

GEXcel – Centre of Gender Excellence

Theme 1: Gender, Sexuality and Global Change

Örebro University Autumn 2007

WORK REPORTS FROM VISITING FELLOWS



Professor Valerie Bryson
University of Huddersfield
United Kingdom

I spent 15-19 October 2007 at Örebro University as a visiting fellow. My first two days were spent in meeting fellow researchers and completing my paper for the opening seminar of the GEXcel/Theme 1 on Wednesday 17th October. I spent Thursday revising my paper in the light of feedback and developing further ideas as a basis for a future paper. Friday was taken up with another seminar and the exchange of ideas.

While the highlights of the week were the papers and debates throughout Wednesday and on Friday morning, the value of the week went well beyond this. It provided me with an extremely valuable opportunity to exchange ideas with both internationally renowned scholars and new researchers (both visitors and Örebro based) working in related areas, and to take time to think through issues in a highly stimulating and creative intellectual environment. The week was extremely well organised and I would like to thank members of GEXcel for their hard work and efficiency, as well as their intellectual expertise.

Professor Cynthia Cockburn
City University London
United Kingdom

I had the opportunity to visit Örebro University, as part of the GEXcel programme of research, from October 14 - 28, 2007. I was provided with excellent facilities in which to pursue my research into sexualized violence in war, examined by way of sociological concepts of identity, subjectivity and othering; positionality and power; and intersectionality both at the level of individuals and social structures.

In particular I valued access to the University's excellent library, and the opportunity to do many hours of on-line research among the reports of human rights organizations. I benefited greatly from the stimulus of the intellectual contributions, in the field of gender, politics and power, of the principals of the GEXcel programme in Örebro and Linköping. In this supportive context I was able to produce a provisional paper and present it for discussion at a GEXcel seminar involving staff and students. I shall continue to work on the paper for presentation at the May conference in Örebro, and I hope for eventual publication.

During my stay other scholars were invited to the Department, notably Jeff Hearn, Michael Kimmel, and Valerie Bryson, and I was able to attend the conference organized as part of the GEXcel programme at which they presented aspects of their work. A particularly enlivening element of my stay at Örebro was interaction with a number of resident doctoral and postdoctoral students working on a range of topics not too far distant from my own. In sum, the experience of participation in activity of the GEXcel Theme 1 has benefited me greatly, furnished me with productive new contacts and ideas, and inspired my further work.

Kate Hardy, PhD student
University of London
United Kingdom

My one month fellowship during October 2007 as a PhD candidate at GEXcel has been extremely constructive. Engaging with international scholars in such a positive and supportive environment has matured my scholarship and helped me to develop it in a communal context.

The fellowship provided me with time and space to reflect on the transcripts from my PhD research which I had not yet had an opportunity to consider. Both formal and informal conversations at GEXcel contributed to helping me to write and present the paper 'Rethinking Action: Negotiations of the Body and Space in the struggle of AMMAR' which I have written in the duration of the fellowship. The reflections and constructive criticism of scholars and students involved in the GEXcel programme were invaluable. Such an interdisciplinary environment with a focus on gender relations have helped me to develop the theory and conceptual underpinnings of my work, by identifying common themes, theories and approaches which traverse an innumerable number of research topics.

The objectives and conceptual framework of the paper shifted from the original proposal, entitled 'Rethinking Action: Gendered and Sexualised Space and Identities in the Struggle of AMMAR'. The paper reflects on the negotiations of gendered and sexualised identities through bodily performances in various spatial settings, including the private, the public and the quasi-public. It also suggested three identifiable spatial strategies used by the women of AMMAR in their political struggle. The first of these is 'conscious self-surveillance' by which sex workers as activists resist essentialising inscriptions of 'whore' and attempt inscribe new meanings through gendered and desexualised bodily performances in public and quasi-public spaces, representing themselves as neutrally gendered and autonomous citizens. The second are spatial transgressions, wherein the women present their bodies explicitly as sex workers in prominent public spaces, disrupting normal spatial divisions and challenging spatialised constructions of social difference. The third strategy is the creation of sex worker spaces,

in which they are free from the disciplining gaze and are able to reverse the terms of exclusion.

It has been hugely refreshing to work and think in an environment in which ideas are varied, innovative and open for exploration. I am very grateful to everyone at GEXcel for inviting me as a scholar and for being so highly organised and enthusiastic - intellectually, academically and even socially.

Professor Michael Kimmel
SUNY at Stony Brook, NY
USA

I had the opportunity to visit Örebro University, as part of the GEXcel program from October 14 - 20, 2007. (Unfortunately, I had to curtail my visit due to illness.) I was provided with excellent facilities in which to pursue my research both on the gender and sexuality of the extreme right and also on university-campus sexual behavior.

I presented a lecture at the major conference during that week entitled “Globalization and its Mal(e)contents: Masculinity and Sexuality on the Extreme Right.” I was delighted with its reception, and provoked to further thinking by the comments I received. It was a very helpful discussion.

I also began to develop a paper on U.S. university sexual cultures, which is based on a large-scale survey of 6,000 undergraduates in the U.S. After consultation with Anna Jónasdóttir, I will develop this paper into a formal presentation text for the next conference in May in Örebro, and I hope for eventual publication.

During my stay other scholars were invited to the Department, notably Jeff Hearn, Christine Beasley, Cynthia Cockburn, and Valerie Bryson, and I appreciated their interventions and perspectives as I worked through these issues. I was also both impressed with and deeply appreciative of the intellectual generosity and administrative kindness offered to me by the GEXcel organizers and staff at the university. They made my participation, however truncated, thoroughly pleasant.

Rajeev Kumaramkandath, PhD student
Centre for the Study of Culture and Society, Bangalore
India

GEXcel, as I anticipated, was a fine venue for the kind of questions it raised and for the spaces for interactions it provided me with. It perfectly suited my own interests in the sphere of sexuality and helped me in articulating the kind of questions that I had been trying to ask and investigate through my research. My immediate task was to set my interim paper on the discursive production of sexual subjectivities in Keralam, India and I have been constantly working on this project.

I had the opportunity to circulate and present my proposed paper before the GEXcel committee and the students and faculties of the Centre for Feminist Social Studies, Örebro University. The interaction that followed my presentation and the response and suggestions that I received were very useful. During my stay in Örebro – October 1-31 2007 – I also had the opportunity to take part in very interesting discussions and paper presentations which were immensely useful in enriching my own understanding.

I remember with a deep sense of gratitude the best conditions provided by the Centre for Feminist Social Studies that made my life at both levels – my work and my stay particularly – a comfortable one. I was given a warm welcome by every member at the department and by the fellows of GEXcel all the time. This generosity and hospitality was immensely inspiring and it definitely enhanced my capacity and capability to work.

The GEXcel fellowship was a fantastic opportunity in refreshing my intellectual energy.

Since my trip to Örebro came immediately after my field trip to different parts in Keralam, my immediate task at GEXcel was to frame my basic arguments in the proposed paper in the light of materials gathered during my field work. Hence I spent my time mainly arranging the arguments in a more coherent fashion with the support of my materials. An inevitable requirement for this was also reading through selected books and articles available from the library and other online sources. In this respect I was very much benefited by being at the University for the rich and varied sources it had. Another major source of engagement was exploring the possibilities that my participation in the forums, seminars and other forms of discussions at GEXcel opened up. The intensive

engagements particularly with the theoretical aspects of sexuality studies was very much inspiring at the same time as proving to be a challenge for me. Realizing the propinquity of these broader concerns with my own interests I had to work hard and spend a major portion of time in assimilating and addressing these questions in my paper too; something which I am still trying to get at.

Another source for my time spending was in finding articles related to my Ph D project particularly from the online library and storing them. This was mainly because that many journals that were thus available are not available from my current location.

I will always remember my stay, accommodation and work arrangements with a deep sense of gratitude and I really appreciate all the concerned ones for the perfect planning and implementation in this regard. It was indeed a very pleasant time that I could spend and a very intellectual one with higher levels of quality for the kind of discussions, interactions that I have had during then. It was indeed a highly enriching experience.

Lene Myong Petersen, PhD student
Danish School of Education
Denmark

As a GEXcel junior fellow I have been afforded the best conditions possible for undertaking the project I originally proposed; writing a chapter on racialization of desire and intimacy for my dissertation on transnational adoption. During my stay, from the 1.-31. of October 2007, I have been constantly working on this project.

I have also had the chance to circulate and present a paper on race and desire for the GEXcel fellows as well as students and researchers at the Centre for Feminist Social Studies at Örebro University. I am grateful for all the comments and questions I received which offered new perspectives and ideas. The presentation and the feed-back will most definitely improve my work. The plan is to rework the paper into an article.

During my stay I have been awarded great hospitality and a warm welcome from everybody. These conditions have contributed immensely to my productivity and motivation. It has been extremely interesting to meet and interact with the other GEXcel scholars on both junior and senior level. I have enjoyed interesting conversations and dialogues about my project and thus been able to develop and revise crucial ideas and analytical points.

The GEXcel fellowship has proved to be a fantastic opportunity, and I wish to thank the GEXcel Board and all the scholars and students I met at the Centre of Gender Excellence, Örebro University.

Maria Törnqvist
PhD in Sociology
Sweden

My stay at GEXcel at Örebro University has been very interesting and inspiring. It has been a great opportunity for developing my own work on emotional markets (with the case of tango tourism in Buenos Aires as the empirical scope) as well as engaging in other scholar's research.

I have just finished my first two months as a post doc at the Centre for Feminist Social Studies at Örebro University, preparing a field study in Buenos Aires and participating in research activities at the centre.

The two months (Sep-Oct 2007) have been a truly intriguing and creative period of time. It has been most interesting to participate in seminars of researchers who are conducting studies in the same field as my self. Not the least was the one day conference a most exciting day that gave great chances to listen to interesting talks and meet with other scholars. It has also been fantastic just to be a part of the centre and share ideas and experiences with prominent researchers from all over the world on a daily basis.

I want to make a special note on the excellent administration of the research centre. All the practical details around my stay have been perfectly organised. Also the gender institute is a very warm, welcoming and open-minded milieu that inspires to think and do research.