



The challenge of feminist geography

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Germany

It is in Germany that feminist geography is probably best established. During the 1980s there have been several workshops on feminist geography at the nationwide meetings of geography students. In 1983 and 1987, for example, at the bi-annual meetings of the Central Association of German Geographers, students organised discussion meetings about the current status of feminist geography in the German-speaking countries. Apart from the important activity of individuals (for example Maggi Rossler (1985) who, together with Ann-François Gilbert, introduced feminist geography into German geography) there is an active student's working group in Frankfurt [1].

In connection with a special programme of the Federal Government to promote Women's Studies, geography students in Frankfurt began, in 1985, to establish a feminist geography course in their department. Some lecturers stated their readiness to advance the initiatives of the students, and in winter 1986, at the suggestion of the students, two women lecturers offered a seminar course of feminist geography covering mainly theoretical issues. The students then formed a feminist geography working group to co-ordinate their activities. In winter 1987 another seminar course took place with more emphasis on empirical studies such as women's mobility and women's fear of crime in certain areas of Frankfurt. Unfortunately, this course was terminated after half a year because of cuts in the budget for women's studies in higher education. But this does not signal the end for feminist geography in Germany. As the recent publication of the first feminist geography newsletter testifies, there is a small, but dedicated, group of German feminist geographers who are now establishing links with groups in other countries. And the first fruit of this collaboration is to be a joint Anglo-German meeting in London in February 1989.

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NOTE

[1] I would like to thank Monica Treske for the information about the situation in Frankfurt.

(IN SEARCH OF) FEMINIST GEOGRAPHY IN GREECE

From Dina Vaiou, National Technical University, Athens

In trying to understand the state and prospects of feminist geography within higher education in Greece one has to keep in mind that geography is not taught at degree or higher degree level. Geographers who teach in higher education or work in research institutions or in public administration have studied overseas, usually taking geography as a postgraduate degree. Consequently, areas of research and teaching that in many countries take place in geography departments, in Greece

form part of the curriculum of other academic disciplines. (The same is true of professional practice outside universities.) For example, physical geography, the only kind of geography taught in primary and secondary education, is taught as a component of natural sciences degrees. Economic geography is taught in departments of economics in courses focusing on regional economics, location theory or rural development. Departments of urban and regional planning that are part of the schools of architecture offer introductory courses in human geography and a variety of courses in urban and regional analysis, development and planning [1]. There is, however, one department of geography in the school of Surveying and Rural Development of the National Technical University in Athens. Its emphasis is on quantitative geography and urban modelling, with human geography being offered only as an optional introductory course. Within such scattered courses, geographical studies remain marginalised. The focus of research and, more so, the emphasis within teaching have to be adapted to the requirements of the degree(s) offered by the school in question, rather than contributing to the development of geography as a synthetic discipline.

In this context feminist geography, or rather a feminist approach to spatial analysis, is even more marginal, if not non-existent. What could form part of such an approach is based on the two schools of architecture, in the National Technical University of Athens and in the University of Thessaloniki. In Thessaloniki one optional course has been offered since 1986 and is entitled 'Gender as a parameter of spatial organisation'. It is taught by two female members of staff and taken by both female and male students. In Athens, a feminist approach is associated with a course that guides female students on their individual research projects which they have to do as part of their degree. Two female members of staff have been responsible, since 1985, for this course, the emphasis of which is on housing and urban development, since these topics can be easily related to the curriculum of the school.

Teaching in both cases is based on small groups of students working on specific projects. Students approach such themes as the shifting boundaries between public and private activities and spaces, the separation between production and reproduction and its impact on gender relations and the organisation of space in everyday life (see, for example, Vaiou & Hadjimichalis, 1987; Lada, 1984; Vaiou, 1987a, b; Vrychea, 1988). Teaching through projects, which is fairly common in schools of architecture, offers the opportunity for close contact between students and teachers. Theoretical concerns and field-work research experience, for example, are addressed in group discussions. We have found that this setting can help students to refine their methodologies and reach a better understanding of the questions being studied.

These limited attempts to introduce a feminist perspective are generally thought of, by male members of staff and students, as 'irrelevant' or 'less scientific', with concomitant effects on the evaluation of the work of both the students and staff involved. It takes commitment on the part of the staff to start a course in a hostile environment where it is not uncommon for proposals for such courses to be rejected by the school assembly as unrelated to the degree. It also takes much commitment on the part of students whose projects are invariably judged more strictly than the average project. In such circumstances, even when courses and projects do take off, they have to start every time by establishing the legitimacy of the subject and the approach. They also have to cope with the scarcity of resources and the lack of teaching material in Greek.

In view of such difficulties, the focus at present is to publicise and promote the feminist approach in spatial analysis through professional journals and meetings. It is hoped that this will create pressure, both from outside universities and within individual schools or departments, to introduce new courses in curricula that are currently being revised. Whether such parallel activities will enable feminist geography to be firmly established as an area of research and teaching in the male-dominated Greek university is an open question, and one that is closely related to the development of geographical studies in more general terms. But it is not only within geography that the future of feminist geography will be determined. A feminist approach inevitably questions the relevance of established academic divisions for studying the multi-faceted experience of women in society and space. New areas of research and methods of teaching and learning are not exclusive to human geography, sociology or planning. Efforts are therefore being made to break through departmental barriers and promote joint teaching and research [2]. Unfortunately, the prospect of a cross-disciplinary feminist project, in which geography would play an integral part, is at present undermined by a lack of resources and institutional coverage, as well as by the pressure on higher education to be directly marketable, and it is further inhibited by a general recession of feminist initiatives within academia.

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NOTES

- [1] School refers to academic units that offer degrees. A department is a research and teaching unit that is part of a school but does not have a separate degree.
- [2] The most organised such effort is the Women's Studies Group of the University of Thessaloniki, that has offered campus-wide free courses since 1984. However, its status in relation to the schools and departments of the university still remains unclear.

FEMINIST GEOGRAPHY IN KOREA

From Hae Un Rii, Dongguk University, Seoul

Research on women by Korean academics is well established and has largely focused on both the history and current problems of women. The first university course in women's studies appeared as an option in general education in 1977 and at present over 20 universities and colleges offer women's studies as an optional or required course for general education. In addition the Korean Association of Women's Studies was founded in 1985, and the *Journal of Korean Women's Studies* (Han'guk Yosonghak) is published annually by the Association.

In most universities and colleges, women's studies is taught by team teaching from an interdisciplinary perspective including history, law, education, home economics, philosophy, religion, sociology and anthropology. Geography, however, has not yet been involved both because scholars from other fields did not understand the relevance of feminist geography and because many geographers themselves were not aware of feminist geography. Feminist geography in Korea was