

# Gendering Epistemologies – Gender and Situated Knowledge: Perspectives from Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe

**Eva Svatoňová**

Thirty-five years ago, Donna Haraway, a prominent American scholar in science and technology studies and ecofeminism, coined the term ‘situated knowledges’, which has since become a classic reference in feminist debates. Acknowledging that knowledge production is bound to a specific point in time and space, scholars have been using Haraway’s notion to reflect on their positionality in the process of creating scientific knowledge. This now iconic concept was a central theme at the international conference ‘Gendering Epistemologies – Gender Situated Knowledge Perspectives from Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe’, organised by the research initiative Political Epistemologies of Central and Eastern Europe (PECEE) and held on 13–15 October 2022 in Liblice (Czechia). The conference aimed to bring scholars from the central, eastern, and southeastern European regions together to reflect on the pertinence of this notion within diverse contemporary debates, from feminism to queer theories and trans activism, and in the face of current social challenges like hate speech, fake news, and conspiracy theories. In other words, the goal was to examine how gender-shaped knowledge and truth claims are tied to gender politics in the region. Situated knowledges of gender served as a thread running through the five panels, which consisted of diverse contributions coming from various disciplines, including history, cultural studies, and political science.

On Friday, 14 October, the conference participants travelled to Chateau Liblice where the academic presentations and debates took place. In the first panel, titled ‘Activism and Objectivity’, which was moderated by Jan Surman, presenters dealt with positionality and activism in academia. In her contribution titled ‘Feminist Standpoint Theory Strengthens Feminist Academic Activism’, Duygu Altinoluk, a researcher from Kilis 7 Aralık University, discussed how oral history can serve as a tool for implementing marginalised knowledge into existing hegemonic, masculinist narratives in academia in the context of Turkey. She described how Turkish feminist academics and LGBTQ+ people experience marginalisation in a country with a masculinist, conservative government led by the Justice and Development Party (AKP). Anna Eroshenko from Moscow University followed with her paper ‘Knowing Transgender Experience through the Indirectness’. She discussed how narrative psychology could serve as a tool for understanding collective oral histories, illustrating her argument

through the example of the Moscow transactivist group T-Action. The panel ended with a presentation by Eszter Kováts, currently of the University of Vienna, who set out from a slightly different position. In her presentation, 'Paradoxes of Situated and Universal Truth Claims in Central Eastern Europe', she discussed the connection between situated knowledge and postcolonial universalism. Analysing the current political situation in Hungary, Kováts was critical of the usage of Western concepts and argued that postcolonial universalism eliminated the difference between activism and academia, which is affected by the normative bias driving academic research.

The second panel, 'Gendered Politics', was moderated by Karin Reichenbach. It began with a contribution by Adela Hîncu from the University of Vienna titled 'Women's Invisible Labor in Socialist Romania: Feminist Methodology and Theories on Rural Transformation under State Socialism', in which she discussed political developments relating to agricultural cooperation and their potential to emancipate women. Ella Rossman, from University College London, discussed the construction of girlhood in the postwar Soviet Union in her presentation 'How to Be a Soviet Girl? Constructing Knowledge on Women's Puberty in the Postwar (1946–1991)'. Her analysis focused mainly on educational guides from academia and politics, examining the motives of an ideal girl constructed as natural, simple, friendly, and modest, and how this construct served to create a binary distinction between 'socialist' and 'Western' conceptions of girls' education. Isabela Kowalczyk, from Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, concluded the panel with her presentation 'Feminism Meets Catastrophes', which focused on reciprocity and the simultaneity of political influence and practical appropriations through agency.

The third panel, 'Scientific Authority and Gender', was held on Saturday morning (15 October). This panel's first presenter was Evangelia Chordaki, from the University of Athens. In her paper, 'Locating Science to Silence: Discussing Gender and Knowledge through the Politics of Silence', she reflected on the Greek abortion debate as an example of how the exchange between science and society is blocked by deliberate political non-information. In the second presentation, 'Sociologists in White: Feminist Epistemologies in the Medical Field', Daria Litvina and Anastasia Novunskaya, scholars from the University of St Petersburg who conduct sociological research in a St Petersburg hospital, used the notion of situated knowledges to reflect on the reciprocal influence of their roles as researchers in their research field. In the panel's last presentation, 'Claiming Epistemic Authority of Women in Science and Technology: Case Studies of Women Engineers in Turkey', Berna zinging Arslan from the University of Istanbul spoke about the experience of Turkish women working in science and pointed out how femininity was constructed as technologically incompetent in the Turkish academic context.

The theme of the fourth panel was 'Gendering Institutions'. Presenters in this

panel discussed spaces that can serve to emancipate subjectivities marginalised in hegemonic institutions marked by indifference towards the situation of the subaltern. Martyna Miernicka from the University of Wrocław discussed gendered practices and the possibilities of capturing the gendered memory of Polish literary institutions through the essential practices of telling and rewriting history. Her presentation was followed by Suzana Milevska's (University of Skopje) contribution, 'Do Archives Have Gender? An Archiving of South-East Archives from a Feminist Perspective'. Her work deals with the 'competition of different memories', deconstructing how the archives have been complicit with other patriarchal institutions in ignoring and overwriting gender differences. Barbara Schnalzger from Leipzig University presented her paper "'Haunting the Ruler's House": Women's Lesbian Libraries and Archives as an Interface between Academia and Social Movements'. Its focus was on German-speaking lesbian archives from the 1970s and 1980s as carriers of precarious knowledge. It dealt with the practices of archives and how and who defines what knowledge is worth preserving.

The fifth panel, 'Media and Truth', concluded the conference with three presentations dealing with the issue of gender and its media representation. In 'Woman's Metaphor and Universal Truth: On One Episode in Poland's Interwar Intellectual Life', Ksenia Shmydkaya from Tallinn University reflected on three Polish women writers and their conception of femininity, which oscillated between an emphasis on gender difference on the one hand and the rejection of gender as a universal category on the other. Lisa Füchte from the University of Leipzig presented the paper 'Who Put the Object in Objectivity? Gender and Visual History of Care Work in the Soviet Union', in which she discussed the role of gender in Soviet posters. Bernhard Kleeberg and Dietlind Hüchtker concluded the conference with some final reflections and evaluated the potential of developing new methods to grasp the assumptions of political epistemologies.

## Translating Research Findings into Operational Tools in the Context of a Crisis: the RESISTIRÉ Approach

**Agnieszka Kolasińska**

The relationship between research and its potential to create real-world impact is an important topic within the social sciences and first and foremost in the debate concerning the 'action-research' approach. In recent years, this debate has also been enriched by reflections arising from the world of design, integrating approaches aimed at the construction of artefacts and services with traditional sociological research