Revue Française de Civilisation Britannique

French Journal of British Studies

XXIII-1 | 2018

Women in Britain since 1900: Evolution, Revolution or
'Plus ça change...' ?

Review of *Rewriting Academia, The Development of the Anglicist Women's and Gender Studies of Continental Europe* by Renate Haas (ed),

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Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/rfcb/1855>

DOI: 10.4000/rfcb.1855

ISSN: 2429-4373

Publisher

CRECIB - Centre de recherche et d'études en civilisation britannique

Electronic reference

Shirley Doulière, « Review of *Rewriting Academia, The Development of the Anglicist Women's and Gender Studies of Continental Europe* by Renate Haas (ed), », *Revue Française de Civilisation Britannique* [Online], XXIII-1 | 2018, Online since 20 March 2018, connection on 23 August 2020. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/rfcb/1855> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/rfcb.1855>

This text was automatically generated on 23 August 2020.

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REFERENCES

Renate Haas (ed), *Rewriting Academia, The Development of the Anglicist Women's and Gender Studies of Continental Europe*, Peter Lang, Frankfurt am Main, 2016, 442 pages

- 1 The book under scrutiny is a global survey of Gender Studies in Continental Europe. It presents the work of -mostly female- researchers aiming at developing Women's and Gender Studies as an academic topic, as well as assessing its current situation. The book is divided in four geographical areas: Southern Europe, Western and Central Europe, Northern Europe, Southeastern and Eastern Europe.

Southern Europe

- 2 The overview begins with the situation in Portugal. Macedo and Esteves Pereira remind us that teaching feminism or gender studies remains challenging in most places in the world and Portugal is one of these places. When stating the difficulty of fitting classes in the curricula and having to argue one's choice for graduate courses, their experience echoes that in the other countries in Southern Europe. The first Portuguese MA degree course in Women's Studies was created in 1995, then a PhD course was opened in 2002 at Universidade Aberta-the Open university in Lisbon as part of Women's and Cultural Studies.

- 3 Similarly, English Studies and Women's Studies are fairly recent arrivals in Spain following the death of dictator Franco in 1975. It has had to navigate rigid higher education structures. Gender Studies slowly developed but encountered a setback in 2008 because of the recession. Another happened in 2011 with the election of a Conservative party which did not choose to allocate funds for Women and Gender Studies. However, the discipline has grown steadily ever since.
- 4 In Italy, Professor Vita Fortunati highlights a complex situation when it comes to the institutionalisation of these type of studies. On the one hand, some faculty members consider that the inclusion of Women and Gender studies is key to the recognition of its "formative and educational strength (p. 87)". On the other hand, some fear it would deprive them of its "subversive potential" (Ibid.).

Western and Central Europe

- 5 In Western and Central Europe, Women's and Gender Studies is usually either transdisciplinary, or part of the English Studies Department. Universities are generally funded by the Ministry of Education and Research, which gives them a strong orientation towards research. Florence Binard dates Women and Gender Studies in most Western countries back to the Women's Liberation Movement of the 1970's. In France, it is also related to the social movement of May 1968 which brought about a deep transformation of Higher Education and an increased emphasis on non-traditional topics such as Gender studies.
- 6 She highlights the fact that scholars were able to organize non-official research groups, and/or women-only meetings mostly based on the participants' feminist commitment and their teaching in left-leaning universities. This did not prevent dissensions, with some opposed to feminist studies in academia and others fearing a "dilution of feminism in a male-dominated environment" (p 87).
- 7 Ultimately, she underlines the influence of individuals in the creation of courses: in 2004 the President of the Conseil Régional d'Île de France (Paris Area Regional Council) appointed a Vice President in Charge of Education who was open to feminist concerns. He gave Eliane Viennot, professor of Literature the task of developing research on women, sex and gender. In 2009, the first Senior Lecturer position of Women Studies, Sex and Gender in English studies was created at Lille 3. Belgium saw a similar development under the impulse of young scholars in the 1990's. Marisa Demoor calls attention to the fact that, in Belgium there was a little hostility to Women Studies and Feminism. Some people have an ambivalent position, as some younger researchers deem women studies "unnecessary and patronising to women" (p.107).
- 8 In contrast with the situation in other Western countries, in Germany Renate Haas dates feminist efforts to study these domains back to the 19th Century. Intertwined with women's literature, lesbian literature, and motherhood leagues, they went through obvious setbacks due to the Third Reich's policy of ousting women from office. Women who might have been leading intellectuals remained excluded from the higher ranks of academia after 1945 until the early 1980's. Haas credits the revival of women's studies to Anglicist studies and individual lecturers' efforts though she warns that "pioneers were frequently ridiculed and viciously attacked" (p.154). Haas also points out that since its establishment in 1980, the prize for the best Habilitation thesis has never been

awarded to a woman, and the only habilitation with a clear Gender Studies orientation to win such a prize was written by a man studying masculinities.

- 9 In Austria, Women's and Gender Studies were modeled on the second wave feminism in the 1960s in American universities. Austria was late in admitting female students, later than most European countries, and equally suffered from the exclusion of female researchers due to Nazism. In 2007/8 the University of Graz introduced an MA in Gender Studies but in other universities courses are integrated as part of "topics in Cultural and Media studies" and are thus less visible. Overall Anglicist and Americanist Women and Gender Studies emerged from feminist interventions in Austria and are largely shaped by English and American syllabi, only officially included as a field of study and research in 2002.
- 10 In the Czech Republic, the authors concede that Women's and Gender Studies is used as an umbrella term although some department have Gender Studies only (without Women's Studies) but are part of sociology departments. Women's and Gender Studies tend to be integrated in the English departments. This distinction is due to the post-communist period in the early 90's, when a more "user-friendly" word was chosen, "less ideologically charged than Women's Studies or Feminism" (p. 195).
- 11 During the communist years, women's emancipation was seen as part of the communist doctrine, if one had different ideas one was accused of being bourgeois and capitalist. After the change in political regime in 1989, Anglicist Women's and Gender Studies were created but remained ostracized for a while. Their work consisted mostly of translation of western feminist works. After 2000, Women's and Gender studies became more institutionalized but as part of Sociology more than of English studies. In 2004 the Czech Republic joined the EU which has driven even more progressive steps toward gender equality, but the authors warn that the situation is far from stabilized.
- 12 A similar situation is found in Croatia where, according to the author, Women Studies is "paradigmatic of the development of women's studies in post-communist, transitional societies" (p. 219). Feminism was also part of communist values that the middle class did not identify with. However, Women Studies were created as early as the 1950's in line with the party's agenda, as part for example of the Institute for the History of the Workers Movement.

Northern Europe

- 13 Sweden, Finland and Lithuania are slightly ahead of the others, with Women's Studies courses held as early as the 70's within the humanities and social sciences. However, the authors warn against the myth of the all egalitarian "women friendly" welfare state in Finnish society. Though they have plenty of MA and PhD programs in Women's studies, some universities do not have gender-related research. Currently the main development is the shift from Women Studies to Gender Studies. Another warning to curb one's enthusiasm is that among EU countries, Lithuania is the leading country for male to female researcher ratio, but female researchers hold mostly the less prestigious positions.

South-Eastern and Eastern Europe

- 14 In Romania, Schneider and Selejan explain that the general feeling is that “there is not a strong feminist movement nor any need for one” (p. 327) or that it is an “alien importation, largely of Anglo-American extraction” (Ibid.). These four countries saw a rise of interest in feminism after the fall of Communism in the 90’s, and share the same suspicions against *bourgeois* notions. The influence of the European union is felt, as the prospect of getting in the European Union pushed universities to add more English studies courses to the curricula. Romania however, has the particularity of not having had an industrial revolution in the 19th century and no second wave feminist movement in the 60’s.

Conclusion

- 15 The aim of the publication is to give a greater visibility to the various Anglicist scholars in Europe developing the field of Women’s and Gender Studies which suffers from lack of communication and recognition. Why Anglicists? Because English studies is a predominantly feminine field influenced by Anglo-American Feminism it should come as no surprise that it is where Gender Studies got their impulse. The different articles show the ambivalence or unease in using the word feminist, preferring Women’s and/or Gender Studies and remind young researchers of the long way fought and the way ahead. They point out that even today, a valued researcher can be denied a position because of his/her field of research being mostly in women’s studies and ultimately raises the issue that a lot of work is done by individuals and once these researchers are gone so are the projects they started.
- 16 Overall this collection of articles fulfils its goal of unveiling the work of scholars to promote an undervalued field of studies. It is unfortunate though that it does not cover countries outside of Europe since it is still too commonly held to be true that feminism exists only in Europe. It could be the object of an entire new study and would be very valuable. It is nevertheless a great inspiration for Women and Gender Studies scholars but also for researchers of other topics with a similar problem such as Post Colonial Studies.
- 17 **Shirley Doulière is a PhD student at the university Bordeaux Maigne and ATER at the University of Besançon. Her doctoral thesis is entitled: *The Tightrope Walkers of Identity: Victorian Female Explorers map out a New Atlas of Femininity*.**

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