

**Brief reflections on the connections between women's movements,
gender studies and public policy in regard to Spain**

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First of all I would like to thank Panteion University's Centre for Gender Studies, and its Director, Maria Stratigaki, for their kind invitation to speak at this most interesting conference.

I will say straightaway that the question of the connections, if any, between women's movements, gender studies and public policy is a challenging topic for me. My research on the Spanish women's movement, which recently culminated in the publication of *Gendering Spanish Democracy* (Routledge 2005), written together with Celia Valiente and Christine Cousins was devoted mainly to highlighting the historical presence of the women's movement, its role in the transition from

dictatorship to democracy, and its impact on the democratization process, particularly of public policy. In other words, this research did not consider gender studies as an active factor in the process. From this research perspective, a first reflection on gender studies in Spain would be that it is a product of the women's movement, an outcome rather than an active factor or an activator of the movement, particularly since feminist activism began before there were institutional gender studies centres in Spain. This is certainly true for the early days. But as attention to gender developed in Spain, there were closer and closer connections between gender studies and public policymaking.

Let us reminisce for a moment. The first women's studies centre was set up at the Autonomous University of Madrid (Seminario de Estudios de la Mujer, UAM) in 1981. I well remember its first conference that led to the publication of 2 volumes of papers. If one looks back at the participants in that historic conference, one can see that there was a 50/50 mixture between on the one hand, historians, mainly but not exclusively women, and, on the other hand, feminist activists of the time who were also writers, lawyers and academics (sociologists, linguists, political scientists). Notably, several of these went on to become prominent in advocacy, taking the movement forward into the realm of public policy. So these two volumes already epitomize the connections we are interested in today. Let us ask, then, in what direction did the communication initially flow? Who was encouraging or influencing whom?

ACADEMICS > < FEMINISM > < ACTIVISTS / POLICY ADVOCATES



GENDER STUDIES

The simple graphic attempts to show that academics and activists or policy advocates were brought together through feminism in Spain. Feminism was a force in itself, a powerful cluster of ideas, even an ideology for some that mobilised a variety of categories of women. Two types of women, academics on the one hand and grass-roots activists together with not so grass-roots policy advocates on the other, came together to initiate gender studies in Spain.

It is worth considering whether these early gender studies have aged well, not in terms of how well each article stands up today, but in terms of the preoccupations the volumes reflect. Clearly, they displayed a preponderant concern for women's place in history. As a secondary priority, they show engagement with the battle of ideas around women in society, especially the dialogue with Marxism (one paper is amusingly entitled "What every vulgar Marxist should know about feminism" by Ludolfo Paramio, one of the few male feminists of the era). Interest is shown in the political economy of domestic labour and consumption patterns of women, but, perhaps surprisingly, not in women's employment problems. There was only one paper on women in politics, and significantly, only one on divorce (by Inés Alberdi), even though divorce was the burning public issue of the day in 1981.

So evidently, there was a gap between the demands of the women's movement and the research being done in Madrid at the time (there was another centre at Granada University), as this leaned much more towards history than towards the issues of the women's movement, which were, at the time, childcare, abortion, contraception, divorce as well as general equality in all spheres. The second Conference of Inter-disciplinary Research of the Autonomous University of Madrid's Gender Studies Institute produced two more volumes entirely devoted to Spanish women's history from the medieval era onwards (1984), followed by one on the image of women in art. Subsequent conference proceedings and publications continued to reflect the dominance of history in gender studies until at least the mid 1990s, before engaging more clearly with themes linked to the women's movement such as employment, political power and violence against women (see <http://www.uam.es/otroscentros/institutomujer/publicaciones.html>)

Interestingly, when the Women's Studies Seminar of the Department of Sociology of the Autonomous University of Barcelona held its first major feminist conference in 1983, the theme was patriarchy. This attracted a far less scholarly type of paper, and, perhaps because of this, the themes were very closely linked to the feminist debate of the time, with a number of papers on patriarchy, masculinity, education, employment, the media (see *Seminari d'Estudis de la Dona*, 1983). Whether this reflected a division of labour between the two research institutes, or the preferences of paper givers in the two regions, was not clear. The third major gender studies centre in Spain was formally set up at the University of Granada in the winter of 1986-7, scene of a historic first feminist Workshop on

Patriarchy in 1979 (a forum of debate for all the strands of the women's movement). Despite earlier published projects, their first inter-disciplinary gender studies conference was not held till in 1990, and was numerically dominated by papers on women's history. Notably, full sections on education, work and health produced much more policy-oriented papers (see Balarín and Ortiz Gómez 1990). In addition, it is of particular interest that many of the papers making up the over 1000 pages of proceedings concerned only women in the region of Andalucía

So if we ask the question whether there was any direct connection between gender studies and policy-making in the origins of Spanish democracy, there is not much evidence on the basis of an analysis of the types of papers presented at the major inter-disciplinary gatherings. A review of all research monographs of Spanish Universities, let alone of publishing houses is well beyond the scope of this paper, but a thematic overview in Ortiz Gómez 1989 suggest that this continued to hold true at least till the 1990s. However, gender studies did reflected some of the *general concerns* of feminism, but not the *priorities* of the women's movement.

Now I would like to move on to ask the normative question: SHOULD there be any connection between gender studies and gender policymaking? Why assume that there must be? For instance, the mission statement today of that first and still foremost academic gender studies centre in Spain (IUEM-UAM) affirms that its aim today as a research institute is to

"incorporate the perspective OF women and ON women into the transmission of human knowledge" [emphasis added] (<http://www.uam.es/otroscentros/institutomujer/objetivos.html>). And it adds that for this reason, its priority aim is to construct the theoretical and methodological bases for transforming university curricular programmes. In other words, some gender studies bodies in Spain see themselves as embedded in the science of knowledge, and not as applied research centres working for the purpose of policy-making. In relation to this, we have already noted the fact that the area where gender studies research has most developed in Spain is in the discipline of history. Arguably, there is far less likelihood that public policy will flow from women's history through a directly traceable link. As to other disciplines, a first consideration, following a brief enquiry, is that there has been no research for Spain on the influence or effect of gender studies on policymaking.

Furthermore, in an environment of academic freedom, there is generally no direct link between government departments and university research programmes. Nonetheless, it is generally known that government departments who commission research, and academic research funding bodies such as national research councils draw up programme priorities with the intention of signalling to the academic research communities that there are areas in which public bodies are more interested than others. However, is commissioned research on a gender topic tantamount to gender research? Is the fact that a government agency commissioned research on "Sexual harassment at work" -- as the state Institute of Women did recently, from a professional polling organisation probably

employing a number of *male* researchers, who may not have taken on board any gender methodologies nor considered feminist theoretical perspectives – part of gender studies, despite its typically feminist theme? Dr Mayte Gallego, one of the co-authors of the first women's studies state of the art (*El Libro Blanco de los Estudios de la Mujer en España* in 1996) thinks not.

Having said this, there are empirical and speculative observations that can be made on this subject.

- When a public body commissions a piece of research, it is reasonable to suppose that it is disposed to taking its findings seriously for policy purposes, or that it is looking for answers to support a particular policy initiative. Thus the Spanish Institute for Women (Instituto de la Mujer) has a long history of commissioning research from women scholars, and has had a strong role in drawing up public policies. It would be churlish to suggest that its policy department was not speaking to its research department.

- Most sociological studies on gender with empirical findings do contribute to the building up of a conventional view on the position of women; say in the labour market, or in the family. For instance, the variety of ways in which women are at a disadvantage in the labour market is known to have been the subject of myriad studies. Thus it is reasonable to deduce that policymakers have been encouraged by the cumulative effect of such studies to address women's disadvantage in the labour market, and to focus on possible solutions

suggested by such studies. In this way, gender studies shapes policymaking even if only over the long term.

One expert in the field, Mayte Gallego strikingly expressed her opinion of the usefulness of women's studies: 'It is never knowledge that goes into the waste bin', even if one cannot ascertain where it has gone to after production. This is evidently not a wholehearted endorsement of gender studies. But the issue of "usefulness" is contestable. Scholarship on women has tended first and foremost to reflect, represent and *interpret women's lives*, and has not seen itself as the kind of tool for *solving the problems* of women's lives that policymakers would find useful. Therefore there can easily be a gap between feminist research/gender studies and policymaking, and perhaps it simply that there are some stages in between. This takes us back to our diagram of the flow of information and influence. There is a difference between the motivations of scholars and the motivations of policymakers, and I would argue, that the gap is best filled by feminism as a web of ideologies. It is thus up to the women's movement in its broadest sense, to mediate between gender studies scholars and policymakers so that policy ideas and evidence can flow between the two.

Another consideration is whether this gap, call it difference in motivations or communication difficulties, should be perceived as natural or as a problem, a tension between the two? Since there is already collaboration between scholars and policymakers through the commissioning of applied research, is there a need to clarify at what stage, or level, of the flow of

knowledge and interaction between the two sides should gender studies or feminist research play a role? For instance, if the stages are identified as:

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| i) problem discovery | < GS/FR input |
| ii) policy design to counter the problem | < GS/FR input |
| iii) policy implementation | < policymakers |
| iv) policy monitoring | < policymakers |
| v) policy evaluation | < GS/FR input |

Then, as seen in the second column, it is possible to formulate appropriate gender studies or feminist research input for stages i) and ii). Of course, input does not automatically mean impact or influence, which is why there may be a break between the policy advocacy that goes into stage (ii) and the next stages. Thus stages iii) and iv) belong to the policymakers, though one can foresee a further responsibility for gender studies in the evaluation stage.

There is clearly a role for scholars in problem discovery and measurement. It is the role of making visible, of uncovering and of being able to establish the prevalence of a phenomenon. This is crucial for motivating policymakers to take action in the design of remedies, with or without the aid of the feminist research. An example would be research on the prevalence of violence against women. In fact, it is arguable that feminist research generally (not particularly in Spain), has uncovered major phenomena that the simple gathering of statistics by government previously overlooked, for instance: -the existence of rape in marriage; - differential poverty levels within families (the way income, expenditure & consumption patterns within households vary by gender – and inevitably

to women's detriment); and - different time use by men & women that reflect time-consuming care work. Clearly there is a role for GS/FR that will lead to policymaking.

Having laid out the possibilities for gender studies to impact on problem discovery and policy design, let us also reflect on the missed opportunities. Has GS/FR failed the policy community in this task? For instance in Spain, it is undeniable that the major issue of violence against women was discovered, and the policy response designed, *without* the intervention of gender studies scholars. Furthermore, to this day, there is still little research on women's poverty. And little is known about the women's vote, despite its crucial significance for the Left-wing parties. Even in the area of labour market studies, of which there are many, there is little research about women's access to redress when labour laws are flouted and transgressed by managers, employers or other employees. Too little is known in Spain, in far as my research experience shows, about how far women workers can use the law and the labour courts, to enforce equal opportunity and anti-discrimination law – an issue that is vital given the extensive legal protection that female employees are supposed to 'enjoy'.

This raises another important area of reflection: Should GS/FR have more of a social conscience? Should it be more politically engaged? The answer to this is not as obvious as it seems, i.e. yes. Sometimes, research can kill. Some feminist policies may not very popular with the electorate, even with women. For instance, 'gender parity' representation, 50/50 men and women on electoral lists, has hardly been submitted to the test of

popularity. And the answers obtained in an opinion survey, would, arguably, depend very much on its methodological approach and the design of the questionnaire. It would be fairly easy to predict that a certain type of survey design would conclude that the major feminist policy of gender parity for parliament is unpopular with women.

In this context, the mission statement of the gender studies institute of Madrid Autonomous University mentioned earlier is very significant: to teach, and to transmit through the mainstreaming of feminist methodologies, the tools with which future researchers will be able to conduct research that avoids, at the very least, the best known forms of gender biases.

These reflections on the problems facing Gender Studies, inspired by the case of Spain arise to some extent from the research undertaken by myself, Celia Valiente and Christine Cousins (who has unfortunately not been able to enjoy the fruits of her labour, since she sadly died very soon after publication of *Gendering Spanish Democracy*). In brief, we encountered a major set of conceptual problems to setting up the analysis. Researchers are trained in mainly one academic discipline. When turning their attention to studying women, they gravitate towards the field of their discipline. But the systemic discrimination or exclusion experienced everyday by women everywhere do not map neatly onto academic disciplines. It is thus particularly difficult to assess the position of women in one country. I say this despite the well-known fact that many books on Women in country X or Y have been produced. But a series of chapters on

women in work, education, politics, do not really add up to an integrated, holistic picture. What Celia, Christine and I realised was necessary and desirable, was to treat the particular polity as a multifaceted gendered system in which the facets could be women-friendly, or women-unfriendly, in the way they functioned and connected to each other. Thus the partnering and reproductive (family) system, the employment system, social security system, the reconciliation systems for work and family care, the education, the health, the legal rights system, and the political representation system can be identified as key facets that work together and independently to produce a gender regime that can be unique to one country and concluded that in Spain there are marked disparities between how well each facet of the gender system functions for women. Recently, there has been some interesting research published on gender regimes (e.g. Walby 2004)

Our surprising conclusion was that the representation system, referring to women citizens' formal political representation and also to real policy advocacy, functioned better than other facets, such as the social security system. This conclusion was in marked contrast to old welfare states and the Nordic states in particular where women's advances have come on the basis of a welfare state constructed somewhere between 1930s and 1970s; and also to other countries where women entering the labour market and obtaining an independent income has been seen as the platform on which they have been able to strengthen their position of power and their social and political voices. In Spain, by contrast, women's labour market position remains relatively weak.

We need, therefore, more integrated gender studies, in which disciplinary boundaries are transcended and tools for crossing disciplines become readily available, in order that the task of apprehending the totality of gendered systems and gender regimes becomes easier for researchers who are aiming to be more useful to policymakers.

Lastly, a brief reflection about the impact of the Spanish women's movement, as opposed to gender studies/feminist research, on policy. One should note here the invaluable advances in methodology made by the RNGS Research Network on Gender, Politics, and the State founded by Amy Mazur (see <http://libarts.wsu.edu/polisci/rngs/>) on the study of the interactions and relations between governments and women's movements. In particular, Mazur (2001) advances a rigorous methodology for measuring the influence of women's policy advocates on decision-makers in public agencies, developed by the RNGS network. Without the aid of such rigorous research, one can venture only the odd hypothesis. Most gender policies arose as a result of voiced protest and semi-researched formulations from activist within the Spanish women's movements and in lived experiences of a variety of categories of women (e.g.. Separated women; or mothers with illegitimate children, etc), in the context where background influences included the international women's movements, including those linked to parties such as the *Socialist International Women*, and that part of the European women's movement that has gained a foothold in circles close to DG V of the Commission of the EU. Nonetheless this changed over time, and is therefore too complex to summarise here.

Therefore I conclude on the proposition that I mentioned at the start, namely that from the perspective of the Spanish case, the connection between gender studies and policy is heavily mediated by the women's movements, by the activists, by legal practitioners, and even by the frontline women's rights workers who were offering services to alleviate already identified problems.

This conclusion leaves gender studies quite a lot to think about!

To end on a positive note, I am quite impressed by the way scholars are responding currently in Spain to the challenge of multicultural issues**, such as immigration, islamophobia, discrimination and cultural stereotyping. This is an area where research can still be ahead of policymaking, and lead to innovative approaches. Hopefully, it will.

**For instance 'women and Islam' in Spain has been problematized by scholars as an area of interest, with two conferences taking place in the first half of 2006 without being driven or commissioned by policymakers, such as the Fundación Pablo Iglesias's April 2006 conference on *The Other's View: mixed Cultures and Diversity* (In Memory of Edward Said), and the IUEM (Women's Studies Institute of the Autonomous University of Madrid) 18-19 June Conference where many papers reflect a concern with multicultural issues.

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Interviews

María Teresa Gallego Méndez, Profesora Titular, Departamento de Ciencias Políticas, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (see http://portal.uam.es/portal/page?_pageid=35,49085&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL)

Further Reading:

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