

# **The Making of European Women's Studies**

## ***Volume II***

A work in progress report on curriculum development  
and related issues in gender education and research

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<sup>1</sup> For part one see Braidotti, Rosi and Esther Vonk (eds.) *The making of European Women's Studies. A work in progress report on curriculum development and related issues*, Utrecht, ATHENA/Utrecht University, 2000.

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# The uses and abuses of the sex/gender distinction. Five case-studies from European languages

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## Trans-lating Gender into the Russian (Con)Text.<sup>1</sup>

*Irina Aristarkhova.*

### *Introduction: Wake-up calls*

The Gender Centre (also known as The Centre for Gender Studies) was set up within the Institute of Socio-Economic Problems of the Population at the Russian Academy of Science in May, 1990.

Since the time it was set up the centre has been receiving a series of telling phone calls; wrong number, usually. For example,

Staff at the Centre : 'Алло! Центр гендерных исследований' ('*Hello! The Centre for Gender Studies.*')

Caller : 'Каких исследований, - ядерных' ('*What studies, nuclear?*')

Curious and funny as these mistakes may seem, it is not as surprising to a Russian speaker as the words for 'gender' (гендер) and 'nuclear' (ядер) sound very similar when expressed quickly (and the bad telephone reception does not help much either). Such mistakes reflect a more urgent and serious problem in the way the term 'gender' has been **imported** into and used within Russian academia. In my essay, I seek to present a history of 'gender' as a notion and concept in Russian official (both academic and governmental) discourses in a way that highlights

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<sup>1</sup> This article was first presented at the Annual Conference in Russian and Slavonic Studies, University of Cambridge, March, 1995. It was subsequently published in Labour Studies Working Papers, University of Warwick, 1995.

the different ways in which it has been used and not used to 'talk about' and 'work with' women. It would be shown that the term 'gender' still remains 'to-be-trans-lated' into the Russian text insofar as it remains marginal to and has not achieved a **cultural currency** within the Russian context.

### *Historical (con)text*

'Only that which does not have a history can truly be defined'. (*Nietzsche*)

Before attempting to discuss the ways in which the term 'gender' has been used in the Russian context, it is important, I believe, to present a historical elaboration of the various terms and notions that were employed to 'talk about' women (gender?) prior to its introduction / importation. Instead of giving a strict chronological account of the different terms in Russian history, I intend to present a more thematic discussion of three exemplary<sup>2</sup> historical junctures, namely the **Pre-Revolutionary** period (prior to 1917, especially late nineteenth and early twentieth century), **Post-Revolutionary** (after 1917, especially the 1920s and 1930s) and finally of the **post-Perestroika** period.

### *Pre-Revolutionary period*

In this section, I intend to highlight the uses of the terms 'sex' and 'women' in the works of Rozanov (an important nineteenth-twentieth century Russian philosopher and writer) and in the discourses of the women's suffragist movement in Russia.

**a)** Rozanov presents sex as a (the) primary activity constitutive of one's religious life and claims that its relation to Christianity significantly differs from that which the Church sought to establish. He says, 'The tie of sex with God is stronger than the tie of intellect, or even conscience, with God'. (Rozanov, cited in Roberts, 1972:221).<sup>3</sup> For him, sexual intercourse allowed 'man' (note not women) to actually come into direct contact with God and that the child that is born out of this divine encounter is testimony to it. Rozanov sees sexual activity as a means to bring souls from that higher world into this one. Hence sex that does not involve reproduction is divinely incorrect and 'the need for sex (therefore children) becomes a basis for the family and marriage, which are to end when this need ends' (Roberts, 1972:221).<sup>4</sup> Rozanov saw children as a means to reject death insofar as some part of one's carries on in

<sup>2</sup> In this essay, the various themes, discourses and authors that I have highlighted as 'exemplary' are not presented as if they are / were representative of the period or feature discussed. I have carefully chosen the examples that, in my view, most comprehensively and suggestively reflect the issues discussed. Thus, their exemplarity is not in their exhaustive representation but in their instantiation of an issue / period.

<sup>3</sup> His first book devoted to the themes of sex and marriage, was *In the World of the Obscure and Uncertain* (1901). Other works on such themes - *Around the Church Walls* (1903), *The Dark Face* (1911), *Moonlight People* (1913)

<sup>4</sup> Rozanov even coded genitals, both male and female, with religious significance, as 'holy' and at times his views about them amounted to a deep fixation even: 'If I can't smell and kiss the sex of a woman', he says in one of his letters, 'then let me suck the udder of a cow' (Rozanov, cited in Roberts, 1972:222)

this world long after one's death. Rozanov rejected Christianity as 'the pain of the world' which 'conquered the joy of the world'. The essence of a true religion for him was glorification of life; a semblance of which he found in the religious teachings of the ancient Hebrews and the primitive religions of early Egypt. He considered these 'religions of the flesh', more attractive options vis a vis Christianity as they centred on the sexual behaviour of man, urging man to be fruitful and to multiply being concerned with the here and now.

Where are women? Are they not in Rozanov's view simply tools and mediators in this divine encounter between 'man' and God? It is interesting that Rozanov despite speaking so lovingly of the religious significance of the sexual act fails to mention that other half of the heterosexual pair - 'woman'. What may seem to us as a failure on his part to mention 'woman' in sex may well be due to his not making that initial distinction between a woman and her sexuality - that, for him, woman is sex. It is this taken-for-granted synonymy between women and their sexuality that seems to characterise much of the philosophical musings on women before the Revolution.<sup>5</sup>

### b) Women's Suffragist Movement

In the last decades of Tsarist rule Russia saw a dramatic development of women's social and political activism, what Richard Stites characterised as the 'sixty years old history of Russian feminism' (Stites, 1978:58) which came to an abrupt end after the Revolution. The range of diverse women's organizations and writings that cropped up during this period bear testimony to not just their enthusiasm and revolutionary fervour but also to their conceptions of what it was to be 'woman'. There was a strong international character to some of these organisations, namely the National Council of Women (which had affiliations with its international counterparts in Europe and America) and the International Woman Suffrage Alliance. The women's liberation with its libertarian and humanist rhetoric provided the discursive space within which these and other national organizations (e.g. Russian Women's Mutual Philanthropic Society and the Union of Equal Rights for Women) articulated their aims and objectives. This libertarian, humanist and egalitarian rhetoric that characterised the suffragist is also indicated by the various journals / magazines that were established before the Revolution. The following provides an indication of the range and discursive logic of the issues covered by the Russian suffragists:

<i>Zenskie Novosti</i> (Women's News)	St Petersburg (1866-1868)
<i>Zenskoe Obrazovanie</i> (Women's Education)	St. Petersburg (1876-1891)
<i>Zenskoe Delo</i> (Women's Issues)	St. Petersburg (1899-1900)
<i>Zenskii Vestnik</i> (Women's News)	St. Petersburg (1904-1917)
<i>Souz Zenschin</i> (Union of Women)	St. Petersburg (1907-1909)
<i>Zenskoe Delo</i> (Women's Issues)	Moscow (1910-1917)

<sup>5</sup> This characteristic of attaching women to or making them inseparable from their sexual identity is found in much of the key figures of Russian literature and philosophy prior to the twentieth century (eg. Turgenev, Dostoevsky, Vladimir Solovyev and especially Tolstoy)

It is interesting to note that the word 'woman' is appended to all the various journals in a way that marks these texts and the issues covered therein as 'relevant' to women. A casual perusal of the issues discussed in these various journals / magazines, shows an emphasis on questions of women's 'rights' with reference to education, domestic realm, political participation, divorce, family law, medical practices and prostitution.<sup>6</sup>

Associated as it was to the women's liberation in Western Europe as of the USA, their approach of the issues employed a libertarian rhetoric / agenda.

Post-Revolutionary period - Constituting the 'New Individual'

'The dictatorship will have to become softer and milder as the economic welfare of the country is raised. The present method of *commanding human beings* will give way to one of *disposing over things*. The road leads not to the robot but to man of a **higher order**.' (Trotsky, [1933]/1970:50)

The Revolution of 1917 left the Bolsheviks with an immense task at hand - how to rule the Russian population without seriously compromising their own power. I have argued elsewhere that they sought to address this immediate governmental problem of achieving control and social order through constituting the 'new communist individual'.<sup>7</sup> It is within the discursive and historical construction of this 'new individual' that discourses about women need to be examined. Two main themes dominated discourses about 'women' during this period, namely,

- a) Freeing women from the shackles of oppressive peasant family and kinship structures so as to facilitate and increase women's free participation in the new social order / future through work. .
- b) Management (through rational ordering) and construction of the new communist family - where sexuality of women (and men) becomes an object of governmental problematization through notions such as **polovoi vopros** (sexual question), **polovye otnosheniya** (sexual relations), **polovaya zisn'** (sexual life)<sup>8</sup>.

Both these issues were (or at least, pretended to be ?) framed with reference to 'correcting' bourgeois (peasant ?) morality that was deemed detrimental to the creation of a communist

<sup>6</sup> Some of these issues, especially those about medical practices and prostitution were extensively explored during the First All-Russian Congress of Women in 1908. See, Edmondson, *Feminism in Russia, 1900-17* (1984), for a detailed discussion of this congress and of pre-Revolutionary Russian feminism.

<sup>7</sup> In my M.A. dissertation, 'Women and Government in Bolshevik Russia' (University of Warwick, 1994), I have employed Foucault's concept of 'governmentality' to analyse the complex interconnections between the governmental technologies involved in this construction of the 'new individual' and of the 'new woman'.

<sup>8</sup> The notion of 'социальный' (sexual life) has been mostly employed within Soviet medical discourses to normalize the sexual conduct of 'new' individuals, especially Soviet youth.

social order. And in doing so these discourses employed the terms 'women', 'sex' and 'sexual relations' as if they were synonyms of each other, for an articulation of the differences between them would have amounted to the insertion of the notion of 'gender'.

I would now move on to discuss each of these issues.

a) Kollontai, one of the leading voices of Communist feminism, in an echo of Lenin, condemns the old order of sexual (gender) relations in a way that problematizes the pre-Revolutionary individualistic essence of privacy and household : 'Bourgeois morality demanded everything for the beloved person. The morality of the proletariat prescribes - everything for the collective' (Kollontai, [1923]/1990:93) Lenin defines the notion of 'communist morality' in his famous work 'Tasks of the Youth Leagues (Bourgeois and Communist Morality)'. This work served as the cornerstone of educational and socialisation discourses and practices throughout the entire Soviet period. Lenin says that Communist morality is based on the united discipline and serves the purpose of helping human society rise to a higher level, which is the communist future : 'Communist morality is based on the struggle for the consolidation and completion of communism. That is also the basis for the communist training, education and teaching'. (Lenin, [1920]/1990:24) Thus, the task of the new generation - struggle with the constant bourgeois threat 'outside' and building the edifice of communist society in order to bring it to completion.

A Communist became an example for the rest of the population and, as Krupskaya puts it, 'a communist is, first and foremost, a person involved in society, with strongly developed social instincts ( in opposition to the biological instincts) who desires that all people should live well and happy' (Krupskaya, [1922] /1990 : p.26; words within parentheses mine). Here she clearly tries to apply a scientific language of physiology and biology to the communist discourse. She indeed uses such words as instinct and desire with references to the sociality, providing the future road of articulating socialist agenda empowered with the energy of instincts. The sexual revolution, however, was announced only on paper by means of being superficially addressed by Bolshevik legal reforms. The Bolsheviks themselves, seemed more interested in employing these legal reforms to effect the 'withering away' of the *bourgeois* family, to be substituted by the new framework of sexual relations, namely that of the *proletarian* family. Kollontai aptly notes that,

'...the old type of family has seen its day...But, on the ruins of the former family we shall soon behold rising a new form which will involve altogether different relations between men and women, and which will be *a union of affection and comradeship, a union of two equal persons of the Communist Society, both of them free, both of them independent, both of them workers*' (Kollontai, [1918], 1980 : 179).

Moreover, these legal reforms helped Bolsheviks to directly interfere into and thus reconstitute the private realm. This institutional legitimacy that the Bolsheviks gained through their laws that affected the private realm served to inculcate people's docility to their power. The concept

of the 'new proletarian family' (vis-à-vis the traditional, peasant family) and the task to construct it through the management of sexual relations were part of a governmental strategy that afforded the institutionalisation of greater control over the lives of private individuals and / through their families. As Trotsky says :

*'A long and permanent marriage, based on mutual love and cooperation - that is the ideal standard. The influences of the school, of literature, and of public opinion in the Soviets tend toward this. Freed from the chains of police and clergy, later also from those of economic necessity, the tie between man and woman will find its own way, determined by physiology, psychology, and care for the welfare of the human race... In any case, the problem of marriage has ceased to be a matter of uncritical tradition and the blind force of circumstance; it has been posed as a task of collective reason'* (Trotsky, [1933], 1970: 53).

Here Trotsky reveals that while the Church was responsible for the 'old family', now the communist regime became the new actor empowered to organize and channel sexual relations. And the direction was of the same order - marriage and motherhood :

'Communist Society therefore approaches the **working** woman and the working man and says to them : You are young, you love each other. Everyone has the right to happiness. Therefore live your life. Do not flee happiness. Do not fear marriage, even though marriage was truly a chain for the working man and woman of capitalist society. Above all, do not fear, young and healthy, as you are, to give to your country new workers, new citizen-children. The society of **the workers** is in need of new working forces...The child will be fed, it will be brought up, it will be educated by the care of the Communist Fatherland...'( Kollontai, [1918], 1980: 178-170; emphases mine).

In other words, family became an instrument to achieve particular kind of Bolshevik governing, and a target of governmental problematization. In 1936 *Family* was put into Soviet Constitution as a basic and smallest unit of socialist society, thus, it became 'the true proletarian family' and children became 'appropriated' by educational, medical and academic authorities.

The category of 'woman' was employed as a tool in the governmental constitution of the 'new proletarian family', built after the destruction of the individualistic 'peasant' and 'bourgeois' family (in Lenin, the distinction between them was collapsed to legitimize the destruction of both as one).

#### **b) *Polovoi vopros* (The Sex Question)**

In a 1924 article in a book, *Polovoi vopros* (The 'Sex Question'), two popular physicians and writers on sex issues claim that human sexuality and sexual relations were fundamental to the constitution of 'all aspects of our existence, not only in physical health, but in our moods, our capacity for work, our relations with people, our social activity, our creativity' and as such go on to advise its ordered and healthy management. '(T)he new world', they say, 'can be created

only by a thoroughly healthy, strong and cheerful generation. And only a generation which **orders its sexual life on a rational and healthy basis can be healthy**'. (L.A. & L.M. Vasilevsky, [1924], 1990:95, emphasis mine)

Vinogradskaya, a member of central Zhenotdel, and the editorial board of journal for women *Kommunistka* [Communist Woman], in her 1923 essay in the journal, '*Molodaia Gvardiia*' ('Young Guard') delivers an interesting critique of Kollontai's essay, 'Make Way for the Winged Eros' of the same year. In criticising Kollontai's thoughts about the possible varieties of relationships between men and women, she argues that 'moving on to the situation of our everyday existence, to our reality, we must say that **all questions of the rationalizations of sexual relations turn first of all (under our conditions of poverty, unemployment, especially among women, lack of social education) on the questions of the family, of children**'.

She, in a way that echoes and draws on Trotsky, asks rhetorically: 'Is love really, taken in a social and biological connection, some sort of art for art's sake? Is it really not the prelude to reproduction, to the bearing of children?' (Vinogradskaya, 1990[1923]:119; emphases mine)

Vinogradskaya's position is that the 'new' permutations of relationships between men and women that Kollontai conceives as made possible by communist society, are very much 'ideal' conceptions which do not have referents in the real world as the abject conditions of poverty and unemployment that characterise the real conditions of man and women are not amenable to the developments of such relationships. More importantly, she says that Kollontai's attempt to engage the question of men-women relationships without reference to children, to relations of reproduction, is both naive and contrary to the Marxist notion of social instinct.

However, Kollontai made it clear that, from her point of view, love emotions should be directed for the benefit of the collective, thus 'biological instinct becomes spiritualized'.

(Kollontai [1923], 1990:84).

Thus, it can be seen that the discourses about women that characterised this period seldom engaged the complex interplay of sex and gender categories but rather preferred as a matter of governmental convenience to collapse the distinctions between them.

### *Post-Perestroika period - Gender as Agenda*

In this section, I would highlight the more recent trends of academic discourses specifically employing the term 'gender' in Russia, particularly referring to the writings of Russian academic-feminists like Rimashevskaya, Posadskaya and Konstantinova and of the émigré feminist, Mamonova. Their writings serve as good examples of post-*Perestroika* discourses about 'gender' especially because they have been instrumental in its 'importation' into Russian academia (as well as into official policy discourses) and in establishing the semantic parameters through their pragmatic applications of the term.

Natal'ia Rimashevskaya in her article *The New Women's Studies* presents how the notion of 'gender' (as *гендер*) has come to be used in academic circles in Russia through her activities as

a participant of a special committee created with the task to cover 'the **social activities of women** in the contemporary world' (Rimashevskaya, 1992:118; emphases mine). She particularly emphasises the reluctance of the academic community within Russia to adopt the 'гендер' concept when she introduced it in her article *How We Solve the Woman Question*. She notes that the new egalitarian approach she proposed in the earlier article, is based 'on a mutual complementarity of the **sexes**' in opposition to the traditional assumption about (natural) '**differentiation of role functions** between the **sexes**' (p. 119).

However, Rimashevskaya notes that the concept of 'гендер' received many negative responses both within the academy and the authorities. Rimashevskaya writes that on top of the Academy male majority did not take such ideas as 'gender' seriously since "public consciousness is still extremely patriarchal, especially among men" (p. 120). She notes in conclusion that as '**conceptual analysis of the 'woman question' develops the need for praxis is increasingly pressing**' (p.120), in a way that seems to underscore a certain anxiety about praxis vis-à-vis conceptual analysis.

A Centre for Gender Studies, she says, 'focuses on the issues of sex, as socially constructed' (p. 121)<sup>9</sup>, attempting also to make its work intelligible to both men and women and presenting new approaches to the 'woman question'. Then Rimashevskaya presents list of a variety of activities the Centre provides, ranging from the development of theoretical perspectives to organising activities within the women's movement.

Konstantinova, another Russian academic who has been actively engaged in feminist activities, in her discussion of the women's movement in Russia echoes the libertarian / humanist rhetoric characteristic of the early women suffragists. She bemoans the fact that, '(i)n the Soviet period the **emancipation of women** was not even an issue in the ongoing debate between the Slavophiles and the Westerniser authors' who set the intellectual agenda for Russia (Konstantinova, 1992:204; emphases mine) In summarizing the contemporary situation of women in post-Perestroika Russia she claims that the resurgence of the Orthodox Church has had negative effects on women's social positions. 'Religion is once more playing an increasingly important part in society. The Russian Orthodox Church is deeply conservative and patriarchal, and its **repressive** attitude to women has emerged unchanged by the *perestroika* reforms'. (Konstantinova, 1992:204) Here, she clearly seems to be caught within what Foucault has referred to as the 'repressive hypothesis', which has characterised traditional political analyses, where power is essentially conceived as that which represses or oppresses instead of looking at the actual operations of power which defy such easy theoretical appropriations.

<sup>9</sup> It is this idea of 'socially constructed sex' which has lent legitimacy to one more alternative translation of 'gender' into Russian academic text as 'социальный' meaning 'social sex'. See especially, Per Monson (ed.) *Contemporary Western Social Theories* (1993) published in the Russian language in Moscow, wherein 'gender' is translated as 'social sex'.

'Throughout the history of the Soviet state', Konstantinova asserts, 'the position of women has been determined by state-defined demographic and economic imperatives : either women must be productive workers or they must stay at home; at other times they are expected to combine the two, but never have they been able to make their own choices or to formulate the issues themselves'. (Konstantinova, 1992: 204-5) In addition to drawing from a largely impoverished paradigms of libertarianism and humanism, she also seems to be assuming that men have had the privilege to make free choices during the Soviet period or today.

Yet another example of a feminist academic who remains within and operates from the libertarian rhetoric of early suffragists is Posadskaya, the Director of the Gender Centre in Moscow, who, interestingly, seems to have been one of the first persons to have used the term 'gender' as 'гендер' in the Russian academic community. In addition to being instrumental in the formation of the Gender Centre (together with Rimashevskaya), she has remained one of Russia's foremost feminist activists constantly organising women's forums and workshops. In her most recent book, **Women in Russia** (1994) she has reiterated her conviction that the current situation in Russia threatens to develop into a 'Renaissance of Patriarchy' insofar as the rise of capitalist enterprise within Russia 'excludes' women from both the labour market and political participation.

Mamonova, a Russian émigré writer living in the United States, who has achieved great popularity within feminist circles in Australia, Canada and France, equally draws from this tradition.

'Where, then, is the moral imperative of feminism ? What does feminism have to offer if it is to distinguish itself from patriarchy ? What is the point of our struggle ? For thousands of years men have not been not ashamed to assert their superiority, so why have we been so frightened by new alternatives that have opened up after a ten year battle'<sup>10</sup> (Mamonova, 1989: 172) While showing an anxiety to 'get involved' and 'do something', her faithful reiteration and appeal to humanist principles and liberty seem to unduly restrict the scope of feminist political engagement.

'...I believe in woman. A new path lies ahead of her, but the **habit of enslavement** that has been instilled in her for thousands of years has not been overcome. Yet there are in women reserves of strength, **unknown** to the world, and resources of energy, **still hidden**, that are capable of enriching humanity. Men have already demonstrated their possibilities, but women have yet to reveal theirs'. (Mamonova, 1989: 172; emphases mine). The constant reminder of the 'not-yet-unveiled' strengths of women, though rich in suggestion and promise cannot but remain utopian in a situation where the articulation of women is still with reference to her sex. Moreover, to present the strengths as unrealised she wipes off the actual achievements of many ordinary women.

<sup>10</sup> Note that this article was written in 1986 in the wake of *Perestroika* and thus the 'ten-year battle' and 'new alternatives' were made with reference to it.

The term, 'gender' seems to be employed (when employed at all) in the abovementioned discourses as a 'catch-all' term - within which the general and more specific issues about 'women' and 'sex' could be and were practically engaged with or discussed. It seems to be used as a convenient locus around which to set the agenda for the Centre and for women's activities. It is possible that (though not very clear if) the urgency of the need to actively work with issues and problems that relate to women in Russia forced the Centre and its pioneers to promptly compromise the cultural commensurability and translational adequacy of the terms of /in their agenda. The fact that gender served the agenda seemed enough. However, the term 'gender', as an imported term, remained **semantically empty**, but the discursive space it opened out within the academy and in society was filled with the terms 'women' and 'sex'. While, this made for prompt action, it, unfortunately, may have blunted the possibilities for a more concerted, long-term political engagement with regards to gender issues.

### *Problems of translation*

*'The traditional concepts in any discussion of translation are fidelity and license - the freedom of faithful reproduction and, in its service, fidelity to the word. These ideas seem to be no longer serviceable to a theory that looks for other things in a translation than reproduction of meaning.'*

(Benjamin, 1972:78)

Having thus far highlighted the historical context within which the term 'gender' has come to be 'imported', it is possible now to present a more critical discussion of the problems of translating 'gender' into the Russian (con)text.

Much of the more formal theoretical approaches to language (and by implication, to translation) draw upon the **universalist** assumption. Such an assumption 'accepts the existence of a universal system of language-independent entities (**semantic primitives** or **semantic primes**)' where these **semantically primary** entities are seen as a 'common-denominator of utterance-specific realizations..., and as a **tertium comparationis** for language-specific entities that are considered to be translationally equivalent'. (Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, 1992:85). However, in thus assuming a language-independent ontological basis for and hence possibility of translation across languages, the translations proceeding from the **universalist** foundations, tend to both ignore and obscure the cultural differences between the languages involved.

While the universalist assumption complacently iterates the possibility of translation there is yet another theoretical tradition constantly pronounces the impossibility and indeterminacy of translation. Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk succinctly summarizes this so-called, 'Indeterminacy of Translation' thesis as the theoretical position that is sceptical about the possibility of translations for various reasons, namely, that '(e)ither languages of the world have such disparate

systems that they do not fit one another, or human conceptual categories are so diverse that they cannot be 'calibrated' or else a foreign speaker can never be certain about the correspondences between the native interlocuter's and his own interpretations of the perceived reality'. (Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, 1992:85) And W.V. Quine is one of the more famous proponents of this thesis.

Though sharing the scepticism of the indeterminists, I believe any translational exercise cannot even begin without the optimism that characterises the universalist assumption of the translatability of experiences. In a summary of the contemporary task of translation, de Beaugrande and Dressler state thus : '*Probabilistic models are more adequate and realistic than deterministic ones. Dynamic accounts of structure-building operations will be more productive than static descriptions of the structures themselves. We should work to discover regularities, strategies, motivations, preferences and defaults rather than rules and laws. Dominances can offer more realistic classifications than can strict categories. Acceptability and appropriateness are more crucial standards for texts than grammaticality and well-formedness. Human reasoning processes are more essential to using and conveying knowledge in texts than are logical proofs. It is the task of science to systematize the fuzziness of its objects of inquiry, not to ignore it or argue it away*' (de Beaugrande, R. and Dressler, W.W. 1981:xiv). In addition to the themes highlighted by them, I would like to add two other themes of relevance to achieving more politically engaged and culturally sensitive translations. The following discussion which focuses on some of the problems involved in the translation of the term 'gender' into the Russian (con)text will be organized around these two themes, namely, 1) Cultural Currency and Commensurability, and 2) Political efficacy.

### *Cultural Currency and Commensurability*

**'Translatability is an essential quality of certain works, which is not to say that it is essential that they be translated; it means rather that a specific significance inherent in the original manifests itself in its translatability'**. (Benjamin, 1972:71) And what is true of the work could be reasonably and critically made applicable to the word too. In a rather optimistic note, Benjamin observed that translatability remained a possibility inherent in certain works insofar as some element of the original invited it. While Benjamin's optimism seems to derive primarily from what he called the 'purity of language(s)', I believe that translatability is directly related to the general **commensurability** with regards to that which is to be translated. For the problem, whether for the reader or the translator, is too often is not one of translatability as re-presentability, but rather of 'cultural commensurability'.<sup>11</sup> The existing translation of 'gender' in Russian however, lacks a cultural currency and in fact has not and may well never gain currency outside the walls of academia insofar as it is incommensurable.

<sup>11</sup> This notion of commensurability is borrowed from Thomas Kuhn's 'incommensurability thesis' as espoused in his *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.

## Political Efficacy

Spivak, in her excellent article *The Politics of Translation*, suggests that translation affords a creative contention with the language (and difference) of some 'other'. This 'working with' the language of the other(s), that is 'not-mine', is for her 'one of the seductions of translation'. In her view, translation is, in this sense, 'a simple miming of the responsibility to the trace of the other in the self' (Spivak, 1993:179). Here, it is noteworthy that it is not a seduction that involves an irresponsible submission but one with strings attached; with responsibilities to 'the other'.

Starting from the position that 'it is not bodies of meaning that are transferred in translation', Spivak claims that it is more pertinent in translation exercises to examine the way in which a language facilitates the 'agency' of its users (both readers and writers).<sup>12</sup> She claims that the 'task of the feminist translator is to consider language as a clue to the workings of the gendered subject', for in her view, while the 'writer is written by her language,...the writing of the writer writes agency in a way that might be different' for different translators / speakers. (179)

### 'How does the translator attend to the specificity of the language she translates?'

There is a way in which the **rhetorical nature** of every language disrupts its **logical systematicity**. If we emphasise the logical at the expense of these rhetorical interferences, we remain safe. 'Safety' is the appropriate term here, because we are talking of risks, of violence to the translating medium'. Spivak believes that in translations there is a need to carefully allow both the rhetorical and the logical elements of the origin language to be retained though, (she seems to imply) these elements could in the act of translation by way of their (necessary ?) oppositional relationship mutually exclude each other. Spivak feels, it seems, that most translators prefer to be 'safe', by choosing between one or the other element.

She also claims that thus far, '(t)he politics of translation from a non-European woman's text too often suppresses this possibility because the translator cannot engage with or cares insufficiently for, **the rhetoricity of the original**'. (181; emphases mine). Spivak's notion of rhetoricity is a necessary element in all languages though it is, according to her in a relationship of communicative tension with, what she calls, the logical systematicity of languages.

She says that 'the simple possibility that something might not be meaningful is contained by the rhetorical system as the always possible menace of a space outside language' and that it is this that is 'most eerily staged (and challenged) in the effort to communicate with other possible intelligent beings in space'. Thus, she claims (mysteriously, within parentheses), '(a)bsolute alterity or otherness is thus differed-deferred into an other self who resembles us, however minimally, and with whom we can communicate'. (181)

<sup>12</sup> This notion of 'agency' implied by gender seems to have been borrowed from Irigaray: 'Gender as index and mark of the subjectivity and the ethical responsibility of the speaker...constitutes the irreducible differentiation that occurs on the inside of the human race. Gender stands for the unsubstitutable position of the I and the you (*le tu*) and of their modes of expression'. (Irigaray, 1993:169-70)

While rhetoric in language works in between the interstices of what is communicated in and by words, logic threads them together in a manner that communicates by connections. 'Rhetoric must work in the silence between and around words in order to see what works and how much' and Spivak asserts that this '**jagged relationship** between rhetoric and logic, condition and effect of knowing, is a relationship by which a world is made for the agent, so that the agent can act in an ethical way, in a political way, a day-to-day way...

Unless one can at least construct a model of this for the other language, there is no real translation'. (181; emphasis mine) Thus, compromising on the rhetoricity inherent in a term / phrase in an effort to make intelligible (i.e. logical) to some others, serves not only to distort / blunt the cultural significance of that term, but more importantly affects the agentiality of the speaker's as of the readers. It is in this sense that an alternative term for 'gender' is required within the Russian (con)text as the uncritically imported term 'гендер' which merely mimics (phonetically) its English equivalent, makes its Russian users empty vessels that merely echo it.

### *Род (Rod) as GENDER : Rooting and Uprooting*

Having thus far examined the historical and theoretical issues pertinent to translating 'gender' into the Russian (con)text, this concluding section will go on to provide an alternative translation of the term. It is suggested here that the term 'gender' is most appropriately translated as 'Род' ('rod'). While a detailed discussion and defence of the translational appropriateness of the word is well beyond the scope of this paper, I hope to show at least that in addition to having a wider cultural currency, the term 'rod' is particularly suited for a more nuanced (feminist or otherwise) politics than that offered by the semantically empty, imported term, 'гендер' and other translations like 'social sex' (социальный пол).

The word 'rod' has a rich etymological rootedness in the Russian language / culture. The Oxford Russian Dictionary provides an idea of the diverse meanings that this word evokes. The word, *rod* refers to the social entities of the 'family', 'kin', 'clan', 'generation'; it also means, not surprisingly given its associations with family and kin, 'birth', 'origin' and 'stock'; denotes the 'genus', 'sort' or 'kind' to which a thing belongs; and finally to the grammatical category 'gender' which differentiates between 'masculine', 'feminine' and 'neuter'.

### *Why is 'rod' a more appropriate translation of gender ?*

Firstly because the term enjoys a greater cultural currency in having wider social usage and commensurability (thus, easily understood). The connotations that this term evokes are multiple - especially in its entrenchment in the cultural memories of Russian speakers.

Historically the pre-Revolutionary kinship structures were destroyed in relation to private property by reference to women's social position (i.e. liberating them from the oppressive 'traditional' peasant/bourgeois family). As such, a retrieval of women issues through/as 'gender' (rod) would inevitably imply a simultaneous recovery and remembering of kinship structures. Despite (and because of) the fact that *rod* draws upon the historical and etymological associations

between kinship and gender, it is important to employ this term with a sensitivity to the possibility of its corruption in, what Posadskaya has called a 'Renaissance of Patriarchy'. Posadskaya claims that the post-Perestroika years have been characterised by a renewed emphasis on family and kinship relations which represent a renewal of the patriarchal structures that oppress women.<sup>13</sup>

Thus in employing 'rod' as 'gender' one should strategically articulate its difference from and tensions with(in) kinship structures in a way that retains its **political efficacy**.

Secondly, the term allows for a more nuanced and politically sophisticated engagement and activism. In this sense it has greater political efficacy than a term like 'гендер'. While the term 'gender' as it has been used in English does not restrictively denote women only (though some feminists still carry on as if it did), the term as it has been 'imported' into the Russian (con)text has failed to articulate the complexity of gender relations by consistently excluding men from its discourses framed within the term 'gender'. Too often, they even equate power with / as 'male' and 'gender' as (the repressed) 'female'.

In conclusion, it is not my intention to point to the 'poverty' of feminism as activism but rather to suggest a radicalization of pre-existing feminist struggles drawing from a more sensitive trans-lation of 'gender' into the Russian context instead of merely posing itself as a faint echo of a distant voice, whether from the past or other contexts.

<sup>13</sup> Valentina Konstantinova (1992) gives as an example of such patriarchal 'rationalizations' Solzhenitsyn's article 'How are we to structure Russia: feasible considerations' (1990). In this article Solzhenitsyn expresses common for Slavophiles (Konstantinova refers to writings by Rasputin:1990, Belov: 1990, Tolstaia :1990, and Tokareva:1989) and widely propagated views that '(T)oday the family is the key to saving our future. The woman must be given a chance to return to the family to bring up children and men's pay must reflect this, though with anticipated unemployment in the initial stages it will not work successfully right away; some families would be better off if the woman continues to have a job for the time being' (cited in Konstantinova, 1992: 204).

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