present in these debates. It was also not before long that publishers saw the potential here with several academic journals and dedicated book series being published in the 1980s.

So what has happened in the field of the critical studies of men and masculinities (CSMM) since the 1980's? What does the geopolitics of CSMM look like now? This paper addresses these questions in the context of change and continuity, and the implications for feminist, women's, gender, sexuality and queer studies. The following tendencies can be identified:

- Knowledge movements to the semi-periphery exemplified in the quantitative, qualitative and geographical expansion of CSMM, including conferences and new journals in locations such as, Spain, Turkey and North Asia, especially South Korea and Japan;
- Knowledge growth through collaborations exemplified in the establishment of cross-national, cross-language studies, especially in Europe and Australasia;
- Knowledge focus seen in the particularly strong growth in CSMM directed towards global, transnational, and postcolonial concerns, as well as knowledge innovation as in the emergence of post- theories, virtuality and entrepreneurship;
- Knowledge dispersion evidenced in the increase in scholarship across the global South and global semi-peripheral regions, as well as growth in collaborations between North and South;
- Knowledge concentrations (globally dispersed) via the establishment of several research groups, centres, and even a few professorships in CSMM;
- Knowledge applied via the complex intersections between activism, policy development and research operating internationally and transnationally;
- Knowledge as critique expressed in the continuing highly contested nature of CSMM both from within and outside, including at times over-simplification or limited characterisation of the sub-field by its practitioners or critics.

Kadri Aavik, Triin Roosalu & Maaris Raudsepp, Tallinn University

Gender studies and feminist scholarship at the time of neoliberal transformation in the Estonian academia

In recent years, a significant body of critical work has emerged documenting the corporatisation of higher education and the effects of this on academic life. Overwhelmingly, this literature has been produced in and about higher education and academic research in Western societies. However, similar processes have increasingly started to take place in other geographical, social and cultural contexts, such as in the Global South and in the post-socialist Eastern and Central Europe (CEE). Thus far, there is relatively little work critically engaging with neoliberalisation of the academia in these geopolitical contexts and the implications of this for knowledge production, particularly with regard to feminist scholarship.

As a crucial issue, the question of what impact the neoliberal governance of science has on the status and development of gender studies and feminist research in CEE remains largely unstudied. This paper explores this issue on the example of Estonia. Estonia makes an interesting case for critically engaging with this question for a number of reasons: a) compared to other EU countries, it features one of the lowest government expenditures on higher education b) the national strategic plan for research and teaching in higher education prioritises hard sciences, especially ICT c) recent structural reforms stemming from a neoliberal logic completed or under way in major Estonian universities have met little or no resistance in the academic community, nor are seen as producing gendered effects d) gender studies as an academic discipline is not institutionalised, however, sporadic gender research is conducted by some research groups and individuals, with increasingly limited funding.

By focusing on the status and development of gender studies and feminist research under neoliberal conditions in Estonia, this chapter simultaneously addresses some broader questions: how do particular forms of knowledge and knowledge production become increasingly discouraged and even impossible under neoliberal conditions? What are the implications of neoliberal modes of governance for feminist epistemic practices in post-socialist Europe? What are the implications of the neoliberalisation of the academia for scholarly collaboration between feminist scholars regionally and globally?

The analysis is guided by existing critical accounts of the neoliberalisation of the academia, as well as by literature on intersections of gender and feminism with the neoliberal ideology, particularly in institutional settings. It has been argued that the agency of contemporary “neoliberal academic subjects” (Morrissey 2015) is conditioned via “regimes of performance”, as they engage in practices of the normalised self (ibid), such as self-monitoring, flexibility, and adopting new forms of auditing (Gill 2009). Drawing on this work, this chapter considers how feminist scholars in Estonia accommodate to and challenge the neoliberal governance of research - how do neoliberal academic subjectivities get (re)produced or resisted? Answers to these questions are crucial to begin conceptualising the future of gender studies and feminist scholarship in Estonia and CEE, and productive ways of collective resistance to the neoliberalisation of the academia.

Kari Jegerstedt, University of Bergen

Necro-politics and the Affirmation in/of the Feminine in Postcolonial Literary Knowledge Production

How can one critically address necro-politics, violence and war from a feminist point of view without falling into negativity? In *The Posthuman* (2013) Rosi Braidotti provocatively argues for the necessity to re-think death in affirmative terms in order to transform the necro-political order of our times. This paper seeks to explore Braidotti's thesis in the realm of aesthetic figurations, asking to what extent an affirmative, posthuman theory of death can be linked to sexual difference. One of the ways contemporary necro-politics works is through the production of "disposable bodies/populations" made possible by imperial and capitalist expansion—what Etienne Balibar (2016) has termed the utmost logic of ultra-objective violence. This production of disposability is also the theme in several feminist postcolonial novels that address questions of war, genocide and violence in relation to the female body, such as Assia Djebar's *L'Amour, la fantasia* (1985), Zoë Wicomb's *David's Story* (2001), Yvonne Vera's *The Stone Virgins* (2002) and Yvonne Owuor's *Dust* (2015). Reworking the traditional relationship between the imposition of national borders and the containment of the potentially endless and open female body, the novels in question investigate the relationship between necro-politics and the gendered body as well as the logic of sexual difference play in contemporary global structures/cultures of violence. Can an aesthetic affirmation of the feminine body give rise to a different understanding of the 'masculine' logic of war, and what kinds of subjectivities might emerge if we start from a critical affirmation of the concept (and reality) of disposability, rather than from a restorative politics of dignity? The discussion will contrast and compare Braidotti's Deleuzian framework with a neo-Lacanian ethics of the feminine as an affirmation of the non-all.

Karin Murriss, University of Cape Town

The Posthuman Child: decolonising early childhood discourses

After the demise of apartheid, South African higher education has been concerned with decolonising education in the context of race, gender and class, but no attention has been paid as yet to age as a category of exclusion. Drawing on my latest book *The Posthuman Child* (2016), my paper will make explicit how dominant figurations of child and childhood have colonised teaching and educational research by positioning child as epistemically and ontologically inferior. Child has not been included in postcolonial discourses about the transformation of higher educational spaces and curricula. Despite decades of sustained academic critique and contestation in early childhood research, current programmes of study globally and the pedagogies promoted in their courses still assume the essentialised, universal western child who develops according to a stage-like linear process of formation according to his or her innate potential (developmentalism). I will report on a large three year research project funded by the South African National Research Foundation that aims to theorise the minimal impact this critical contestation of hegemonic theories of child and childhood has had on early childhood care and education (ECCE) in higher education. The research project brings together national and international experts from the arts, humanities, social and natural sciences, to investigate how a new theoretical framework - one that is grounded in feminist materialism can explain this injustice and inform decolonising postdevelopmental theories and practices in higher education. What we are investigating in particular is how feminist scholarship can contribute towards a reconfiguration of childhood in the design and content of postcolonial curricula and research projects with the use and development of posthuman research methodologies central in its objectives.

Kathrin Thiele, Utrecht University

'Beware of Trespassing': Critical Posthumanisms and/as Decolonial Practices

Within current academic contexts, it often seems to be taken for granted that scholarship denominating itself, or being labeled as, posthuman(ist) is usually seen as located in and emerging from the global north, the west or 'the center', while scholarship denominating itself, or being labeled as, decolonial remains associated with or being used in the global south or 'the peripheries'. This reductive mapping of the global geopolitics of thought traditions shall be the (critical) subject of my paper, in which I aim to mess up this very static picturing of things. Without contesting the necessity to attend in detail to the specificities of the histories, locations and situatedness of our feminist/queer/post-/decolonial work and the ways we teach and use knowledges for our (political) actions; i.e. in full awareness "that it matters what matters we use to think other matters with;...what stories we tell to tell other stories with" (Haraway 2011), the continued repetition of demarcations and lines reifies the dualisms and hierarchisations that are in need to be deconstructed in the interventions put forth by critical scholarship.

Thus, rather than placing decolonisation and posthumanism on opposite poles of current Gender Studies debates, in my paper I aim to explicate them as entangled endeavors. As a proponent of the pluriversity (cf. Boidin, Cohen & Grosfuguel 2012), I propose to read them together as two different yet potentially comparable projects, which - in the Jamaican philosopher Sylvia Wynter's words - both work on the deconstruction of 'the over-representation of man' (Wynter 2003) and envision a new *propter nos* (Wynter 1995) beyond the eurocentric image of the human. I argue, therefore, for the necessity to trespass well-trodden paths and allow for a wondering and wandering in the fields of decolonial posthumanisms or a posthuman(ist) decolonisation in order to provide more generous and open thought cartographies for present academic and political conditions.

Kopano Ratele, University of South Africa

South African masculinities: the cultural, geo- and body-politics

A former deputy-president (and later president) of South Africa argued that although the people in country had a theoretical right to equality, the material conditions divided the country into two nations, the one nation being larger, black, poor and made up mainly by women, the other a relatively prosperous white men and women with access to developed infrastructure. Whether we are agreed or not with this characterisation of a country with two nations (instead of one nation struggling with history, inequality, and remaking itself into a socially society), South Africa is an interesting space for studies on men precisely because it features stark elements of the rich and poor worlds, with interwoven historical and contemporary economic, cultural, racial, geographic, sexual and gender hierarchies braided into the materialisation and understanding of men. These hierarchies produce a country that is complexly marked by shifting centres and margins, rival patriarchies, and manifold authorities and peripheries. In trying to think on men from a transitional county that is a marginal hegemony in the global South, this paper seeks to pursue three objectives. First, it is contended that the notion of 'South African masculinity' in the singular has always been plainly inadequate to grasp the lives of men in the country and, therefore, given that contestations around what is a prototypical South African man and woman trouble research and theoretical understanding around masculinities, the politics of South Africanness have to be an object of inquiry in masculinity studies and interventions. Here I also wish to deal with the question of how we might grasp the historical fact that many blacks were not regarded as South Africans but part of what were called ethnic homelands until the early 1990s. Second, as black men in South Africa country were often called boys, a colonial device of infantilisation common to slavocratic, settler and racist geographies, and the fact that the challenge is not settled by pluralising masculinities, I wish to project how we might go about inscribing a critical (South) African situatedness in our research, teaching and activism by working on the cultural, geo-, and body-politics of men's genders. Third, pursuant to the ongoing efforts to develop an African-situated psychology of men, I wish to further elaborate on a African psychological masculinities studies.

Liina Mustonen, The European University Institute

**Theorising women's emancipation in Egypt between the Revolution 2011 and the military
coup d'etat**

In this paper I question the feasibility of both the Islamic feminism approach and the agency-driven Western liberal feminism as tools for understanding women's emancipation in the Egyptian society. I do this by looking at the debates and discourses that involved a gender dimension between the Egyptian revolution in 2011 and the President Mohammed Morsi's overthrow in 2013. It is clear that the campaign against the rule of Muslim Brotherhood and president Mohammed Morsi (June 2012 - July 2013), and the following military-backed-popular-revolution (as its advocates called it) had a gender dimension. However, despite the fierce discussion on women's role in the post-2011-Revolution Egypt, I argue that theorising about women's role neither in terms of Islamic feminism (Badran 2001) nor in light of Western agency-driven feminism (Moghissi 2011) help us to comprehend the whole picture. Although both theoretical approaches provide interesting insights into the lived realities of specific groups of women in Egypt, in light of my research material collected in Egypt between 2011 and 2013 I illustrate how narratives are used to construct binary categories of (Egyptian) women precisely along these theoretical lines. On the one hand we see how the traditional role that the Muslim Brotherhood supposedly advocated for women was frightening to some, while on the other hand these (real or imagined) gender roles were used to defame the Muslim Brotherhood. Hence, and more importantly, I am interested in showing how the discourses on women's emancipation would profit from a class-based analysis.

Liisa Husu, Örebro University

Evaluating the Evaluations of Gender Studies and Gender Research: Quality, Expertise and Politics

National and university-level research evaluations have become increasingly common tools in strategic research policy-making in Nordic countries, Europe and internationally. The evaluations are typically conducted by national and/or international peer review, and use different combinations of bibliometrics, self-reporting, and site visits as methods. These evaluations are important tools in preparing strategic decisions on future research development and resource allocation in research organisations and universities, and thus shape the future directions of knowledge production. The evaluations aim to recognise quality and excellence.

Gender Studies and gender research have become more institutionalised in many countries, especially in the Nordic region, and are thus also more often scrutinised in the mainstream evaluation exercises. It is well-known that Gender Studies publishing venues are not adequately represented in Web of Science, the major source for bibliometric assessments of research quality and impact. How do Gender Studies and gender research more generally fare in these research evaluations? Who are used as experts assessing the quality of Gender Studies and gender research? What comes to be considered as excellent and high quality in Gender Studies and gender research? What kind of political dimensions and dynamics can be identified in the set-up and impact of these evaluations?

The paper discusses and highlights dilemmas and challenges faced when Gender Studies and gender research become subjects to research evaluations nationally or institutionally. The focus is on the Nordic region, together with one example from the Czech Republic.

Key issues analysed include the overall evaluation frameworks and methodologies applied, evaluator recruitment, and evaluator expertise in Gender Studies and gender research, the use of bibliometrics as an indicator of quality and impact in Gender Studies and gender research, the interaction of the evaluators with the evaluated unit and scholars, the understandings of what constitutes social relevance or social impact of research, and the reception of and responses to the evaluations.

Concrete examples of research evaluations at national and university level in Finland, Sweden and Czech Republic in 2002-2015 are discussed based on the authors' first-hand experience of research evaluation of Gender Studies or gender research, in diverse roles: as evaluator in several settings, and as member of a university unit that has been subject to several such evaluations. The data consists of reports of the national evaluation of Women's Studies in Finland, commissioned by the Academy of Finland, the Finnish national Research Council, in 2002; the evaluation 2011 of the Swedish Centres of Excellence in Gender Studies, funded by the Swedish Research Council; the research evaluation of Uppsala University 2006, including the Gender Studies unit; the two research evaluations at author's own university, in 2010 and 2015, including the Centre for Feminist Social Studies and Gender Studies; and the evaluation of social sciences institutes as part of an overall evaluation of the Czech Academy of Sciences in 2015, including gender research units.

Magdalena Górka, Utrecht University

Corpo-Affective Politics of Vulnerability

Breathing is not typically a subject of feminist politics. But as Franz Fanon argues, suffocating operations of power relations are not only matters of territories and ideologies but also of quotidian, embodied and affective practices of living where “the individual’s breathing is an observed, an occupied breathing. It is a combat breathing” (1965, 65). Fighting for breath and for breathable lives is, therefore, a matter of not only acts of and aspirations for change but also recognition of differential forms of political practices. Focusing on the corpomaterial agentiality of breathing enacted in anxieties, the paper argues for a necessity to understand quotidian bodily and affective actions as political.

Rosemarie Buikema, Utrecht University

Academy, Art and Activism

Cultural critique emerges from the need to face the engineerings of the cultural and geopolitical risks and dangers which surround us. At the same time cultural critique in a globalised and neoliberal world has become a practice in which the inherent intertextuality of every symbolic act implies a willingness to account for unforeseen and uncontrollable effects. Critical inquiries therefore require an attitude or willingness to take a chance, to be challenging, to be risky - to be convincing to its audience whilst neither searching for the ultimate truth, nor striving for objectivity. Cultural critique is thus a balancing act by implication, an exercise in the praxis of negotiation, response-ability and accountability. This is particularly true for cultural critique which addresses feminist and postcolonial agendas. I will illustrate this statement by means of the media storm that followed the intervention I made in a daily newspaper concerning the need to rethink what we mean by freedom of expression especially when it comes to conflicting interests and needs. I tried to work from the perspective that in a pluriform and multi-ethnic context the freedom of some might mean the oppression of others. As an example I referred to the commodification and aesthetic control of the female body - the female nude in particular - on billboards and in advertisements in the public sphere which might be experienced as liberating by some and as oppressive by others. To only challenge the notion of the nude as a sign of liberation and western civilisation was perceived of betraying the basic values of democracy and freedom. The challenge for twenty first century feminist and postcolonial critique is to develop and practice a form of critique which continues to truly connect the local and the global, the private and the public, the personal and the political, the empirical and the symbolical. To parry the risk of being perceived as a traitor of western democratic practices when turning to structural analysis of the sexist and racist risks and dangers which are surrounding us, twenty first century feminist and postcolonial critique should embark on a return to the history of feminism and a re-location of the definitions of emancipation, liberation and solidarity. Inspirational texts of first and second wave feminism already theorised liberation as a concept which not only referred to the individual but also to the simultaneous desire for a freedom for the other(s). This ethical-political second wave nuance - one geared towards justice for all rather than merely to equality and individual emancipation - needs to be reactivated and practiced in the context of twenty first century feminist critique and activism; what we need is a return to the envisioned futures of the past in order not to risk to be disconnected from our rich and critical potential.

Ulf Mellström, Karlstad University

From a hegemonic politics of masculinity to a politics of intimacy and vulnerability?

With a point of departure in masculinity studies I share a deep-rooted concern with my feminist colleagues, directed towards thinking differently with regard to gender binaries and beyond that. In this contribution I would like to give a glimpse of, and possibly open up emancipatory spaces in masculinity studies with the guidance of Karen Barad's work, and in particular concepts such as diffraction and interference. For my purposes, Barad's work opens up for critical differences within regulated emotional spaces and stale relationalities of masculine gender configurations. As ways of imagining, Barad's work opens up for a politics of intimacy where different forms of lust, passion and desire go beyond conventional desire and penetrative sex for heterosexual men. Diffracted readings in masculinity studies could thus extend the symbolic space for acceptable forms of intimacy and possibly create emancipatory openings for hegemonic and dominant forms of lust communions. I believe a sensual and conceptual key to alternative routes to masculine gendered subjectivities is intimacy and vulnerability. This is not least so in a political climate where hegemonic ideals are revolving around the competent, strong and successful. As such, vulnerability also connotes and produces a range of conceptual and embodied dyads and triads; empowered-disempowered; embodied-disembodied-able-bodied; homosocial-homoerotic-homosexual; potent-impotent; human-nonhuman; old-young, to mention a few. As such, vulnerability is also a promising onto-epistemological vantage point that hopefully and possibly could work our way around classical binaries and do a well-needed job as a form of emancipatory compass.

Ulrike Auga, Humboldt University of Berlin

**Resistance and the Radical Social Imaginary: A Genealogy from “Eastern European”
Dissidence to New Social Movements and Queer Utopia**

The world is facing an enormous crisis: ever greater inequalities within and among societies with growing economic, social, political exclusion and epistemic violence in forms of Racism, Sexism, Homophobia, Fundamentalism, etc. Many people feel a lack of governmental accountability and perceive the state of representative democracy as unsatisfactory and/or no longer achievable. The United Nations prove unable to develop effective measures against poverty, hunger, and the environmental breakdown. This status quo has been described as ‘postcolony’ (Mbembe), ‘new Empire’ or ‘Economic Apartheid’. Butler, Laclau, and Žižek call for a “radical democracy”.

Since the financial crisis 2007-2008, the “Arab Spring”, and the Occupy Movement, several hundred protest movements have emerged in order to protest against increasing economic, social, biopolitical, and epistemic exclusion. Many of these resistance movements understand themselves to be in the tradition of the dissidence movements in “Eastern European” countries, “Arab Spring” can be related to the “Prague Spring” in 1968 with its protest against the socialist regime, one of the earliest significant protests in eastern European countries.

This paper highlights the agency of Eastern European dissidence which led to the peaceful revolution and downfall of the wall in Germany 1989. Many resistant political, religious and arts movements and mobilisations imagined an open, radical democratic and solidary society not only beyond the existing dictatorship socialism but also beyond capitalism and its limited democracy. These mobilisations showed surprising performances and alliances between secular and religious women’s, peace and environmental movements.

In the light of the new social movements, also new feminist activism emerged acting locally and globally. Furthermore, the concept of ‘queer collectivity’ and its political potential is interlinked with the idea of queer utopia. Several ‘Queer of colour concepts’ (Ferguson) and queer diaspora approaches (Muñoz) harshly criticise capitalism. Ferguson laments the blind spots in Marxist thinking regarding gender, sexuality, and race. Muñoz claims that “queer is not yet there”, and describes as queer the open futurity without violence to which one could aspire.

In the peaceful revolutions around the year 1989, the discursive character of resistance and vision becomes obvious, and with it, the need for the historicisation and diversification of the understanding of resistance and the danger of epistemic violence within certain resistance discourses.

This paper will take a closer look at the genealogy of recent forms of resistance and also the role of faith-based protest in new social movements. It will be discussed how epistemic violence can be undone, and how subject formation, agency, and human flourishing can be achieved but can/must be achieved differently. Epistemic fields unfold differently in different geopolitical contexts. The paper uses gender-queer, postcolonial, and postsecular theory.

Viv Bozalek, University of the Western Cape

Diffraction a political ethic of care through posthuman ethics: Re-imagining response-able feminist pedagogies in southern contexts

In the contemporary South African higher education context where much dissatisfaction has been expressed by student movements about access to higher education, sexual violence and decolonisation of the curriculum (for example the #FeesMustFall, anti-rape protests and #RhodesMustFall movements), it is time to rethink what might be helpful in developing response-able pedagogies. This presentation puts into conversation moral elements of the political ethic of care with feminist posthuman ethics to consider how these might inform response-able feminist pedagogies in higher education. A response-able feminist pedagogy is one which is affirmative, moving away from critique to an openness to new possibilities informed by a relational ontology, upon which both the political ethics of care and feminist posthumanism is premised. In this presentation, Barad's notions of attentiveness and response/ability are superpositioned on the political ethics of care, notions of attentiveness, responsibility and responsiveness and the politics of affect to consider what a response-able feminist pedagogy might look like and what it might involve. Barad defines attentiveness as 'the ongoing practice of being open and alive to each meeting, each intra-action, so that we might use our ability to respond, our responsibility, to help awaken, to breathe life into ever new possibilities for living justly' (Barad, 2007, p. x). These ideas are diffracted through a political ethics of care lens to re-imagine a feminist pedagogy of response-ability for higher education in our southern context and beyond.

Wibke Straube, Karlstad University

Transgender Studies and its intersectional intervention into Gender Studies

Gender Studies is a field widely discussing the implications of heteropatriarchal norms on the formations of femininity and masculinity in various contexts. Intersectionality has had a strong impact on how we practice research within Gender Studies especially in the past decades. Yet it is often still a token practice. Part of this not fully realised “intersectional turn” in Gender Studies is the inclusion of a more diversified understanding of gender embodiment. Transgender Studies is this field which asks for a multiple understanding of gender embodiment and urges for a critical examination of a binary gender ontology not only in the global north but worldwide. Historically gender variant embodiment has existed globally in most cultures and in the rise of Christianity and colonial imperialism has been sanctioned and erased. Until today Western medicine pathologises and regulates gender non-conforming bodies. Globally the gender binary exists as violent structure sanctioning gender boundary violations rigidly through pathologisation and criminalisation. In my talk I would like to discuss the importance of including a diversified filter towards gender analysis that includes globally existing gender variant positions and which complicates the cisnormative lens of sex/gender/sexuality analysis within Gender Studies. I would like to argue that this rapidly emerging area of Transgender Studies challenges the ontologies and epistemologies of Gender Studies and stands in close alliance to Postcolonial Studies and Queer Studies. All these three areas have been vital interventions into the field of Gender Studies and its background of feminist activism including its white, middle-class, heterosexual and cisnormative biases. I would like to present the scholarship of Transgender Studies and its aims that are so often simplified as mere deconstruction of gender and as celebratory of gender ambiguity. By discussing its various trajectories of Transgender Studies I would like to embed this field as a future and temporary challenge to all Gender Studies research and its analytical foundations.