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Travel Notes and Reflections from the Netherlands

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Author

Lynne Musto, Jennifer

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IN THE FALL OF 2008, I visited Utrecht University, a research university situated in the small, albeit densely populated, country of the Netherlands. The express purpose of this trip was to engage in fieldwork activities and to collect interview data for my dissertation project entitled, “Institutionalizing Protection, Professionalizing Victim Management: Explorations of Multi-Professional Anti-Trafficking Work in the Netherlands.” The project explores Dutch state and non-governmental efforts to protect persons trafficked into the Netherlands for the purposes of forced labor. This reflection

piece comes on the heels of five months of data collection activities in which I engaged in archival research and conducted 16 semi-structured interviews with Dutch alien and vice police officers, police trainers and educators, social workers, care coordinators, embassy officials, and non-governmental advocates who work with persons identified as “trafficked,” most of whom are women.

In addition to completing the first phase of data collection activities for my dissertation, the trip also proved to be a homecoming of sorts, as I returned to the very university where six years earlier

I began my graduate studies as a Fulbright scholar at the Netherlands Research School of Women’s Studies (NOV) at Utrecht University. While my research agenda has since shifted from investigating the legal effects of the Dutch government’s legalization of prostitution to examining how state and NGO agents identify, manage, and protect trafficked persons, and although the NOV has been institutionally reconstituted into the Graduate Gender Programme (GGeP), the trip nevertheless provided me with the opportunity to reconnect and meet anew with feminist profes-

sors, colleagues, and students at Utrecht University. So too did my time abroad allow me to observe the exciting changes that are taking place in the field of Women’s and Gender Studies, both within the Netherlands and throughout the European Union. In this piece, I seek to briefly reflect upon my own experiences as a nomadic doctoral candidate roving between the University of California, Los Angeles and Utrecht University and discuss what I hope may be the beginning of future discussions about how best to bring UCLA graduate students and

faculty working on gender into the dynamic fold of inter-university, interdisciplinary, international exchange programs and opportunities.

During my Fulbright year in the Netherlands, I applied and was accepted to UCLA's PhD Program in Women's Studies. When I discovered that UCLA had both a Dutch Studies Program and a formalized, bilateral agreement with Utrecht University's Research Institute for History and Culture (OGC), of which the GGeP is affiliated, I immediately decided to pursue my doctoral studies at UCLA. Since beginning my graduate training at UCLA in 2003, I have had the opportunity to travel to the Netherlands on three separate occasions for a total of twelve months, thanks to the flexibility proffered through the bilateral agreement and through support from UCLA's Department of Women's Studies, Dutch Studies Program, and the Center For European and Eurasian Studies (CEES). As a visiting PhD student/researcher at

Utrecht University's GGeP, I have been able to conduct archival and predissertation research while also participating in numerous master classes and PhD seminars. I have likewise followed two intermediate Dutch language courses at the James Boswell Institute (JBI), and during my most recent trip in Fall 2008, I had the wonderful opportunity to co-teach the graduate seminar, "Feminist Toolbox: Feminist Theories & Methodologies," alongside GGeP Professor Gloria Wekker, who also happened to receive her PhD from UCLA in the Anthropology Department under the mentorship of Claudia Mitchell-Kernan. Professor Wekker's UCLA-Utrecht affiliations gave us the chance to discuss and compare our experiences and to assess the changes that have taken place at both institutions in regards to the development, institutionalization, and departmentalization of its respective women's and gender studies programs.

What became poignantly clear to me, through conversations with

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Gemma
Erasmus Mundus Master's Degree
in Women's and Gender Studies



Máster Erasmus Mundus

Máster Oficial Erasmus Mundus en Estudios de las Mujeres y de Género
Erasmus Mundus Master's Degree in Women's and Gender Studies



The GEMMA Erasmus Mundus Master's Degree in Women's and Gender Studies offers EU and non-EU students alike the opportunity to pursue a joint Master's Degree in at least two out of eight partner institutions, of which Utrecht University is a member.

Professor Wekker, GGeP colleagues, and students in my class, is that it is no longer theoretically sufficient to collapse or conjoin Euro-American feminist projects as one in the same, especially since countries throughout the European Union, particularly though not exclusively in the Netherlands, have developed feminist projects which are decidedly distinct from their U.S. counterparts. To my mind, the most poignant distinction between them rests in the primacy that European women's and gender studies programs have placed on mobility and the need to cultivate ongoing and active networks between and amongst European feminist scholars. Such efforts have been bolstered, for example, through the Advanced Thematic Network of European Women's Studies, hereafter referred to as ATHENA3, which is a forum that brings together feminist and gender scholars from over 80 institutes located in Europe, and which strives to "integrate and consolidate curriculum development, engage in

research on education, and foster collaboration between universities and civil societies" of its member institutions.¹ In addition to providing resources and promoting inter-European networks of knowledge transfer and exchange, ATHENA3 has helped cultivate other bilateral agreements and European cooperative schemas. One such program is the GEMMA Erasmus Mundus Master's Degree in Women's and Gender Studies, which offers EU and non-EU students alike the opportunity to pursue a joint Master's Degree in at least two out of eight partner institutions, of which Utrecht University is a member.² The GEMMA Master's Degree program thus institutionalizes mobility and situates the movement of students between institutions and across borders as part and parcel of the

1. For more information about ATHENA3, see http://www.athena3.org/index.php?option=com_frontpage&Itemid=1

2. For me information, see: <http://www.ugr.es/~gemma/index.php?section=programme&page=description>

interdisciplinary training of Women's and Gender studies scholars in a European context.

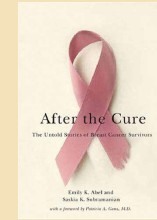
My experiences moving across educational boundaries have indeed proven invaluable and yet as the aforementioned examples demonstrate, are hardly exceptional and more often the rule in a European academic environment in which feminist knowledge production and interdisciplinarity are intimately bound to and informed by border crossing and its corollary epistemic effects. In a U.S. context, wherein calls to develop transnational feminist alliances tend to denote collaborations between feminists and gender scholars located in the Global South and North, I think it productive to re-consider and map how feminism is indeed being done and theorized differently in a European context and how U.S. feminists might engage in transnational collaborative projects with European scholars and colleagues. One of the more formalized venues in which U.S.-based feminists and gender scholars can forge scholarly

collaborations is through exigent bilateral agreements and exchange programs. Here undergraduate students seem to have more readily embraced international educational opportunities than graduate students and faculty. With the exception of faculty and graduate students traveling abroad for the purposes of field and archival research or conference presentations, there seems to be a dearth of attention paid to opportunities that exist for short or longer term inter-university exchanges, whether in Europe or elsewhere. In light of the recent departmentalization of UCLA Women's Studies Department and as a result of the marked success of the UCLA Center for the Study of Women in bringing scholars and students together from a broad swath of disciplinary, regional, and research locations, it seems like an opportune moment to consider how to institutionally and financially support future exchange opportunities for faculty, research scholars, graduate and undergraduate students and to

examine the critical purchase of inter-university mobility and its role in shaping the future structure and content of women's and gender studies programs and research centers.

Jennifer Lynne Musto is a doctoral candidate in the Women's Studies Department at UCLA. Her dissertation, *Institutionalizing Protection, Professionalizing Victim Management: Explorations of Multi-Professional Anti-Trafficking Work in the Netherlands*, charts and takes theoretical stock of Dutch efforts to protect trafficked persons and investigates whether such protective interventions have helped to empower trafficked persons in general and irregular migrants in particular. Her other research interests include sex worker and immigrant rights, structural violence, social movements, transnational feminism(s), European feminism(s), carceral feminism(s), and human rights.

SENIOR FACULTY FEMINIST SEMINAR SERIES



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Emily Abel
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**Saskia
Subramanian**
Assistant Research
Sociologist, Center for
Culture and Health

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Carole Pateman**
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Political Science, UCLA