

Mapping Anglicist Women's and Gender Studies Within the European Landscape¹

Rewriting Academia : The Development of the Anglicist Women's and Gender Studies of Continental Europe / Renate Haas (ed.). – 1. Edition. Includes index. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2015, 442 pp., ISBN 978-3-631-66985-3 (hb), E-ISBN 978-3-653-06121-5 (e-book)

Was there ever a time we could truly call *feminist* so that we can talk today about the *postfeminist* world? This question extracted from the Romanian survey within the volume on European Anglicist Women's and Gender Studies stands as a true central question of the study edited by Renate Haas. Thanks to Renate Haas, an English professor from the University of Kiel, the readers within and outside the confines of academia have the opportunity for an insight into the sixteen national surveys on the Anglicist Women's and Gender Studies of the Continent provided by twenty-five female experts. Along with the statistical research and critical insight and both from the geographical and historical dimension, the collection of surveys presents the institutional aspects of Women's and Gender Studies² related to the English Studies, the discipline oriented to English language, Anglophone literatures and worldwide communication. Besides the informative "Introduction" and motivating "Conclusion" given by Renate Haas, the volume consists of four chapters divided "geographically" and entitled as follows: "Southern Europe", "Western and Central Europe", "Northern Europe" and "South-Eastern and Eastern Europe". Putting into the spotlight Rosie Braidotti's 2002 assertion that "both terminology and the bulk of the scholarship in Women's [and Gender] Studies have been generated in English-speaking cultures and traditions" (p. 12), the essential question of the volume is the academic institutionalization of Women's and Gender Studies, in Haas's opinion, closely intertwined with the "linguistic turn". English has become both *lingua franca* and *lingua academica* of the Continental Europe which is as a geographic entity taken widely and unbiasedly. The very fact that many languages do not distinguish the term "gender" in its biological and sociological

aspect proves at least a tiny particularity of the English language importance for the recognition of Gender Studies as a specific area of research.

Making a brief, informative and clarifying introduction to the presented case studies, Renate Haas points out to certain problems she had encountered during the phases of gathering experts and analyzing the results of the first surveys of this kind.³ Certainly, the primary obstacle was the English Studies disregard for its own history. Editing the first overall view of Anglicist Women's and Gender Studies, Haas was aware of "the danger of putting the cart before the horse" (p. 16) and the possibility of too many gaps in the quest of a deeper understanding of Anglicist Women's and Gender Studies as a European discipline. The first kind of problems was related to the life unexpected circumstances such as the premature death of Ljiljana Ina Gjurgjan, the chairwoman of English Literature Department in Zagreb, whose draft on Croatian transitional society and formation of Women's Studies is, nevertheless, included. Other problems were, as speculated by Haas, most probably ideological. Finding an expert from Russia seemed rather difficult and at the point of finding an enthusiastic one, the editor never heard from her. The readers remained deprived of Russian *anglistika* survey whose lack in the volume is marked more than its presence would have been. Proposing a structural outline for each national survey where the authors would introduce the development and institutionalization of Anglicist Women's and Gender Studies, Haas encouraged scoping out the national context and history glimpses regarding First Women's Movement, degree of women-friendliness, etc. Haas's important conclusion is that surprisingly many contributors, unable to properly place the Women's and Gender Studies within the English Studies, were unaware of the literary studies crucial role for the 1970s Women's Movement.

The first chapter mapping Anglicist Women's and Gender Studies of Southern Europe include Portugal (Ana Gabriela Macedo and Margarida Esteves Pereira),⁴ Spain (Ester Álvarez López, Isabel Carrera Suárez and Carla Rodríguez González) and Italy (Vita Fortunati). The first wave of feminism was rather fruitful in Portugal and the first teaching modules of feminism and Gender Studies were established within the English courses at the English and American Department at the Universidade do Minho in the 1990s. Portuguese survey affirms that the liaison between English Studies and Gender Studies was more obvious than in other fields of literary studies. Comparing to Portugal where establishing Women's and Gender Studies as a discipline was achieved quite late, the dictatorship during the Spanish Civil War was the main reason for an enormous impediment for Gender Studies progress in Spain. The flourishing of the Spanish feminism has its political roots and with its integration into the English Studies and modern languages, there has been a long history of scrutinizing gender content in many BA,

MA and doctoral courses. However, Italy represents a quite particular, and almost isolated case, where the liaison between Italian universities and Anglicist Women's and Gender Studies was created due to the necessity of European and non-European entities comparison. What seems paradoxical is that Italy stands for an example of the gap between the high-level expertise and the non-existent institutional recognition.

The second chapter is certainly the most extensive including the following countries of the Western and Central Europe: France (Florence Binard), Belgium (Marysa Demoor), Germany (Renate Haas), Austria (Susanne Hamscha), Czech Republic (Věra Eliášová, Simona Fojtová, Martina Horáková) and Croatia (Ljiljana Ina Gjurgjan). The early 1970s were crucial for the French history of Women's and Gender Studies and Héléne Cixous was considered one of the most relevant French Anglicist who founded the center for women's studies research as the first of its kind in Europe. Introducing *pluridisciplinarity* in an entourage of highly centralized and government-dependent universities, the development of French Anglicist Women's and Gender Studies depended more on the individual efforts than on the institutional goodwill, which seems to be the conclusion in many presented case studies. Further on, the case study of Belgium is a brief report with rather personal overtones and sporadic poetic discourse: the author elaborates on her own experiences at the Centre of Gender Studies at the University of Ghent, of being a researcher in English literature and telling how much work has been done to make Belgium a country of a good standing position of women's equality. Concerning the case of Germany, Haas provides meticulous statistics setting four phases in the general development of German Women's and Gender Studies. What seems surprising is that there is no networking among German Anglicists and that despite comparative analyses, it's quite complex to distinguish specific tradition of German Anglicist Women's and Gender Studies whose development Haas defines metaphorically as *a snowball effect* – two steps forward and one step back. The example of Austria, however, shows the same slight regression during the recent years regarding the development of Gender Studies which are considered in several cases as a subfield of Cultural Studies. Again, thanks to individual endeavors, the institutionalization of Gender Studies in the curricula of Austrian English and American Studies emerged from a natural affinity between the American Studies and Women's and Gender Studies providing valuable insights into history, sociology, political science, culture, identity and body studies. Czech Republic as a post-communist society, similar to some other examples of transitional societies and newly accepted EU members, began the academic institutionalization of Women's and Gender Studies as a democratic requirement in the new economic and legal context. The institutionalization was related mostly to the sociology departments than to the English Studies

departments. Another example of a transitional society in which the women's studies were formed during the 1950s is Croatia. Due to the author's death, the survey of Croatia is left as a draft, a short note with interesting insights into the local phallogocentric narrative that fluctuates between the male-dependent woman and a man-like monstrous one. It would be also stimulating to elaborate further on the case of Croatia since even geographically, and therefore, geopolitically, the country itself represents a crossroads of Central and South-Eastern Europe.

Chapter three introduces another geographically, historically and ideologically different area of Anglicist Gender Studies research – Northern Europe. The presented surveys were carried out in Sweden (Mia Liinason), Finland (Elina Valovirta, Joel Kuortti) and Lithuania (Marija Aušrine Pavilioniene). Swedish example argues that the institutionalization of Gender Studies in the 1970s was connected to “language science”, however resulting in a successfully established women-friendly society but demonstrating certain practices and knowledge rooted in the deep structures of inequality. The Swedish paradox reflects critically about the successful integration of Gender Studies into academia but also about the production of knowledge and mainstream discourse around sex, gender and sexuality, which is rather unique in the author's opinion. On the other hand, Finish case shows a high institutionalization of Gender Studies noting that its presence within the English Studies is not featuring high, mostly based on individual efforts. Although not being able to present a national outline of Anglicist Women's and Gender Studies, the authors offer the analysis on eight departments out of fourteen existing in Finland. The Finnish survey argues the “national fantasy of women-friendly welfare state” (p. 248) which is rooted in the Nordic branch of equality feminism. Lithuania, reaching its independence in the post-Soviet phase, stands as a different example. Becoming far more democratic and regulated by EU policies, the impetus for struggle, creation of new traditions and new knowledge dissemination within literary studies and English and American departments influenced the development of Women Studies and gender centers in Lithuania. Still, the political life in Lithuania and the lack of proper legal framework represent the hindrance for the constant progress.

Chapter four gathers surveys from South-Eastern and Eastern Europe including countries as follows: Serbia (Aleksandra Izgarjan, Dubravka Djurić), Romania (Ana-Karina Schneider, Corina Selejan), Bulgaria (Milena Katsarska) and Armenia (Seda Gasparyan, Gayane Muradian). Serbian survey enlists three phases of women's movement: the beginning of the 20th century, the 1970s and the 1990s as a post-socialist period. The deconstruction of the nationalist agenda and dictatorial regime of the 1990s was also led through gender studies, a developing field in Serbia which began as an NGO sector financed by Western feminist

foundations. The specificity of Serbian Gender Studies is the distinctive fraction between theory and activism. The first NGO Women's Studies Center [Centar za Ženske studije] was founded in 1991 in Belgrade as an interdisciplinary educational project and in Novi Sad in 1997 named Women's Studies Mileva Marić.⁵ The transition from NGO to academic domain began with the foundation of the Center for Gender Studies in 2003 within the University's Association of Centers for Interdisciplinary and Multidisciplinary Studies, however, still not being able to achieve the full institutionalization.⁶ It is a rather significant fact that most of the gender theory texts read in Serbia were published in English. The first master and doctoral courses were initiated officially at the English Department in Novi Sad and Sociology Department in Belgrade.⁷ The gender courses are also offered at the Center for Gender Studies and Politics which is a structural part of the Faculty of Political Science in Belgrade. However, the university degree in gender is not recognized by the Serbian Ministry of Education indicating that these centers have achieved their objectives only partly. What this survey does not mention is a project financed by Serbian Ministry of Education and Science dedicated to gender theory and criticism, literary science and culture – *Knjiženstvo*. Since 2011, relying mostly on Western models, *Knjiženstvo* has featured many texts on gender theory developing as well its own digital base of Serbian female authors converging the theoretical and pragmatic aspects of feminism. On the other hand, combining elements of gender theory and English Literary Studies is visible in several master and doctoral courses at the Faculty of Philology in Belgrade⁸ but also in certain seminal texts by Adrijana Zaharijević, Aleksandra Jovanović, Aleksandra Izgarjan, Biljana Dojčinović, Dubravka Đurić, Dubravka Popović Srdanović. This successful research of gender through Serbian English Studies and vice versa is certainly an important impetus for further development.

The rise of the women's movement in Romania coincides with the rise of the national identity. However, the authors argue about a general opinion in Romanian society that there is no strong women's movement nor any need for it. The institutionalization of Women's and Gender Studies in Romania began right after the downfall of communism in the 1990s but the evolution of the Romanian Anglicist Women's and Gender Studies, due to the lack of networking and collaboration, is not well documented. The neighboring country of Serbia and Romania, Bulgaria, although showing elements of a society of sexism, homophobia, racism and nationalism, as the author emphasizes, is the place where Gender Studies have been expanding since the 1990s. Moreover, Gender Studies closely related to the English Studies have become a high developing field of research in Bulgaria mostly as gender-sensitive critical pedagogy.

The English Studies academics were the main contributors to the process of institutionalization and also today women form a hegemony within the English departments in Bulgaria.

On the other hand, the Armenian example seems however solitary since it is the only Eastern European survey declaring that little has been achieved to develop a “full-gender inclusive curriculum” (p. 391) but still many activities concerning Gender Studies were put into action. It is noted that the full institutionalization of Women’s and Gender Studies in Armenia has been hindered by the dominant patriarchal model as well as by political corruption. However, the Center for Gender and Leadership Studies was established not before 2013 within the University of Yerevan. Nevertheless, during the preparation and publication of this volume the first gender course was expected to be realized within the English Philology Department. In the meantime, due to the electronic correspondence with Professor Gasparyan from the Yerevan State University who has provided the important information, it is confirmed that the master course “Gender Linguistics” (discussing gender issues in the context of language use) was successfully established and conducted revealing high interest of the students and resulting in the initialization of another gender course entitled “Language, Gender, Communication”.⁹ The year of 2013 was a good one for Women’s and Gender Studies in Armenia.¹⁰

The closure of the volume brings the final editor’s remarks entitled “Europe and Beyond”. Relying on the relevant previously conducted surveys and reports, Haas imports new information and statistics concerning some countries not being taken into consideration. Haas’s conclusion seems as an attempt of filling in the gaps, covering wider geographical spaces and encouraging scholars to engage along this line of study. The reader of this volume can detect the presented natural affinity between the English Studies and Gender Studies although the general summing-up is that the latter was developing inherently to the English Studies as an already institutionally grounded discipline. However, different case studies produced different results and conclusions, supported by the editor’s decision to divide the volume into the “geographic” chapters. Nevertheless, the crisscross of the English Studies and Gender Studies in Europe represents a developing interdisciplinary field, which is a conclusion that affirms the recentness of this volume even almost five years after its publication. In spite of the lack of the necessary comparative analysis of the surveys given, understandably missing due to the enormous scope of work and its pioneering aspect, the importance of the volume is multiple. According to Haas, the purpose of this volume, indicated by its title, lies in the attempt of reorientation and reconceptualization of the English Studies as well as of the European imaginaries (p. 424). The variety of Continental Women’s and Gender Studies is explored in the English Studies departments in particular but also in a broader context. The volume provides

not only the tight connection between the Gender Studies and the English Studies as a kind of discipline of its own but also the national and ideological context as the realm of women's rights and as well as gender research issues within the legal and institutional framework in different countries. The spectrum of diverse surveys showed that the usage of the term "feminist" even today should be rather tentative and precautionary. Haas's snowball metaphor seems as an adequate mental picture of the volume: a lot of steps forward have been taken but still much more work has to be done so that we can contemplate the world as postfeminist.

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² In the following review essay the terms "Gender Studies" and "Women's and Gender Studies" will be used synonymously. The difference between these terms, which are no matter what inevitably related, will not be relevant.

³ As noted in the conclusion, the first European survey for English was made by Martin Kayman covering twenty-nine countries but with modest resources and, as indicated by Kayman himself, with serious methodological problems.

⁴ The authors of the particular national surveys are enlisted in the brackets next to the countries where the surveys were carried out.

⁵ Women's Studies Center in Belgrade has been publishing a journal "Women's Studies" [Ženske studije] ever since later known as "Genero". The journal featured many Anglo-American authors, either through translations or in critical essays.

⁶ Haas notes in the conclusion that Serbia is one of the ten European countries where among the associate and full professors women constitute a majority (p. 414). It is also noted that University of Belgrade's first English Department female chair-holder was Mary Stansfeld Popović in 1952.

⁷ An interesting fact not provided by Serbian survey is that the first English grammar in Serbian was published in 1900 and was used as a course book in the Higher School for Girls in Belgrade [Viša ženska škola], the first school of its kind in Serbia signifying the start of the official high school education level of young women.

⁸ It is worth knowing that one of the Faculty of Philology MA courses unambiguously combining English Studies and Women's and Gender Studies and interpreting their existential mutual relevance is dedicated to the heritage and influence of Virginia Woolf's essay "A Room of One's Own" (1929). In addition, two doctoral courses offered at the Faculty of Philology in Belgrade represent the intersection of gender theory and the Anglophone cultures. The course entitled "Theories of Gender and Difference and Digital Humanities" is dedicated to the research of literature from the aspect of gender theory based on the Anglophone literary theory and focusing on the notions of sex, gender, literature and digital humanities. With its depictive title, the course "Bringing Theory, Activism and Cultural Practices Together: Feminist Press in Serbia in the 90s and 2000s" scrutinizes the aspects and relationship between theory, activism, and cultural and art practices in the contemporary feminist press in Serbia as a transitional society.

⁹ The information about gender courses at the University of Yerevan was kindly provided from Professor Seda Gasparyan, one of the authors of the Armenian survey, during August 2019 via electronic mail.

¹⁰ The author of the Belgian survey ends her report by stating that the year of 2013 was a good one for women's equality in Belgium.

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Мапирање женских и родних студија англистике на карти Европе