

The Long Road to Inclusion

From Women to Gender to Diversity to...?

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Introduction

The foundation of Radboud University in 1923 as the Catholic University of Nijmegen had as important aim the emancipation of the Dutch Catholics. But not everyone agreed wholeheartedly that this emancipatory goal included women. The Catholic norm that woman's foremost duty was to be a good mother and housewife was shared by many of the clerics and other men governing and teaching at the university. Although about 20% of the students in the first decades were women, few pursued a scholarly career afterwards. They either stopped working when they married, they remained unmarried or were nuns. Only very few women stayed on to work at the university. It took until 1961 before the Catholic University appointed the first female full professor. The internationally famous Professor Christine Mohrmann had already devoted 28 years of her life to the university, but only as an unpaid assistant and since 1952 as an extraordinary professor of Old-Christian Greek and Latin. 'Extraordinary' sounds very respectable, but in practice it means that one does not receive an ordinary salary. During that long period of volunteer work for the university before finally getting a full professorship, Mohrmann made her living by teaching at a secondary school and appointments at the universities of Utrecht and Amsterdam. What do we know about the presence of women among the staff in the history of anthropology in Nijmegen, and about the attention for women's issues in the curriculum? Did anthropology differ from the university at large in extending the emancipatory goal from Catholics to other categories?

Engaged, But Not with Women

In the early years of its existence, the Anthropology Institute followed this line of emancipation of Catholics rather than that of women or other less powerful groups. One of the roots of anthropology in Nijmegen was the Roman Catholic mission ethnology (1948–1958) headed by two professors, Vroklage and Mohr, who were men and priests (Meurkens 2002: 495–499). The other root started to grow when the Committee for Social and Political Sciences asked to set up a field of study in non-Western sociology. The candidate was found in Djakarta, and it was a woman! Elisabeth M.A.A.J. Allard (1904–1991) had obtained her doctorate in Nijmegen in grammatical research on the prose of Hadewych and completed a dissertation at the University of London in 1941 on animistic beliefs in Malaya. In 1958 she started as a lecturer and in 1963 as a professor teaching non-Western sociology. But, like her male colleagues, she seems to have been more engaged with the Catholic faith than women's emancipation. She remained unmarried and was a member of the Catholic religious congregation Women of Bethany. The story goes that she tested the religious knowledge of her students by asking during exams about the Ten Commandments.¹ As to Allard's concern with women, it can be said to her advantage that she was in contact with the first Dutch feminist anthropologist *avant la lettre* Cora Vreede-de Stuers who wrote a contribution for her *liber amicorum*, and that she brought back the voice of Raden Adjeng Kartini (1879–1904), the pioneer for women's rights in the Dutch East Indies/Indonesia, by re-editing and introducing the fifth edition of Kartini's letters (Kartini et al. 1976). In 1964 Allard's non-Western sociology branched off from anthropology to become in 1973 the Third World Centre. Allard gave her farewell lecture in October 1969. Two years later, when I started studying anthropology, the anthropology staff was all male.

Student Activism – Inclusive Strategies

In the 1970s, student numbers increased significantly, as did students' impact on the curriculum. Anthropology students set up Project Groups to study topics and literature they thought interesting and politically relevant. One of these was the Project Group 'Feminism and Anthropology'. In 1975 its tasks were formulated as follows: "to study the problematic aspects of women's place in scientific theories and in the literature; to undertake activities in the field of education and research;

1 https://www.huisvandenijmeegsegeschiedenis.nl/info/Instituut_Sociologie (1 August 2022).

to critically evaluate existing theories; [and] to create new opportunities in connection with the problem area" (Postel-Coster and Van Santen 2002: 872).

Note that this demand for a revision of anthropological theories was already far more extensive and inclusive than just the demand for equal rights for women. And it comprised a mixed group, which included male students from the beginning. They set up a reading list of relevant literature, asked Ad Borsboom to supervise them, and put in a proposal for the hiring of new staff with knowledge of the problem area.

At that time, I was abroad doing fieldwork in Algeria on the effects of the land reform program on women, writing my thesis and preparing for the last exams while participating in my partner's anthropological research in Spain. Upon my return I gave two talks to the Project Group Feminist Anthropology, on Algerian women and on doing anthropological research as a woman. The thesis was finished just in time to compete for the new post created at the students' demand, with half time teaching in women's studies and half time researching for and writing a PhD.

Inclusion in the Personnel Formation

My appointment as a junior researcher/teacher led to an anchoring of women's studies in the anthropology curriculum in Nijmegen. Apart from co-teaching in general introductions to Women's Studies, I was asked to design courses on Women in Socialist Countries and Women in the Arab World, to supervise the Feminist Anthropology Project Group and later to teach courses on gender theory. Another junior researcher, Britt Fontaine, taught a course on women's labor and change. In 1973, Development Studies was institutionalized in the independent Third World Centre (DWC) where Marion den Uyl, appointed in 1981, claimed attention for women and development. She was later succeeded by Francien van Driel and Tine Davids. Yet, the initial establishment was only temporary, and mostly dependent on the personal interests of the researcher. Our appointments, and thus also the teaching of women's studies, would stop as soon as we would finish our PhDs.

Several other women at the university found themselves in the same situation: defending a new and heavily contested field in their discipline from a very precarious, temporary and powerless position as junior researchers. They therefore organized themselves in the MIN (Medewerksters in Nijmegen) and worked closely together with the Emancipation Committee installed in 1980. Aims were: to reinforce attention to women's issues in the curricula, to increase the number of women in more structural staff positions, to support female researchers and

research on women, and to counter problematic sexism in academia. In practice this meant that whenever a position became available, a committee was formed, a research program was written, or funds were made available, then we acted to defend our case. In fact, we worked double shifts as many students wanted to learn about this new field, while at the same time we had to defend and create space for women. And this was an arduous and never ending self-imposed task.

Nothing was self-evident. For instance when, at our instigation, the first Emancipation Committee was installed in 1980, we had to rectify the automatic move of the board of the Social Faculty to put a male rather than a female representative forward. When university funds became available for education improvement we applied in different disciplines for projects to raise teachers' attention to women's issues in both new and existing courses. As a result, in anthropology, José van Santen and Thea Campagne were hired to do so in 1983. They interviewed and advised all staff members on how best to include women in their specific subjects and wrote a supportive article and annotated bibliography (Campagne and Van Santen 1985). Moreover, we sought to increase the research power of women. At that time, in the early eighties, research was being concentrated into programs, and the question was whether to integrate research on women into disciplinary programs or whether to develop an autonomous interdisciplinary research program on women's studies. It was decided to do both, and not only on the local but also on the national level. So the 'double track policy' evolved. Within the disciplines, PhD positions were acquired by women and some of them did their research on women's issues. For the other, the autonomous interdisciplinary track, Eva Weber took the lead in proposing a multidisciplinary Centre for Women's Studies, for both teaching and research and with relevance for society.

And with success. In 1985 the board of the university decided to provide funds for a professor and a research and teaching group in interdisciplinary women's studies. First because the university did not want to be left behind after seeing that other universities had already been more successful in obtaining a significant share of the funds made available for emancipation and women's studies by the Ministry of Education in 1980.² Secondly because it would soften the effects of staff reduction on the basis of 'last in, first out' due to budget cuts. As those 'last in' were mostly women who had finally managed to start a university career, creating the Centre for Women's Studies would enable the saving of some of these female scholars who would otherwise have been laid off. When my temporary contract

2 Tweede Kamer, zitting 1979–1980, 16006, 1–2. https://repository.overheid.nl/frbr/sgd/19791980/0000172241/1/pdf/SGD_19791980_0006322.pdf

in anthropology ended because my PhD was finished, I could apply for one of the positions created in the Centre for Women's Studies. As each staff member was attached to a certain discipline, I continued teaching gender studies in anthropology all through my career with the Centre, but without ever being considered part of the staff of anthropology.

Inclusion in Research

As a large part of all research was, and still is, funded by NWO (the Netherlands Organization of Scientific Research, then still called ZWO) it was crucial for feminist scholars to become active on the national level, both to increase the presence of women in the different disciplinary boards and committees as well as to defend interdisciplinary women's studies (and later gender studies) as a valid and relevant field of research. Since 1976, the Steering Group Emancipation Research discussed with ZWO the possibilities of financing emancipation research/women's studies. After much negotiation with the board of ZWO, funds were set apart for the WVEO (Werkgemeenschap Vrouwenstudies en Emancipatie Onderzoek; 'Research Association Women's Studies and Emancipation Research') to subsidize the writing of proposals for individual disciplinary research as well as for interdisciplinary programmatic research in the new field of women and emancipation studies. So here again the double track was followed. Several young anthropologists from Nijmegen were successful in obtaining funds for writing proposals, doing PhD research or participating as post-docs in interdisciplinary national research programs.

Getting a new research field accepted and settled meant not only developing the theoretical domain that needed to be taught and researched, but also establishing professional organizations and professional journals. Anthropologists in Amsterdam and Leiden took the initiative in 1978 to found the LOVA Network for women's studies in anthropology, currently with Tine Davids from Nijmegen on the board, and with its own journal *LOVA: Journal of Gender Studies and Feminist Anthropology*, a blog, a prize for the best MA thesis and regular Summer Schools, some of them organized in Nijmegen. Moreover, we participated in the interdisciplinary *Journal of Gender Studies* and later the Netherlands Research School of Gender Studies.

Inclusion in the Curriculum

Introducing women's studies into the teaching of anthropology made for a highly exciting and intellectually stimulating time, with the introduction of new topics and new and critical ideas. In the mid-1970s a wave of critical studies appeared in England and the United States on the subject matter that challenged conventional thinking. Gayle Rubin (1975) tickled our brains by showing how the theories of Marcel Mauss on gift exchange or the theories of Lévi-Strauss on the elementary forms of kinship could be made relevant to understand women's plight, if you took a gender perspective. And the volume in which it appeared (Reiter 1975) contained other interesting articles that challenged the Man the Hunter paradigm, the scholarly neglect of women's role in African politics, or the common ideas on female pollution. A decade later we were challenged to understand the non-Western gender perspective after Chandra Talpade Mohanty wrote her critical essay on the Western tendency to reduce all women of the third world into a single, homogeneous, and collective other.

Anthropology was not the most difficult discipline in which to instill an interest in women's issues. From evolutionary ethnologists to later anthropologists the question of the origins of sexual hierarchy had already been a topic of interest. And as early as 1935 Margaret Mead became famous for her case study of how not only women but also men were culturally 'made rather than born', to paraphrase the later Simone de Beauvoir. Women doing field research were far from absent. Yet, anthropology also suffered from a gender blindness. Students tend to remember far fewer famous female anthropologists than male anthropologists. Moreover, even famous female anthropologists had far greater difficulty in obtaining a university position or a promotion compared to their male colleagues, as the (auto)biographies of Margaret Mead or Ruth Benedict show. Not only anthropological foremothers but also the studies they wrote were easily forgotten; many of the topics and theories on women, sexuality or gender relations were not part of the general introduction to anthropology. Topics related to women often lacked status in social science research. Political organization, economic inequality, migration, etc. were all considered far more important to study. A local sociologist once dismissed my study of golden wedding gifts in Algeria as utterly irrelevant because it was 'just jewellery'. Yet in my view, any sociologist who ignores the exchange of wealth at marriages will never properly understand economic and cultural power hierarchies between spouses, families and social groups.

Soon the focus shifted from women to gender, because describing women's activities and their role was not sufficient to understand the power differences

between women and men. And wasn't it exactly the inequalities, their origins and potential solutions that we searched for? For that, it was necessary to include men, compare women with men and look at masculinity across diverse cultures. Moreover, the diversities within the genders became interesting, as there are different femininities and masculinities. Students were interested in and eager to explore previously untouched topics in their research projects, such as lesbian motherhood, gay communities in Egypt or Brazil, or the experience of gender transition. And senior researchers noticed a move from women and development to gender and globalization (Davids and Van Driel 2001: 84, 2005).

As women form half of the population everywhere and gender is relevant in any domain studied in anthropology, be it politics, archaeology, kinship, economics, migration, development or religion, it was relatively easy to mainstream gender in the anthropology curriculum. But mainstreaming gender also tends to lead to its fading away and being taken less seriously. There are several disappearing acts at work. First, because gender is reduced to just another factor to take into account rather than an element that merits exploration for itself. Let me explain: After decades of feminist critique on standard methodologies, most researchers nowadays accept that it is elementary and necessary to differentiate between men and women when studying topics like salaries, religious gestures, migration patterns or the effect of vaccines. It is an enormous improvement that they now add gender to the range of diversities (next to age, class, ethnicity etc.) that need to be taken into account. But finding similarities or differences does not yet explain them. For that, a more profound gender perspective has to be taken, for which other and more research is needed, a follow up that is not always provided. Moreover, what we call 'the intersection of the different axes of inequality' leads to an interwoven complex that tends to be reduced and relegated to separate domains. Gender is set apart, instead of questioning why for instance political party affiliation, racist expressions or religious beliefs are so often expressed in gender or sexuality terms.

A second disappearing act concerns the weak anchoring of gender theory in anthropology as a basic theme comparable to kinship, social inequality, or religion. A fading away of this theoretical sub-field can be seen in the reduction of course hours whenever the curriculum is rewritten or in making it an elective rather than a compulsory part of the curriculum. It can also be seen in the mind-set that considers it a topic for women or gay men rather than elementary training for all students, or sees gender only as a concern for feminists rather than as an analytical concept that needs to be deconstructed and decentered because it functions centrally but differently in each culture studied, or that gets tired of the words 'women' and 'gender' because they turn up perfunctorily in every course without being explored in depth.

A third disappearing act occurs with the changes in staff. As the attention on gender is not yet fully integrated in the basic curriculum of anthropology, everything depends on the enthusiasm and dedication of specific staff members. Luckily there are far more women among the staff than when I started studying anthropology, but these are not necessarily gender specialists. Of the 7 female teaching staff on the current website of CAOS, only three explicitly mention gender as an interest and only one names it in a course title; none of the 9 male teaching staff mentions gender as an interest. When the gender specialists retire, take on another job or are given other teaching tasks, the field disappears or is relegated to the margins of more general courses. Over time most gender specialists have disappeared at Dutch anthropology units (Van Santen et al. 2016: 195). In Nijmegen, the retirement of two gender specialists working in anthropology has not led to their replacement, a fact still somewhat hidden because of the continuing investments of Tine Davids, the cooperation with the Gender and Diversity section, and the personal interests of two other female anthropologists. It should not be necessary to fight for inclusion and respect for the field as soon as a staff member leaves or a research or teaching program is rewritten. As long as that is the case, the original emancipatory goal is not reached.

Anthropology in Nijmegen has over the last 75 years come a long way in opening up research on gender and gender inequality, in training women to be anthropologists, in hiring female staff and in teaching about gender issues in different courses. Over the years many students have walked with us this long road towards inclusion. It is now up to them to counter the forces that want to pull them off this road and to continue to show the value of a gender lens for an inclusive anthropology.

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