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Internationalisation and the Neoliberal University

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Abstract: This short intervention explores recent research on gender and the status of women in geography and draws implications for the ramifications of the internationalisation in the context of the neoliberal university.

1 In 2010 the Women and Geography Study Group (WGSG) of the Royal Geographical Society – Institute of British Geographers (RGS-IBG) undertook a survey of careers in UK Higher Education (HE) Geography. This study, which replicated earlier studies by McDowell (1979) and McDowell/Peake (1990), was part of an effort to understand career patterns and experiences of women in the discipline (the 2010 survey was the first to seek to include men) and to generate longitudinal date conducive to understanding these patterns and experiences over time. This effort is in turn related to the political project of the WGSG: to encourage the study of the geographical implications of gender differentiation in society and geographical research from a feminist perspective, and to advocate for the role of women in Geography.

2 The preliminary results of the analysis of the survey data were presented at two conferences in 2011, the International Critical Geography Conference in Frankfurt (Madrell et. al. 2011) and the RGS-IBG Annual International Conference in London. At both conferences the sessions included perspectives from women geographers working in different national contexts, in particular Spain and Australia. At the ICGC, in a session on 'Feminist Geography, Neoliberalism and the Academy', Danielle Drozdzewski and Natascha Klocker presented on 'Career Progress Relative to Opportunity: How Many Papers is a Baby Worth?', which examined how parental leave, and in particular maternity leave, is rendered calculable in relation to the construction of normative frameworks for publishing that in part determine career progression for academics in Australia. This issue, which clearly has gendered implications, has also been widely debated in the UK in relation to the Research Excellence Framework (REF): a decision has been taken that the answer to this question is '1' (see HEFCE 2012). At the RGS-IGB conference, Maria Dolores García-Ramón, Hermina Pujol, and Anna Ortiz's paper explored the decline in the numbers of female faculty members in Geography in Spain and the masculinisation of the discipline.

3 What linked these studies was a desire to go beyond quantitative measures of progress (or the lack thereof) to understand how the social construction of gender, and other categories of difference more broadly, relate to shifting institutional and disciplinary landscapes of power, exclusion and struggle. These preoccupations, in turn, connect partial and particular explorations of lived experiences of social difference with the broader questions explored in this edition of Querelles relating to the practices and effects of internationalisation. In particular, we would suggest, it highlights some of the issues associated with the pursuance of internationalisation in a context of generalised but highly uneven economic crisis (for perspectives on internationalisation and the discipline of Geography see for example García-Ramón 2006/Shepherd et al. 2000/and Vol. 20, Issue 3 of the *International Research in Geographical and Environmental Education*). In this short intervention we illustrate our point by highlighting some of the findings of WGSG 2011 survey which, we suggest, 'trouble' the question of how we assess, and address, the benefits and drawbacks of internationalisation. Attention to how women are differently 'emplaced'—differentially embedded within institutional, disciplinary and social contexts that are themselves spatially and politically variegated—can help us to think through the implications of the internationalisation of academic

feminism, gender studies and women's studies, especially in the current period of uneven economic and political crisis, as well as the implications and importance of the internationalisation of studies of gender/women *in* academia.

4 The WGSG survey asked questions designed to generate both quantitative and qualitative data on a range of factors including demographics, career trajectory, mentoring, career breaks, publications and funding, progression, impacts on work and life, and experiences of intersecting or interlocking categories of social difference (such as ethnicity and race, gender, age, (dis)ability, and class). We received 256 responses from UK-based academics and PhD students (two thirds women and one third men), while PhD and early-career researchers/lecturers (below 'senior' level) comprised 54 percent of responses. The survey generated a large amount of data; participants were extremely generous with their time, providing detailed written responses and divulging highly personal experiences. In this brief overview of the analysis undertaken to date we focus on some of the 'work-life' impacts explored in the survey[1]: this category included questions on career breaks, caring responsibilities, discrimination and bullying. We used this category as a starting point for a basic thematic analysis of experiences and expressions of insecurity related to trends in both UK higher education generally, and the discipline of Geography in particular (see for example Castree/Sparke 2000, Laoire/Shelton 2003, Crang 2003, 2007).

5 A variety of qualitative survey responses highlighted pressures generated by convergent processes of retrenchment in higher education in the UK, casualisation, and increased workloads relating to higher student numbers, pressures to generate grant income, and punitive benchmarking processes such as the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE). The RAE and current Research Assessment Framework (REF) are intended in part to "provide benchmarking information and establish reputational yardsticks", of which 'international' calibre research is one highly arbitrary category. The effects are disciplining in variety of highly uneven ways (Harvey 2006), but can have concrete implications for diversity and progression. As one survey respondent stated, "It seems to me that the way in which research is increasingly audited and measured (though things like RAE…)[2] indirectly discriminate against part time academics…More generally, the increasing market-orientation of Higher Education in the UK is producing an ever narrower social group of career academics who are willing to work to the demanding schedules needed to respond to the increasing demands of university managers and student customers. I don't think Geography is unique in this respect but it needs to ensure as a discipline that it safeguards any gains in gender equality that it made in the last few decades" (Male 308, 35–44 yrs).

6 In the context of an increased market orientation in higher education (see for example Lewis 2004 on associations between bullying and institutional change in UK universities), 'headline' quantitative figures on bullying and discrimination showed, for example, that 27 percent of female respondents and 12 percent of male respondents past the PhD stage reported they had been subject to discrimination; the figures were 30 percent for female PhD students and 12 percent for male PhD students. In relation to bullying the figures were 21 percent for female respondents and 20 percent of male respondents, and 23 percent for both female and male PhD students. While discrimination and bullying are epistemologically distinct and both defined and experienced in ways that are mediated by *inter alia* gendered norms and constructions of social difference, quantitative data suggest the possibility of patterns in gendered discrimination that have been documented elsewhere (e.g. Lee 1990). A somewhat unexpected finding, however, which is relevant to the issue of the internationalisation of feminist geography and gender studies, was that a number of respondents related experiences of bullying or discrimination to their sub-disciplinary area, theoretical approach or subject matter. One PhD student, for example, reported the "Belittling of my work/methods by another PhD […] often in front of others" (Male 110, 26–34yrs). Another respondent highlighted the relationship between the lack of recognition afforded some approaches and the tensions between teaching and research: "I feel that the attitude towards teaching represents masculinist assumptions about what counts as work. I fear that this biases [sic] is replicated in the way research is assessed. I also fear that the division in geography between 'empirical' and 'theoretical' work and the distaste for regional expertise marginalises feminist research" (Female 41, 35–44 years).

7 What is interesting for us to reflect on was that several respondents pointed to the UK Geography as a relatively open environment in relation to opportunities for progression for women academics in general, and for feminists and/or those who study gender in particular, compared with other national and disciplinary contexts. Yet others identified categories of difference other than gender—race, ethnicity, nationality, and class and age—as having the greatest impact on (helping or hindering) their careers, pointing to the complex ways in which social location shapes experiences in particular geographical and institutional contexts.

8 Nevertheless, these processes raise important questions about the 'dark side' of internationalisation: how internationalisation agendas, if tied to rigid and hierarchical

modes of assessing 'excellence', discipline academics in ways that generate or entrench existing inequalities. So where internationalisation, especially as a criterion related to impact and excellence within such frameworks, leads to increased demands to publish, for example, in highly-ranked (often English-language) journals, new pressures are generated that may exacerbate power differentials within and between institutions, countries and regions. As one respondent noted: "My workload has at times approached 200%. Promotion criteria that are constantly ratcheted upwards" (Female 238, 35–44yrs). A number of young female geographers expressed the perceived impossibility of combining, for example, paid work with unpaid caring. One young woman stated that "I feel that as a woman with the hope of starting a family in the not too distant future, that it is almost impossible to start my career in academia" (Female 23, under 25yrs). This suggests that despite legal advances in the UK since the 1970s in setting the parameters of equal treatment at work, and a striking increase in women in disciplines such as Geography (where female PhD students have now overtaken male PhD students), socially-defined categories of difference and socially-defined divisions of labour in paid labour and unpaid work still influence opportunity structures in important ways: no similar statements about the incompatibility of academic work and family life were reported by male respondents.

9 Yet the internationalisation of gender and women's studies, where it relates to open exchange, the generation of new critical feminist epistemologies, and a willingness to recognise and challenge power differentials and hierarchies both *within* the subject area, and *among* current and aspiring academics, also opens up new possibilities for political mobilisation against the uneven neoliberalisation of higher education. The inclusion of studies of gender and other categories of social difference within academia as part of this process is particularly fruitful in relation to a feminist politics of building alliances of resistance. It also has the potential to link up with broader struggles. The 'feminisation' of junior academic work (which is becoming more precarious and competitive) relates to increased labour market polarisation more generally, and the 'downloading' of the costs of crisis onto the higher education sector reflects the downloading of the costs of crisis onto the sphere of social reproduction (Bakker/Gill 2003). These alliances need to be especially attentive to hierarchies within and between socially and spatially-embedded institutional contexts; nevertheless, they are increasingly necessary in the current period when for many austerity and retrenchment represent 'the new normal'.

Notes

1. This is a necessarily selective overview: for a fuller exploration of the data and findings, see Maddrell et al. 2011.

2. The RAE is the Research Assessment Exercise, last carried out in 2008, which ranked research activity by discipline at participating higher education institutions in the UK : see http://www.rae.ac.uk/ (accessed 18 March 2013).

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