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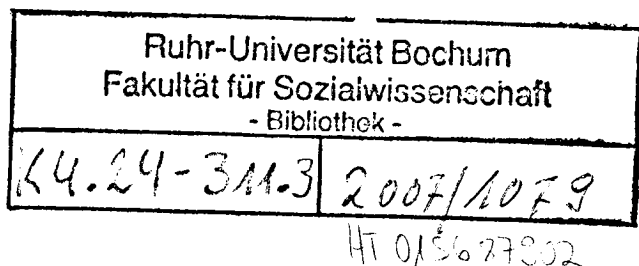
A Canon of Our Own?

Kanonkritik und Kanonbildung in den
Gender Studies

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ZWISCHENRAUM

VERHANDELTER RAUM

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Canons and Contexts: Beyond fragmentation[1]

Thus standpoint theories argue that it is certainly the case that each group's social situating enables and sets limits on what it can know. However, the critically unexamined dominant ones tend to be more limiting than others in this respect are. What makes these social locations more limiting is their inability to generate – indeed, their interests in avoiding, devaluing, silencing – the most critical questions about the dominant conceptual frameworks. (Harding 1998:151)

Introduction

This paper is part of a larger research where I am addressing some of the issues of the interconnectedness between theory, research and policy in the domain of gender studies at the semi-periphery of Europe. ("Gender Studies" here refers mainly to women's studies, but includes also studies of masculinities, as well as gay and lesbian studies and queer theory.) I am exploring how the knowledge about gender issues has been created at the semi-periphery, and how policies related to the gender equality and/or gender mainstreaming are being articulated and implemented. The focus is on distortions coming from multiple "translations," on "cacophony" created by multiple agents of knowledge production, as well as on discrepancies, even contrasts, between the "theory" and the "reality" of the semi-periphery. This chaotic condition could be heuristically rewarding, and feminist theory and epistemology could actually benefit from it, if they were capable of reflecting and theorizing upon it.

My overall hypothesis for this broader research is that while research on gender was often, intentionally or not, demonstrating a discrepancy between "Western theories" and "Eastern realities," policy making was heavily relying on "globalized," "internationalized" gender policies, often

not context-sensitive. Globalized policies (embodied in different UN and EU agents) are being designed as "translations of translations," "translations" of "Western theories" which integrate, more or less, legacies of postcolonial criticism into the global environment, and then, through another "translation" of "globalized policies," into the local contexts of semi-peripheries. In both "translations" semi-peripheral characteristics of gender regimes, and specific contextual forces which shape them, stayed invisible, whether an object of "knowledge," or an object of "policy" (EU or UN). Semi-periphery is partially exposed to the policies similar to the center, and partially to those which are meant to improve the position of women in the developing countries, and most often to both simultaneously. All those "translations," together with the lack of con-textualized knowledges, and extreme multiplicity of knowledge agents and "gender stakeholders" in the "transitional" societies, resulted in multiple distortions, but these distortions, if reflected, could be a source of newknowledge and empowerment.

Thus, my starting epistemic argument in this text is that the semi-periphery has important specificities, resulting exactly from the position between the center and the periphery, and that those are being reflected in the social and cultural construction of the specific gender regimes. Consequently, there is a need for well contextualized knowledges and carefully designed policies in favor of gender equality. It is not possible, and often it is counterproductive, to ignore specificities of gender regimes at the semi-periphery, either by assuming that those societies are similar to the center, or by assuming that they are similar to the "developing" countries, or even worse, by assuming that the knowledge about gender that has been generated either by the center ("The Theory") (Stanley and Wise 2000) or by the periphery (post-colonial theory) is adequately "covering" epistemic, scientific, or political concerns of feminist scholars from the semi-periphery. Although there are many similarities along the continuum center – semi-periphery – periphery, there are also important structural, historical, cultural differences, as well as different contingencies which justify the validity of contextual knowledge coming from the semi-periphery. The creation of knowledge from the contexts of semi-peripheral societies is congruent with the very foundation of feminist epistemology.

From this perspective, the "East-West feminist debate" is seen in the light of continuous efforts by feminists of the semi-periphery, demanding recognition for the essential structural, social, and cultural differences of their societies which shape gender regimes and delineate possibilities for political changes, while searching for an innovative and creative "trans-

lation" of the "Western theories" into the "Eastern realities." But it is exactly because of the position of the semi-periphery in the world knowledge market, including gender studies, that theoretical contributions of gender scholars from the semi-periphery have not been adequately integrated or recognized. In this paper I will not deal with the actual characteristics of different contexts at the semi-periphery, nor with the specific contributions of gender scholars; instead, I will try to establish clear arguments in favor of contextual knowledge.

Epistemic positioning: void, muteness, numbness

I am a woman from the semi-periphery, from former Yugoslavia and from the Balkans. Regardless of how much these claims may seem "essentialist," I can prove "empirically," as a sociologist, not only through my own experience, but through the experiences of many others, that my/our life/lives has/have been shaped mostly by those social facts. This is, without any doubt, what makes me epistemologically devoted to the "essentialism" and this is why I can not easily claim that those facts are not relevant, or that I am "beyond" those identities. No matter how hard I have tried to escape "essentialization" of my own life, it was always working against me. It is not simply to declare that you do not accept "essentialism" to "cancel" it; it still works through different structures of power and different sets of inclusions and exclusions. Therefore, I need to claim my status of the Other, because only by doing so I can empower myself through the understanding of my own difference and through the very act of knowing by accomplishing that understanding. And only then I can make yet another step, which is to connect with other Others. If in the name of "de-essentialization" my Otherness is denied, which is so vividly and tangibly present in my everyday life, I am simply silenced. If my Otherness is denied, my agency is also denied and, consequently, my power to make meaningful knowledge is denied as well.

Moreover, in years I have been feeling "victimized" by inadequate know-ledge, both by our internal intellectual elite which was legitimizing the wars, as well as by those who claimed that wars in former Yugoslavia were "ethnic," and even "religious" wars, or those who were bombing civilians at different occasions, and whose immoral and ruthless decisions were always backed up by some kind of "knowledge." It was with the help of the "knowers" that certain constructions were made and still remain to-

day, because in the meantime, they have been successfully materialized in concrete social, political and economic structures (Campbell 1998). The truth is that that "knowledge" was not only found in books, but it actually backed up many disastrous political and military actions. I still feel too often that political, economic and social engineering, to which my country has been exposed, internally and externally, is based on inadequate knowledge and arrogant ignorance. Further on, globalization process with rigid prescriptions of what needs to be done so that we can "all live happily ever after" is also backed up by some kind of "knowledge" (Stiglitz 2003).

I have built up my sensitivity to "knowledge" because in my own intellectual development I could actually see how the connection of social reality of former-Yugoslav society which previously was a decently developed European industrial society, was "distancing" from "theory," and how "Western" knowledge was becoming misleading and even counterproductive for the adequate comprehension of the disastrous wars. As most of the other former-Yugoslav intellectuals I had an open mind about "Western" know-ledge, I gained decent "Western"-style knowledge in my regular education and I upgraded it with a feminist scholarship for my Ph.D. thesis already in the 80s. Although I was an autodidact in those times, working virtually without any mentorship, I did not have any problems at the University to defend my basically feminist thesis – successfully, and to be professionally promoted. Neither had I any difficulties to publish my findings locally and internationally, nor had I any difficulties to be effectively integrated into the local feminist circles in Belgrade with lecturing and concrete political and educational initiatives. But, when I wanted to rely on that knowledge to understand what was going on in former Yugoslavia after the 90s, it was simply "not working." I was faced with an "epistemic void" (Ivekovic 1993). Normally acceptable paradigms in the 80s became inappropriate in the 90s (Blagojevic 1996). This was as much the truth for sociology, as it was for women's studies (Blagojevic, Duhacek, Lukic 1994).

"Epistemic void" here implies a widely shared feeling of inadequacy of theories coming from the center to actually deal with many of the problems of post-communist societies, including the ones related to the violent dissolution of former Yugoslavia. And, to be quite clear, it was not because of our lack of knowledge of "The Theory," but because all those "theories" were somehow distorting what we already knew about the social reality we lived in. Most of the theories could relate to some limited aspects of that reality, but if extended they would collapse under the burden of evidence.

"Epistemic void" means an absence of canons, a fragility of theories and concepts faced with lived reality. It could and usually does result in silence, silence of preparation, digestion, articulation of "something" which could eventually become some new paradigm. But this "something" has a meaning only if it is shared by the wider epistemic community. The collapse of our former-Yugoslav society also meant, in many ways, the collapse of our epistemic communities.

The next point of my epistemic departure is the feeling of "muteness". Because I too often encountered situations in which I was asked to give my opinion on what was going on in former Yugoslavia or in post-communist societies (with women, usually) to "outsiders," I often felt like I was listened to, but not really heard. To deal with the frustrating communication I made up a slogan which became almost a kind of mantra, which I was repeating to myself for years to help me cope with the overwhelming feeling of "isolation-through-communication." The slogan was: "*As long as you are deaf I am mute*." Over time, I learned that the "burden of proof" is on my side, and that I need to situate carefully "the other side," to locate her/him, so that I could frame my own communication according to the needs and openness of the other side. (Part of the problem of communication could lie in the increased invisibility of the problems of the semiperiphery due to the prevailing positive interpretation of the "transition.") Needless to say, it was a one way effort. And, also, it never really worked. Throughout my very intense career, I many times faced the comment that what I am saying is "too complex." Now I understand that it was not really the "complexity" as such, but rather the "system" which I was trying to define within the scope of contextual know-ledge. If the starting point is an already established theoretical system, it is fairly simple to take a part out and elaborate on it, theoretically or empirically. But when the starting point is the whole set of interrelated facts which are generalized to the level of "system," it demands a major effort from the audience to get involved in it. This issue is also closely connected to the issue of canons. If someone moves within the canon, many things are self-explanatory and there is an epistemic community which is easily following one's contributions related to the canon. Even if someone clearly moves beyond the particular canon, the canon is still there and makes one's work intelligible. But if someone moves *beyond – beyond the canon*, if s/he speaks from a theoretically-non-definable location, such as concrete context, or even worse, if s/he additionally employs multi- and inter- disciplinary approaches such as gender studies, the problem amounts to the complete risk of both self-exclusion

and exclusion. Is this risk worth taking? My answer is "yes," and science history is clearly supporting outsiders' knowledge contributions. My trial to communicate some kind of "contextual knowledge" would always be limited, distorted or rejected. The effort to communicate this "contextual knowledge" is in fact very different from the one of communicating "local examples" through dominant theories, concepts and approaches. The difference comes from what you put into the center: do you put dominant theory into the center and then use "local examples," or you put "contextual knowledge" into the center and then try to theorize upon that.

The feeling of "muteness" has been reinforced by certain types of questions, comments, or by the way how my statements were integrated into the dominant paradigms. The comments on what I considered to be the contextual knowledge would often take one of the following directions: it is déjà-vu in "Western" societies (the same thing exists here and here, or it is "nothing new"); it is already explored by post-colonial theory; it is irrelevant for our present day "theoretical debates" (in the "West"). The questions usually were autistic, often treating the "Western" situation as a model, a norm, more "progressive" in every aspect, and the "Eastern" as an exception, a deviation, or a previous phase in inevitable "modernization." Although my writing would heavily rely on local sources, I was asked to "add theory" which I understood more as a kind of ritual of submission than a truly academic requirement, and which I would regularly refuse. So, even if I would be heard, I was actually misheard. (I am using "I" to emphasize, narratize and in a way dramatize my own experience, but I believe it is an experience widely shared by many Eastern scholars, not so openly spoken about, exactly because of the fear of exclusion.) These encounters too often confirmed that the center is self-absorbed, self-referential and self-reproducing. These traits actually invoke "muteness," they create silence. So, at the end, what is really important is hardly heard.

While "muteness" is a concept which I use to denote communication with the "outsiders," those who are unfamiliar with the context I come from and to whom I was failing to communicate contextual knowledge, I use the concept of "numbness" to explain the problem of communication towards the "inside," towards "the context." "Numbness" comes as a consequence of an absence, weakness, or low influence of an epistemic community, a community of shared theoretical approaches, a shared understanding of what is going on in a social reality and how the problems should be addressed. This is no less a problem than the problem of "muteness." Both of them, "muteness" and "numbness," create a very isolated position for a

gender scholar at the semi-periphery. The resulting situation is that for her/him it is in fact much easier to "listen" than to "speak," much easier to "understand," than to "create" knowledge (paradigms, concepts, theories, ideas, canons). Outside the epistemic community it is almost impossible to create knowledge, because *knowledge is communication*, it is a *discursive practice*.

However, I realized that "numbness" and "muteness" were/are widely shared. It was becoming clear to me that what seemed to be the absence of knowledge and self-understanding was/is actually invisible knowledge, or, sometimes, latent, tacit knowledge. That knowledge was more or less articulated, more or less communicated, more or less substantiated, more or less disseminated, but basically it was fragmented, out of the dominant knowledge systems, subversive, marginal, powerless, often practical, isolated, knowledge of the outsiders within the semi-periphery. *That knowledge was the knowledge of the semi-periphery about itself.* In comparison to other knowledges about the semi-periphery (political sciences, economy), knowledge in the domain of gender studies stayed out of the mainstream, and it kept and still keeps critical distance towards the dominant paradigms, at the center and at the semi-periphery. It resists to become instrumentalized for the globalization process, at least more than other "knowledges."

On a larger scale "muteness" of gender studies at the semi-periphery is a result of the exclusion based on the center/semi-periphery relationship, while "numbness" is a result of non-existence or weakness or powerlessness of the epistemic communities at the semi-periphery itself, which reflects the marginal position of both gender studies and women-scientists in male dominated and androcentric knowledge hierarchies. At the same time, non-integration is a powerful place for resistance, no less important now than in the nineties.

Finally, I would like to add a few notes on the methodology I apply in the research project which is the framework for this text. I use a kind of "double strategy" –deconstruction and reconstruction (Slavova 2001). Deconstruction here is not taken in a strict sense as something which connects exclusively to deconstructivist approach, but has wider meaning, implying the deconstruction of theory-based knowledge facing the challenges of research-based knowledge as a certain kind of representation of societal reality. This is a social science perspective. I incline to balance between "constructivism" and "social realism." At this stage of my research I actually recollect and re-visit many of the sources I collected in the last fifteen

years. I also use my own experiences and insider's perspective extensively. I am re-reading old collections on the topic and I try to track down theoretical background of the research performed in the "East," or by "Easterners," and their major findings. I also employ a kind of ethnographic and participant-observer research, especially related to my own direct involvement in policy making.

Why semi-periphery?

Semi-periphery is a useful concept both for the epistemology of gender studies, as well as for the sociology of science applied to gender studies; furthermore, it can connect both of them through the standpoint theory. I use the concept rather loosely, mostly, but not exclusively, to denote different post-communist societies at the semi-periphery of Europe. By describing those societies, I go beyond geography, and I refer to their distinctive structural social, economic, and cultural qualities closely connected to their positioning between the center and the periphery, which makes them more similar than different among themselves. Semi-periphery is not exclusively about geography, but location cannot be ignored. I use this concept as a "strategic" concept, following Harding's idea that some categories are not meant to "name reality," but "rather as ways of gaining a fresh perspective" (Harding 1998:21), and I use it to address the issues of power differentials in reality and in the know-ledge production of that reality. I recognize that there are other semi-peripheral societies, as well as that there are semi-peripheral epistemic communities in the core societies. So I use the term in its double meaning: to denote the relation between the societies, on the global scale, but also between epistemic communities, and often both at the same time. The concept itself could be multilayered, and different levels of "semi-peripherality" could be identified either in different societies, or within the same society. It could cover the issue of gradual differences and inner hierarchies within the core countries, or the issue of metropolization or regional hierarchies.

The concept of semi-periphery originates from the world system theory, and it is based on a critique of simplified dichotomy of center-periphery. When different parts of Europe are qualified as "semi-periphery" meaning is attributed to the location. This is important for my argument: that knowledge about gender at the semi-periphery has developed in different manners and in different forms from the knowledge in the center, and that it

has, necessarily, developed in relation to "Western" theories. (I will, throughout this paper, use the term "theory" because it implies hierarchy which I want to expose to critical analysis, while at the same time the concept of "discourse" would disguise that hierarchy.) This relation is not simple and non-ambivalent. Gender knowledge at the semi-periphery sometimes was upgrading those theories, sometimes it was subverting them, sometimes it was ignoring them, and sometimes it used them as a kind of ritual to prove "belonging" to the gender communities of scholars, or to attribute "professionalism" to the existing knowledge of the practitioners in the domain of gender studies. As recently observed by Weiner, "Central and Eastern European social scientists discoursevly establish an interpretative distance from the Western rendition of "gender-in-(economy)-transition" by invoking the historical, cultural and social differences" (Weiner 2004).

The essence of semi-periphery is that it is integrated into the world system, that it is related to both center and periphery, and that is "in-between." This is not to say that its own development is strictly dependent on the center. As recently shown by Roncevic, the semi-periphery is also differentiated itself, and those differences are based on the division of labor and the geographical positioning of the country. Different countries at the semi-periphery have different capacities for development. They have different levels of "cognitive mobilization," meaning that they attribute different relevance to "knowledge" as such (Roncevic 2002). Although the relevance of similarities and differences depends on the choice of criteria and aims of the analysis as well as of the inherent values, the important aspect for my analysis here is that much of the semi-periphery is in the stage of transition, deep and over embracing societal change. It is "in-between" the structures. Another essential characteristic of the semi-periphery is that it is exposed to forces of both development and de-development, evolution and devolution. Semi-periphery is deeply fragmented and consists of different diachronic elements (Blagojevic 2004). But also, it is not at a developmental stage, rather it is a location where different systems and historical times are at work simultaneously (Blagojevic 2004).

In the global knowledge system and in the global knowledge market the semi-periphery has a distinctive position. According to Arrighi (1985), the relevant distinction is not the one between the production of industrial versus primary goods, but between "intellectual" activities (i.e. those that involve strategic decision-making, control and administration, R&D, etc.)

and "executive" activities. Accordingly, knowledge production at the center is accompanied by supplementary activities at the semi-periphery (Blagojevic 2004). Moreover, the semi-periphery is exposed to social, economic and political engineering on two levels (Blagojevic 2004).

For the analyses of gender studies in East and Central Europe, or in post-communist societies, the concept of semi-periphery is useful because it can relate to the extreme multiplicity of knowledge agents and "gender stakeholders." Knowledge production about gender issues at the semi-periphery goes far beyond the academic community. Knowledge agents in the domain of gender studies are: women's NGOs, local and international scholars, local and international researchers, international organizations (UN, UNDP, UNIFEM), EU bureaucrats and femocrats, local bureaucrats, local and international women politicians, local and international experts, the media, different networks, "theorists" who influence without being physically present, knowledge "transmitters" as local educators, etc. Local gender communities are usually very heterogenic, action oriented, under the pressure of urgency, and usually, but not always, small. There is an overwhelming climate of high pressure to "change things." There is an overall lack of time to make some coherent knowledge systems which would frame the action or the policy. Multiple knowledge agents make "cacophony" in the domain of gender studies, which profoundly destabilizes local "knowers" and "know-ledge hierarchies" at the semi-periphery and creates multiple distortions. The discursive field of gender knowledge is very different from the situation where there were different chronological layers: movement, research, theory, and policy were building the field sequentially. This is not to say that they were/are not overlapping, but still the change was happening in a longer period of time and in sequences, while at the semi-periphery everything is happening "at once."

Another reason why semi-periphery is a useful conceptual tool is because it can be connected to specific gender regimes. The specificity does not come primarily from the fact that those were post-communist societies, but rather that a semi-peripheral position creates specific types of societies (diachronic, fragmented), with the inclination to become part of the center and to resist the center at the same time. Semi-peripheral patriarchies strongly mobilize women's resources "to catch up" with the center. This is why women's resources are used intensively both in the private and in the public domain, together with the "ideological fog of gender equality." This results in a strange amalgam of a "super woman": a strong,

sacrificial woman, who is "more than equal" (Blagojevic 2004, Enwise Report 2003).

The semi-periphery, additionally, in many ways has a different intellectual tradition which is reflected in a different scholarship, including gender scholarship (Wessely 1996, Petric 2005). Recently, Nannette Funk, for example, explored whether the feminist critique of Anglo-American feminists is applicable to Eastern and Central Europe and the former Soviet Union, and concluded that "under the conditions in this region, several Anglo American feminist criticisms of liberalism do not apply, while others have a very different meaning" (Funk 2004:695). Also, Funk argued that

> [liberal thought] did develop differently and exists in different theoretical, political, and historical contexts. In both pre and post socialism, liberal thought varies widely and differs from many of the classical and dominant forms of liberalism in Western Europe and the United States (Funk 2004:696).

Most of those differences still stay invisible and unrecognized because they do not fit into the dominant framework which is defined by the center. What is especially interesting from the epistemic point of view is that Eastern gender scholars face very contradictory challenges as consequences of these two different traditions.

Furthermore, the concept of semi-periphery is ideologically and politically reinforced, although by other names, in the very process of Enlargement. What is happening is a differentiation between "more or less" semi-peripheries, depending on the Enlargement process. Gradual exclusions and inclusions create an even higher fragmentation of the semi-periphery. The semi-periphery is exposed to unprecedented engineering which is fundamentally changing the life chances and every-day-life conditions of citizens on a daily basis. Gender differences and gendered strategies of survival are being reinforced by these inclusions/exclusions.

Finally, the semi-periphery is a very relevant concept for the exploration of the working and living conditions of scientists, including gender scientists. The recent Enwise Report is offering a comprehensive analysis of the situation, showing how much knowledge-making is dependant on the location of the institution and of the individual scientists. In many regards, differences between core and semi-periphery are larger than differences between the genders. On the other hand, gender differences have very similar patterns of exclusions and inclusions (Enwise Report 2003).

Although useful, the concept of semi-periphery should not be taken as fixed in any way. But the concept is "working" and it is working towards a better understanding of power relations behind the knowledge production in gender studies, as well as of better understanding of the differences of gender regimes in the "East" and the "West." Therefore, it allows for generalizations to a certain degree, and for possible politics of resistance in knowledge and through knowledge. It is certainly possible to transcend the differences based on location, but it is not possible if the semi-periphery and exclusions based on locations stay invisible.

Why contextual knowledges?

The concept of contextual knowledge is immanently linked with feminist epistemology. It does not mean that it is exclusively feminist, nor that feminist epistemology could be reduced to the problems of contextual influence on the creation and validation of knowledge. The role of contexts is an ongoing debate in general epistemology (deRose 2004). However, the role of contextual knowledge in feminist epistemology is connected to the standpoint theories, which are a major feminist contribution to epistemology. As Longino states, there is a danger of understanding standpoint epistemology as some kind of "metaphysical monism." Longino warns about the danger of feminist insistence, open or hidden, on the possibility of finding one veritable, unique, total and coherent description of the world, as a major obstacle to really introducing epistemic innovations into the epistemology. She believes that epistemic innovations within the feminist epistemology are basically inconsistent with this monism (Longino 2004).

Without going deeper into the epistemic debates, I would simply like to reaffirm the relevance of contextual knowledges for understanding the functioning of gender regimes at the semi-periphery. Semi-peripheral societies, such as post-communist societies, have different developmental paths which deeply influence gender regimes from macro to micro level. Different structural characteristics of the semi-periphery create different structural characteristics of their patriarchies.

Contextual knowledge connects well with standpoint epistemology, but it relates to the wider communities of semi-peripheral societies. It consists of a dense discursive field of knowledge, including tacit knowledge, within a certain epistemic community. In fact, contextual knowledge relies on

epistemic and political community; it emerges from the dominant concerns of those communities. It is problem-oriented, more than theory-oriented. It defines the link between theory and policy, and it gives meaning to "The Theory" within a context. It is neither a-theoretical or anti-theoretical. It is close to both "grounded theory" and "middle range theory," but cannot be reduced to either one of them because it is more complex, more multi-disciplinary, more multi-theoretical and dealing with wider, complex contexts. Contextual knowledge has theoretical statements formulated in an inductive manner. It usually connects abstract theories from the core with generalizations made inductively. In the very connection there is innovation. However, this innovation is often overlooked, simply because it can destabilize power hierarchies. The center is usually oriented towards "approval" or "disapproval" of "The Theory" and not towards the large field of relativization of "The Theory," which contextual knowledge necessarily creates. In a way, contextual knowledge does not reject theory as much as it inserts uncertainty into it, the kind of uncertainty to which the semi-periphery is "normally" exposed and subjected itself.

If generalizations, such as "The Theory," are very abstract, they are by their nature "applicable" throughout different contexts. They come close to a situation best described as "theory about everything, theory about anything." Within gender studies, theories are important because, as canons, they provide common ground for the intra-disciplinary communication, they enable the constitution of a discipline, they make a certain field of reality intelligible, they provide the basis for educational and research organization, as well as for professionalization. They enable the exclusion of the "laymen" or "laywomen" by defining some hermeneutic knowledge which serves as a "professional secret" and which establishes criteria for exclusion/inclusion. Regardless of how much this is in line with the political project of women/gender studies, from the epistemological perspective no theory can subsume contextual knowledge. Contextual knowledges in their theoretical part are not reducible to "The Theory," nor can "The Theory," with the addition of data, facts and figures, substitute contextual knowledge. Disciplinary knowledge in gender studies, in other words, needs to go beyond canons and support contextual knowledge as an epistemic and political necessity, not as a concrete factual contribution.

Contextual knowledge is multidisciplinary knowledge, and it combines different theoretical approaches, dominant in different disciplines. It necessarily uses both theories and concepts in a loose manner, exactly because it often combines them, and it is usually distancing itself from them,

exploring their changeable meanings in different contexts. Contextual knowledge gives to different theoretical frameworks local meanings and political relevance, and it is immanently changeable. (Similarly to semi-periphery to which it refers!) It combines different sources, sometimes in a chaotic and non-systematic way. The urgency to create knowledge at the semi-periphery about the semi-periphery itself, together with the lack of resources, often results in intuitive "leaps" more than systematic, substantiated knowledge. Contextual know-ledge relies on: common knowledge, local experience, local research, statistics, historical accounts, narratives, memories, oral histories, intellectual and academic traditions. It relies on tacit knowledge within the community, as well as on self-reflection of that community. It is not ethnocentric knowledge, at least not within gender studies, and it insists on the relatedness of core and semi-periphery.

Much of the fragmented knowledge from the semi-periphery has not been adequately integrated. This resembles the situation of Fukujama's "end of history." Who has the right to declare knowledge authority, and the "ending of the theory"? Who has the right to say what is theory and what is not, or to define hierarchies based on "more or less of a theory"? Who has the right to define that "there is nothing new," that everything is a repetition, a "déjà-vu" or that it is "already known"? Are "Western" feminist scholars reflecting on their own positioning and the power hierarchies they necessarily belong to, when they feel competent to state, openly or covertly, that there is already "The Theory" and that „outsiders" should not "bother" with anything else but using it and adding up examples? And the other way round: Are feminist scholars from the semi-periphery really applying feminist epistemology when they do not go beyond "The Theory"?

From the beginning of the 90s, it has been persistently very difficult to define a common theoretical ground which needed to emerge from different fragments, common knowledge, tacit knowledge, memory, research, historical evidence. Feminists from the semi-periphery were involved in the "international debates" before they were ready, before this articulation could take place. The way how many of them were framing their discomfort with the "wrong knowledge" they were exposed to, was both naive and innocent (Wöhrer 2004). They simply did not have the time or power to produce scientific evidence to "prove" their discomfort with "the wrong knowledge."

Conclusion

Knowledge making at the semi-periphery in the field of gender studies is profoundly different from that process in the center. It is exactly through the unsuccessful "translation" of "Western" theories into "Eastern realities" that new, innovative, creative, inspiring knowledge is being created. The semi-periphery is inclining to create a different knowledge, which often can be described as a contextual knowledge. It is the knowledge that semi-periphery creates about itself. It could be neither replaced, nor subsumed by "The Theory." The innovativeness of that knowledge should be evaluated in line with the feminist critique of the dominant criteria of "scientific excellence" (Brouns 2004). Contextual knowledge resolves the problems of void, muteness and numbness of an isolated (female) gender scholar in the midst of a structural collapse during "transition." They provide different, but never-theless theoretical, discursive and political ground for communication. Contextual knowledge builds on growing transnational communities of gender scholars, those who feel need to connect "Theory" with "Reality," who transcend "East"/"West" hierarchies in their lives and in their research and get sensitized for them through their own lived experiences. These transnational gender scholars understand economic and political hierarchies behind the knowledge hierarchies well. The very horizontality of contextual knowledge is, I believe, what defends epistemic and political foundations of gender studies. It is both necessary to create contextual knowledge, as it is to go beyond fragmentation, to reach an understanding of how globalization actually works through gender and location.

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