Emerging Ideas in Masculinity Research: An Interview with Raewyn Connell by Christian McMahon

The third conference organised on behalf of the Nordic Association for Research on Men and Masculinities (NFMM) was held in Reykjavik, Iceland, from 4 to 6 June 2014, under the title *Emerging Ideas in Masculinity Research – Masculinity Studies in the North*. It was part of the Icelandic Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2014, in cooperation with the Ministry of Welfare and the Centre for Gender Equality in Iceland, RIKK (Institute for Gender, Equality and Difference, University of Iceland), and the Equal Rights Committee at the University of Iceland. The conference included 35 themed sessions, with three to five paper presentations in each, covering a vast range of topics and debates across theory, policy, practice and empirical research. Here, Christian McMahon reflects on the conference via an interview with Raewyn Connell, Professor Emerita, University of Sydney, Australia, who was one of the conference keynotes.

It happened in 2004 I think, when my life changed. There are of course many changes in life; some of these are just more profound. I had borrowed, by accident, a book by Raewyn Connell. After reading it everything became very clear to me – some of the questions that I had asked myself for a long time got answers. These answers raised further questions, and that eventually became my professional life. The personal became professional.

Raewyn Connell probably does not need an introduction to people who are involved in gender studies or sociology. Her contribution to social theory and her works on gender, class, masculinities and sexuality have contributed significantly to shaping the contemporary understanding around these and many other issues.

Now, more than ten years later, I met her in person for the very first time in Reykjavik, the capital of Iceland, at the conference *Emerging Ideas in Masculinity Research*. The conference was important in many respects. First, let us consider the juxtaposition of the geographical and the historical. When it comes to research on gender equality, men, and masculinities, Nordic countries (i.e. those countries belonging to the Nordic Council of Ministers) have for a long time been in the forefront. This has also been reflected in governmental policies and societal attitudes to gender equality issues in general. On the other hand, the collapse of the Soviet Union and its sphere of influence resulted in quite contrasting realities in post-socialist countries that are geographically close. Though they have differences, they are all marked by the Soviet legacy that they still have to deal with. Geographically, these countries could have also been called 'Nordic', but not in terms of societal outcomes. This was, and too often still is, reflected also when it comes to attitudes to gender equality, as in these countries the topic has been considered trivial and as an attack on 'traditional (family) values'.

For a long time there was no strongly established tradition of research on gender and on masculinities in these countries, even though there were separate projects and individuals working on the topic. Now, more recently, there has been progress in terms of gender research and research on men in these countries. The conference also brought together researchers from beyond the 'traditional Nordic' region, thus recognising the importance of the research and discussions going on in these countries.

Secondly, the sheer number of topics at the conference, ranging from indigenous masculinities, the male body, military and global masculinities to family and work-life balance and politics, was indeed impressive, but made it difficult to choose where to focus.

Thirdly, the conference was an important affirmation from Nordic governments, providing a space where academic research is brought together with policy-making and policy-makers.

In her keynote speech, Raewyn Connell focused on knowledge production and the importance of research, theories and analysis done also outside the '(academic) metropolis'. With that in mind, the questions that I was asking were also related to the problematics of intersections between research and policy, metropolis and periphery, as well as knowledge production in general.

Christian McMahon: In your work you have defined gender as the structure of social relations that centres around the reproductive arena. In the policy context, as well as in wider understanding in Western society, quite often genders are seen as different categories, almost in opposition. How, in your opinion, in the policy framework should we overcome this, what should we do?

Raewyn Connell: I have to confess immediately I have never worked in a policy position. So I have, in a sense, an amateur view of policy-making.

The problem that you raise is obviously an important one: we face that in Australia too. For instance, in health policy, when gender was put on the table in health policy, it was originally in the form of women's health policy. Then along came a number of people who said: 'Okay, what about the men? Or what about the boys?' The result was absurd. We got a 'men's health' policy machinery and policy documents, set up alongside a 'women's health' policy – but no attempt to integrate the two.

In fact, the women's health movement was never simply about matters that only concerned women. The movement was very much concerned with the position of women in society, that is, the *relation* between men and women, and the different situations of different groups of women. So there was implicitly a relational view of gender.

If health policy would be developed in a more sensible way, it would be built relationally all along. You can do that: you can analyse health issues in terms of gender relations (see Schofield et al. 2000; Connell 2012). These relations may produce different health effects for men and for women. But gender relations also concern differences among groups of men, relationships between specific groups of men and specific groups of women, and so forth. This brings in what is now often called 'intersectionality', the interplay between class position and gender relations, the interplay between sexuality or ethnicity and gender relations.

All these issues have to be dealt with by practitioners, but often they're ignored in the formulation of the policy instrument. In Australia that was better handled in education policy than health policy. Almost all gender policies initially came from the involvement of the women's movement, so gender policy for education was initially framed as doing something for girls. But that grew into a very comprehensive approach to gender equity that focused on gender relations. It included work around boys, including the different educational projects that you got from different groups of boys in the same school. By the early 1990s education policy in Australia had become an impressive model of integrating gender policy.

Then there was a right-wing backlash. A conservative government came to power that was hostile to the feminist impulse, indeed to gender equity itself. They sponsored a separate educational agenda for boys, based on very dubious psychological suppositions about boys having a different learning style from girls. So Australia reverted to a segregated education policy approach, which I think was very unfortunate indeed (for a full account of this sad story, see Weaver-Hightower 2008).

So, yes, we have to see the policy arena as a field where there are a lot of contestations and arguments. You may gain a lot of experience; but the experience can also be lost.

A relational view of gender requires you to think in a more constructive way about policy. Policy isn't simply a matter of the redress of categorical differences between groups. We need to think in terms of the kind of world that we want to bring into being. In the case of gender-equity policy, we need to ask what are the acceptable relationships of gender that the decision-making is wanting to produce? And then, what are the kinds of practice, and the kinds of knowledge, that are needed to do that?

Good social policy is an enabling process. One of the questions is always what kind of knowledge, in the hands of the members of the society, is needed to advance towards more democratic and peaceful social relations. So one of the fundamental issues in gender-equity policy is actually an educational issue. It's about what people need to know about gender, and how that knowledge can become widespread and popular.

This can be tough, since we are frequently working against the grain of modern mass media. Commercial mass culture is full of stereotyped models of gender, for instance in 'action movies' addressed to young men, or 'rom-com' movies addressed to young women. Young people of school age are highly interested in gender questions – for instance, when a teenager is thinking about forming relationships and beginning to think about pathways in life. But there is little response to that interest from the curriculum, or from education policymakers now. And (partly because of the backlash) there is often a very limited and conservative approach by schools. We can be bolder, if we want to respond to actual needs for knowledge and understanding.

Christian McMahon: You mentioned the importance of knowledge production and where we get the knowledge. Now let's come back one step from the policies to actual knowledge production. In Europe we quite often use data that is harmonised across Europe. This is very clearly divided into men and women, and all the analysis is based on one of these two categories where the assumption is also heteronormative. Is there a way for us to think of how should we still deal with this problematic?

Raewyn Connell: ...how can you get a better model for quantitative knowledge production?

Christian McMahon: Yes. I was wondering if you would have any reflection on this.

Raewyn Connell: Lots of reflections on this. I am not sure that heteronormativity is exactly the issue here. The problem is more the *categorical* thinking about gender, the boys-in-a-box/ girls-in-a-box kind of approach where there are just two categories, each assumed to be homogeneous, as the basis of knowledge. That is the basis of most official statistics that bear on gender equity, globally as well as in Europe – as we see in UN statistics.

That is also the basis of knowledge collection in many fields of science. So when demographers talk about gender, they have usually talked in categorical ways, even if they refine the categories by cross-classifying age and sex. Many psychological discussions of gender are also framed by the concept of two categorically distinct groups. What the researchers are interested in is the statistical difference between those two groups – such work is usually called 'sex difference' research.

Psychology is a good example of why this is not a very productive approach. When the psychologists have combined the results of many different studies, using the statistical technique called 'meta-analysis', the usual finding is that there are *not* marked differences in psychological characteristics between men as a group and women as a group. In many areas there are no statistical differences at all, and in most cases where statistical differences do appear, they are fairly small. We should really call the field 'sex similarity' research (for a calm but devastating review of an amazing amount of data, see Hyde 2005).

Which might make you think, where is gender? Gender doesn't seem to be there in a mass of psychological research – if we understand gender only as categorical difference.

What this research is telling us – very firmly, with a huge body of evidence – is that the psychological characteristics of men as a group and women as a group overlap massively, rather than falling out into two distinct categories. Therefore, we have to look at other levels of reality to understand gender division and gender process. We have to examine the situations men and women are put in, socially, economically, in power relations, in sexuality and so forth – rather than assuming some kind of natural mental difference between the two categories. That is the core of the business.

So, if we want to advance knowledge, we have to devise methods for looking at situations and relationships as well as biological sex categories. When I am teaching about gender I always tell my students that thinking categorically – men here, women there – is just the beginning of gender analysis, not the end.

That would be my response for policy research too. You can sometimes start with categorical analysis to identify where problems are, where problems are not. But that's the most primitive level of knowledge production. You may need very different techniques to get into the actual relationships that produce gender effects. How do you do that in a policy process? I have to confess that I have limited knowledge here because I haven't actually worked in policy units.

I have been involved many times in policy-related research from the university starting point. We have used a range of research techniques to get beyond simple categorical information. We have used participant observation or organisational ethnography to look at gender processes in public sector institutions. We have sometimes used life-history interviewing to look at the careers of people

in organisations and what gender dynamics they have encountered, dynamics which might or might not produce statistical differences between women and men as groups. We have looked at the language, rhetoric and cultural assumptions in documents, including policy documents. Here we try to tease out the processes in language and symbolisation that construct gendered positions, gendered identities and gendered representations of men and women. These are rarely dichotomous – there is usually a spectrum of representations or identities of men in a particular organisational context, also for women (for my report on a major project on public sector organizations, see Connell 2006).

What often happens in policy discussions is that policy-makers and critics have simple categorical statistics (for instance, men's vs women's education or health outcomes) but no research data about the processes behind these statistical patterns. So people fill in the gaps with their intuitions, including their stereotypes. At this point, policy-making becomes speculative rather than research-driven. The same thing happens in the research world. I have often seen academic articles which present sophisticated statistical analysis based on categorical data, and at the end of the article offer a completely speculative explanation of the patterns observed – an explanation not informed by any real knowledge, just guess-work.

So, I am asking for a willingness to do policy research in a slower, more intensive, more multi-method way. This approach will certainly incorporate the kinds of statistical techniques we have now, but will much more deliberately set out to study the social processes that produce the statistical patterns and the social problems they reflect.

Christian McMahon: In your work, as well as here at the conference, you have stressed the need for cooperation on a global scale to fully understand gender orders. Outside of the academic world, how do you think this could happen?

Raewyn Connell: It's a very difficult area. There are a number of non-academic knowledge production processes: corporate research; governmental research – census bureau, policy bureaux and so forth; and NGO research around aid programmes. Then there is a variety of community-based, local knowledge-production processes. Some of them involve indigenous knowledge or local forms of knowledge, some of them don't.

So there is a spectrum of knowledge-production processes. With the corporate research, that is already to a significant extent internationalised. As the corporate world itself has globalised, as more and more of the economy is dominated by transnational corporations, they have their knowledge needs, which are either met by knowledge-production processes within the corporation or they are outsourced.

In the former case, corporate knowledge production is normally located in an intranet, and follows very stan-

dardised forms that are essentially determined by the strategy needs of the transnational managers. Such knowledge will be dominated by the strategy of the global management group – overwhelmingly Northern – and will also be highly standardised because of the simplification needs of computer-driven databases.

In the latter case, there are corporations that outsource their knowledge needs to another group of corporations, notably in market research. Companies doing market research used to be national but are now increasingly international, operating on a global scale, on the basis of contracts covering multiple countries because they serve a transnational corporation that operates in those countries. That too produces a kind of standardisation, because the market research companies are likely to use research instruments that originate and are calibrated in the global North. The instruments are then exported to other countries where their clients want market research data. I have seen this, for instance, in India, where market researchers use 'franchised' scales, developed in France or in the United States. They sell data both to transnational corporations and to Indian companies that want market research information.

Now that knowledge would often be marginally relevant to local situations. There are no strong quality controls here; the findings simply have to be sellable to the companies that make contracts with market research firms. The prestige of the Northern origin of the method is itself a marketing tool. That is very problematic, and frankly I don't expect any better knowledge-production process from the corporate world. This is never going to be a democratic process, it is always going to be driven from the top, by management imperatives.

Governmental research is subject to similar pressures, so it also shows much standardisation. In education, for instance, increasingly, national education systems use testing regimes that produce educational 'performance' statistics. These are standardised, now administered through the OECD – which is *not* a United Nations body but basically a club of rich countries that has managed to hegemonise this field of educational statistics. I don't know the history but I certainly know the effects. The OECD is basically a neoliberal think-tank. So they are now promoters of a neoliberal policy of soulless competition via testing regimes, which has been exported around the world under the guise of educational development aid. It's quite extraordinary how quickly that has happened and how firm a grip it has got on the imagination of policy-makers (Connell 2013).

Here, too, we see a top-down knowledge-production process which originates in the global metropole, is mediated through transnational organisations, and becomes the base of knowledge production in the rest of the world. It is organised to produce league tables of competitive educational 'achievement' – structures of a global market in education.

But public sector organisations do have other possibilities. There are possibilities for democratising knowledge-production processes, demanding relevance to local realities and overcoming the pressures of standardisation. It is possible to produce locally designed, locally accountable knowledge. We began to see that in census bureaux, for instance. As women's movements from the 1970s onward began to demand more gender-relevant information, there were responses from local institutions; and new ways of using public statistics were developed – women's budgets, for instance.

In Latin America there has been very interesting work on knowledge that would test progress in gender equity in a whole variety of fields. This produces not an abstract norm or league table (of the kind promoted unfortunately by UNDP), but examines data against actual local commitments to gender equity, in the form of treaties, constitutions and policy statements. The 'Índice de Compromiso Cumplido' (ICC – Index of Achieved Commitments), first developed in Chile in the 1990s, is a very interesting model of democratic knowledge formation. As the authors call it, a 'tool of citizen control' (Valdés 2001).

This illustrates an important possibility. Instead of going for a global standardisation in knowledge production, we can have locally relevant and democratically accountable knowledge production. What is done in one region can be communicated to another region to stimulate their locally relevant knowledge production, and vice-versa.

Thus we could get a circulation of models of local and democratically accountable knowledge production moving around the world, rather than a top-down standardised process. At least that's my imagination of it. What could be very exciting, certainly difficult, would be connections between that kind of knowledge-production process and the creation of policy. At present, we mainly see locally generated knowledge production at the community level. For instance, self-help research or indigenous groups, which critique conventional knowledge production and also try to generate their own knowledge projects.

There is useful writing about this. For instance, in Aotearoa, New Zealand, there has been work from Māori communities on knowledge production. There is a very nice book by Linda Tuhiwai Smith called *Decolonising Methodologies* that brings together the Māori experience and other indigenous knowledge projects. I do not know if it had very much impact on methodology outside of that field, but it has certainly impacted post-colonial discussions and has now gone into a second edition (Smith 2012).

And the Australian sociologist Yoland Wadsworth wrote a terrific book called *Do It Yourself Social Research*. That is about knowledge production by, and for, community groups. It became a bestseller in Australia and is now in its third edition (Wadsworth 2011). It's a lovely book, very sophisticated intellectually, and at the same time very practical about how to do small surveys, how to collect knowledge relevant to the needs of a suburban community-action group on some particular issue.

So there are already such models. There is an important and interesting question about how these models can travel globally. At this point I do not have many suggestions about that, except that it is the responsibility of academics to put those knowledge-production processes into wider circulation through academic networks.

The other thing I mentioned is NGOs' knowledge production, especially in development contexts. That has been very problematic. On the one hand, there has been a great proliferation of NGOs in the last 20–40 years, as many social movements were transformed into NGOs, and NGOs became the channel for a great deal of development work in poorer countries. Development aid programmes require knowledge to be produced. So there is a considerable amount of social science actually produced from NGOs. But that research is problematic, because the knowledge produced is very often small-scale, short term and derivative in method. There has been an excellent critique of that pattern, especially from African intellectuals, about the fragmented character of knowledge production within the world of development aid and NGOs (Mkandawire 2005).

How you improve that I am not very sure, without rejecting the project of global redistribution and knowledge production around aid programmes. Perhaps we need to give more attention to feedback from the point where knowledge is applied, where its deficiencies become obvious. We can certainly ask aid agencies and NGOs themselves to re-think this project and place knowledge production in a longer time-frame, addressing the question of building an intellectual workforce. Perhaps there is need for link-up between a variety of NGOs, to produce more powerful forms of knowledge, more sophisticated kinds of research. Maybe more long-term collaboration with academics and universities is needed. International aid is a scene I am not very much involved in, but I have been aware of the debate around these issues, and I think the questions are important.

Christian McMahon: You touched upon neoliberalism. In your more recent work you have talked about neoliberalism as an agenda for economic and social restructuring. You also have emphasised the need to study how neoliberal capitalism influences gender dynamics. In academic research, neoliberalism is often talked about as a kind of evil floating somewhere on the macro-level having a negative impact on our lives. However, the way people engage with it often remains somehow vague in analysis. It would be interesting to hear your thoughts on how neoliberalism works in micro-settings, more specifically how to study it in relation to masculinities, and its relationship to hegemonic masculinity, in ways that would avoid leaving it as a vague phenomenon?

Raewyn Connell: Well, I certainly think of neoliberalism as an evil cause! – that has been moving the world in basically anti-democratic directions. But as you say, neoliberalism is a local reality as well as something that operates on a vast transnational scale, and it is important to engage its local reality (Braedley, Luxton 2010).

That is one of my central criticisms of much of the academic literature about neoliberalism. That literature generally takes the perspective of the global metropole and assumes that neoliberalism is simply exported and applied elsewhere. So my colleagues and I have been very much interested in the experiences of neoliberalism in different part of the global South. We have been looking at material from Latin America, from Africa, from the Arab-speaking world and a bit from south Asia.

It is obvious that the social experiences in those regions are different from those of the USA and Europe. It is also evident, when you take a close look, that what neoliberalism has meant for the post-colonial majority world is significantly different from what it meant for Europe or North America. In the post-colonial world, neoliberalism has meant a shift in development strategies. It involves changed relationships with the global economy, the end of most industrialisation projects, a search for staple export goods instead (Connell, Dados 2014).

Huge shifts in economic strategy and employment possibilities around much of the world have very obviously changed the conditions for the making of masculinities. Here I rely on work by the Colombian sociologist Mara Viveros and her colleagues (Viveros 2001; Gutmann, Viveros 2005). Neoliberal restructuring in Latin America has downgraded local projects of balanced development which created certain prospects of masculinised employment in industrial production. It has essentially meant the end of a 'breadwinner' conception of masculinity, as neoliberal restructuring generates structural unemployment for working class men.

This has also been happening in South Africa. Indeed, it is also happening in Australia, as our economy has shifted towards a neocolonial comparative-advantage strategy. Our leading industry now is mining for export, not manufacturing. Young working-class men are going to face a future of precarious labour. The old definition of working-class masculinity through apprenticeship, stable employment and unionised occupational cultures, is fading out. I think a much more chaotic situation for masculinity formation is emerging.

In that context, responses that tend towards greater gender equality and engagement are possible. We can get a redefinition of fatherhood that is more engaged with children, as men are less committed to a trade-based life, as the stable trade isn't there anymore. On the other hand, we may get a masculinity more oriented to physical violence, dominance, and assertion of power through the grey economy or even the criminal economy. Organised crime is extremely sexist and its growing global influence – the drug trade, the arms trade, money laundering, etc. – is likely to increase gender inequalities in working-class contexts.

Meanwhile in middle-class masculinities there is restructuring too. This is dramatic in China, as was narrated in this conference. Restructuring is visible elsewhere too, as entrepreneurial models of masculinity are imported from the transnational economy with the backing of transnational corporations, which recruit local middle-class men into middle-managerial and professional roles (for example, Connell 2010). These men move into a highly individualist competitive ethos of masculinity. It doesn't obliterate local constructions of masculinity but hybridises and shapes local realities.

So we are getting transformations of masculinity in middle-class professional contexts as well as in the popular classes. These processes play out in different directions, in different parts of the world. The economic impact of transnational markets is very differentiated. Neoliberalism does not tend to produce a single homogeneous global culture. I think that was a bad misunderstanding in the 1990s, it was quite wrong, and we now see that differentiated gender orders have been produced in different parts of the world.

This is all a little speculative. It is a huge research field. We are facing fast-moving processes of transformation. Theoretical models both of masculinities and of the economy are in need of reshaping, to deal with our strange new world.

Christian McMahon: Perhaps a final question, about what is personally important for me. In your keynote speech you talked about masculinities studies in post-colonial contexts. Most of the work done so far on masculinities in a post-colonial context focuses on the former colonies of the West. But work that has focused on men and masculinities in the post-communist regions using the perspective of post-colonial theories is quite rare. What insights do you think post-colonial theory could possibly have on studying masculinities in this part of the world, considering that Soviet colonialism differs in important ways from the classical colonialism?

Raewyn Connell: I think there is a lot to be learnt, but it would be a mistake to take a formula from postcolonial theory and simply apply it in the local situation. The thing is to learn from it, and then build theoretical models that are appropriate to these historical circumstances.

Now some events seen in Eastern Europe and Northern/Central Asia do follow very conventional models of imperial power. Russia became the core of an empire, an *overland* empire, in the times of the tsars, before the Soviet period. That was not an overseas empire like the British or Dutch, but still had the same structure of a metropole and a very large colonised area. That structure was maintained in the Soviet era, in relation to Siberia, central Asia and the Caucasus, even though someone from the colonies became the dictator in the person of Stalin. But you had a continuing military occupation, rather than a metropole-colony relationship, in the countries of Eastern Europe under communist rule. So there is a history with some correspondence to the colonial history of south Asia, Africa or Latin America, and some significant divergences, which should be built into any attempt to develop a model for masculinity research

In Scandinavia there have also been some colony-metropole structures at work in knowledge production. There is a distinctly colonial situation in the far north, affecting the Sami people. But there is also a centre-periphery relationship in the history of Scandinavian universities, in relation to the German university system. There is now a centre-periphery relationship between Scandinavian universities and the USA as the global metropole of the world university system. We have the same relationship in Australia, where universities were originally colonial outposts of the British university system and have reoriented themselves to the USA as hegemon. My own institution, the University of Sydney, seems to have an ambition to become the Harvard of the South Seas; unfortunately we don't have Harvard's money.

So you might take some inspiration from the Southern theory, the post-colonial project, which offers a possibility of knowledge-production projects that overcome the hegemony of what is now an American-centred global knowledge system. One might, for instance, learn the importance of locally based theoretical projects. There have been very interesting theoretical ideas developed in Scandinavia, in the work of colleagues like Øystein Gullvåg Holter, but they haven't circulated very widely. Looking at the papers in this conference in one of the Nordic countries, it is much more common to cite English-language theoretical frameworks than it is to cite locally generated theoretical ideas.

Another worthwhile move would be to think of the global situatedness of gender orders in eastern Europe, post-Soviet Russia and the Nordic countries, as part of what masculinity research has to treat as the 'object of knowledge'. This is an issue that emerges from the work of Marina Blagojevic (2009) concerning eastern Europe and Madina Tlostanova (2010) concerning post-Soviet central Asia.

The main paradigm of research in masculinity studies (which I contributed to myself through life-history research technology) is essentially an ethnographic one. It offers to describe the way masculinity exists in a particular time and place. We have hundreds of studies – historical, sociological, psychological, anthropological, cultural – which characterise a certain pattern of masculinity as belonging to a particular time and place. And that is regarded as sufficient empirically, as constituting worthwhile research.

What I argue, somewhat against my own previous practice, is that we now have to expand the object of knowledge, not only to the ethnographic description of a local reality but to the wider set of conditions that make that reality possible. The conditions of existence of local reality must be an equal concern.

That means the global economy, global state structures, international media, global culture and its hegemonies, global communication systems including the internet, global power relations including military and paramilitary systems, the centre-periphery relation in the corporate world. All that has to be part of what we study, to understand the production of masculinities in a particular time and place (for my efforts to do that, prioritising intellectual work from outside the metropole, see Connell 2014a, 2014b).

Researchers in the Nordic counties are in a strong position to do that. They have the infrastructure for sophisticated research, a strong university system, a highly educated population, no lack of potential researchers to do new things in the field. They have sufficient distance from the global metropole – the centre of corporate power is located outside of Scandinavia – to take a certain distance from the mainstream international knowledge-production process, which is integrated with global power relations. So this could be a very interesting regional base for new paradigms in masculinity studies, certainly for new projects that are differently shaped from the ones we have known so far. Go to it!

The interview, recorded amidst creative chaos in an office at the University of Reykjavik, could have easily lasted for another ten hours, making me understand better the dilemmas of the organisers of the conference: having a wealth of information available to you makes you not want to miss anything. Even now, going back to recordings, there are still many questions and ideas which just pop up.

The conference, as I mentioned before, was placed well in terms of timing and the current situation in Europe and beyond its borders. The increase in projects, programmes and actions relating to gender equality in Europe has also triggered fierce opposition. This opposition, for example, in forms of either 'traditional values' or men's rights activism discourse, is something we will probably see more. To tackle this, conferences like the one in Reykjavik are important – for this makes it possible to bring together researchers, activists and policy-makers.

Acknowledgement

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