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and its local translations

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1. Introduction

“Gender refers to the economic, social, political, and cultural *attributes and opportunities* associated with being male or female. The social definitions of what it means to be male or female vary among cultures and change over time”

USAID, 2000

“Mainstreaming involves ensuring that gender perspectives and attention to the goal of gender equality are central to all activities – policy development, research, advocacy/dialogue, legislation, resource allocation, and planning, implementation and monitoring of programmes and projects”

UN, 2001

“Gender equality is a core development issue-a development objective in its own right. It strengthens countries' abilities to grow, to reduce poverty, and to govern effectively. Promoting gender equality is thus an important part of a development strategy that seeks to enable *all people* - women and men alike-to escape poverty and improve their standard of living”

World Bank, 2001

These three passages taken from international institutions *gender mainstreaming*¹ strategy documents are just a brief example of the integration of *gender* as analytical category and field of intervention in development and social policy discourse in the last 15 years. Expressions such as *engendered* development and poverty analysis, *gender* mainstreaming, *gender* equity, *gender*-blindness, *gender* perspective, *gender*-related barriers, *gender*-responsive development actions, and *gender* equality (just to name a few of them) can be easily found in social problems diagnosis, not only among international development organizations but within governmental and non governmental organizations (NGO's) as well. There are indeed enough arguments to consider that this incorporation can be seen as merely rhetoric and with still limited effect in poor population living conditions (Molyneux, 2007; Moser, 2005). Nevertheless, the evidence of *gender* as a core term in social policy vocabulary also allows to question: which of the multiple definitions/meanings of

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English is not my native language therefore I would like to apologize in advance for the grammar mistakes, some lack of precise vocabulary and the inaccuracies surely made. All quotes and translations from Spanish to English and the use of *italics* to highlight document fragments and stress ideas are sole responsibility of the author, unless otherwise stated. I am specially grateful to Romina Campopiano, Laura Fernandez, Ana Grondona y Alejandra Oberti and for their kind support and comments during the writing of this paper.

¹ *Mainstreaming* is defined as “a process rather than a goal that consists in bringing what can be seen as marginal (Gender in this case) into the core business and main decision-making process of an organization” (UNESCO, 2003) According to UN “Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality.” (UN ECOSOC, 1997 in Rao Gupta and Mehra, 2006)

gender can (and which cannot) be assimilated to social policy?. Which are the political consequences of the definitions adopted?. Whether *gender* is used as sign of political correctness for referring to women or to comply with international agreements or considered as a sophisticated analytical perspective for pointing out those aspects of social policy that have neither neutral nor equal effects on population, the different meanings assigned to *gender* definition sets up boundaries for political action .

Gender is a complex term with a long tradition and multiple revisions within feminist thought² all of political strategic importance: “the theoretical and political conceptualization of the term *gender* and the critical dismantling of its linkages with *sex* represents the largest achievement of contemporary feminism, which has used that term to install the problem of sexual inequality in various stages of social intervention, struggle for citizenship and academic and intellectual production” (Richard, 2008). At the same time “it is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and a primary way of signifying relationships of power” (Scott, 1986) The potential of *gender* as a concept to articulate and go across these multiple stages makes it a field of permanent debate dispute but also of great creativity.

The analysis of the ways in which *gender* terminology became increasingly present in Social Policy discourse is part of a PhD research project on *famil(ies)* and *households*³ theoretical and operational definitions utilized in social programs design developed in Argentina during the last decade. I work under the assumption that through the analysis of the various discursive strategies that converge in the delimitations of the subjects, objects, and intervention practices of social policy concerning *famil(ies)* and *households* it is possible to reconstruct main features of the way in which a historically and geographically situated society define which and whose needs are to be satisfied, to what extent, through which modes of intervention and, last but not least, assembles and build specific knowledge. I concentrate in *famil(ies)* and *households* constructions under the assumption that they are the compound result of a various sets of discourses from social science

² Scott (1986) Haraway (1995) Lamas (1999) examine the difficulties and potential misunderstandings that the utilization of the English word *Gender* has for Spanish and French speakers as its main common sense definition does not refer to *sex* or has the same etymological root in non-Anglo languages. For the difficult acceptance of the word *gender* in the French tradition and academic context, See Théubad (2006).

³ Vigdis Broch-Due refers to the domestic sphere as “the presumed essential and eternal gendered entity that went out of fashion after having been roundly criticized in the 80’s s. While the “public sphere” has received more analytical attention lately as part of the recent theoretical concern with the State” (Broch-Due, 2008). Although the separation between spheres of production and reproduction has been heavily criticized taking into account that every reproduction practice is social (Giddens, 1995) there is still an implicit definition of home, households, families structures and gender roles that sub lays operational / technical definitions in social policy dealing with poverty conceptualization and measurement (Moser, 1993) The word families is in its plural form in order not to dismiss the variety of formations that a *famil(ies)* might have.

researchers work (theoretical and technical), Nation State agents, local NGO's/Civil Society organizations as well as International Financial Institutions, among others organizations with strong influence in social problems diagnosis and programs design and financing⁴. Research work in progress aims to understand and describe the way in which public policies concerning life and labour conditions have constructed (by means of its several discourses and suggested practices held in their field of interventions) the domestic space of social reproduction (households and families) as subjects and/or objects of social policy. A glance just at the names of the recent social programs applied through Argentina National Ministries in charge of Development and Labor to assist poor population display the concern about this domestic sphere. Just to mention the more extended ones: "Family Strengthening and Social Capital promotion Project" (*PROFAM*) "Heads of Household program" (JJHD) and "Families for Social inclusion" (Plan Familias)⁵.

Three dimensions can be distinguished in the current research: a) the analysis of the main contents and arguments of social policy discourses corpus selected from official documents, laws, monitoring/results reports and academic field of research production b) the ways in which those discourses coincide, combine, overlap, articulate, converge in different discursive constructions and assembles knowledge about famil(ies) and households relevant features c) the genealogical trace of the political, historical and theoretical debates that lead to the present configurations. These dimensions, roughly described, are essential to understand the effects of truth (Foucault, 2000) resulted from their interaction with consequences for diagnosis and intervention practices. Discursive constructions configure a framework of intelligibility through which the analysis of social policies and the intervention practices on populations proposed by them become feasible. They are also a surface where [on which] not only different opinions and positions are merely expressed but where power relations, hierarchies, unequal resources and resistances establish the changing limits of what can be said (and done) by whom, where, about what, with whom. They show some clues, traces about the intermingled action of history, politics and knowledge.

⁴ Such as UNDP, IDB, and World Bank. This is identified as "the world's largest and most influential development organization" (Bedford, 2008). About World Bank strong influence in Latin America see Corbalán (2002). For complete description of "New Social Policy" main features and their impact in Latin America see Molyneux (2007)

⁵ The three programas were targeted to poor population. PROFAM (2000-2005) consisted in finance to small projects with gender perspective requirements financed by IDB and World Bank and managed through the National Women Council (State agency for gender issues) (Bedford, 2008). Head of Households program (2002-2004) was the most extended program ever reaching almost 2 million unemployed "beneficiaries" of a minimum of \$150 (US\$ 50) with a commitment to comply 4 hs daily job as counterpart. I was financed by World Bank. Both programs were crucial to cope with the 2001 crisis dramatic outcome. In 2004 (in a context of some economic recovery) Heads of Households beneficiaries were split into two groups "employable" (which were transferred to a training and employment program under Ministry of Labour administration) and "unemployable" (most of them women with dependent children) who were transferred to the program "Families for Social inclusion" under Ministry of Social Development administration. They receive a cash transfer per child conditioned to basic education and health requirements. (CELS, 2007)

In Argentina the last two decades are usually described as a period of neoliberal hegemony characterized by the deep restructuring of welfare state by means of privatization and decentralization of its main responsibilities to local levels and structural adjustment of a relatively extended social provision of basic services, finances by World Bank and IMF conditional loans. The profound structural adjustment process and the deepness of the cultural and social changes that occurred during this period shaped the unequal present in which we live and provide the base for the generalized interpretation of this transformation as a whole result of neoliberal ways of government. A closer look to the political, cultural, economic processes included in the description of which is identified as a distinctively neoliberal set of governmental actions is being challenged by contemporary investigations which trace the complex translations that neoliberal main ideas have in each local background and context⁶. Their aim is not to ignore the effect of the structural reforms and its impressive consequences of poverty increase, unemployment and deprivation but to review any superficial diagnosis about a set of *brand-new* neoliberal techniques of problem analysis and intervention applied.

Taking into account this background broader research, some methodological questions also arise: Would it be possible to identify an specific neoliberal way of defining and dealing with families and domestic sphere in social programmes/policy design? Which are the elements that should be considered in a neoliberal characterization of an operational famil(ies) definition to shape its peculiarity? Are we just facing a new arrangement of traditional/classical social policy concepts and tools? Which are the concepts and categories interaction, changes, effects between transnational definitions and their local level translations?. Which are (if any) the political consequences of these traveling ideas? And last but not least, Which are the methodological challenges that these questions pose to knowledge construction and Social Sciences in general?.

The analysis of *gender* assimilation to social policy vocabulary can be a clue to approach these broader questions.

Critical problematization and dismantling of sound concepts like families, households and domestic sphere have been historically one of feminists main efforts and achievements. Any reflection on these issues wouldn't ignore their contribution through the political definition *gender* on the various arena of social intervention, struggle for citizenship and academic and intellectual production. Considered as an analytical category (Scott, 1986) those dimensions of *gender* as a

⁶ As Molyneux affirms "Those who see neoliberalism as having "programmatic coherence" forget that the terrain of Policy, whether social or economic, is always contested, and is shaped by different, sometimes competing, discursive politics and discursive fields as well as existing institutional structures, governing parties and patterns of provision" (...) Each region and indeed each country responded in accordance with its own specificity, social, economic and political, with variations in the depth and timing and political momentum of the reforms. (Molyneux, 2007:8 -12)

complex concept articulate and overlap (not always retaining its critical content) in the process by which *gender* has been increasingly introduced to policy discourse. In this context *gender* (as a transversal category and field of action) is a pertinent example that makes visible vital aspects of the (never smooth) assimilation of categories to local policy level and its traveling trajectories. Multiple factors are involved in this process: international conventions and supra national institutions financing, local and global academic and theoretical backgrounds and the various relations between these two aspects with governmental structures and political movements⁷.

This paper is divided in four sections. In the first part I give a brief account of the introduction of women and inequality – later identified with *gender* – into the development discourse and the rise and spread of *gender mainstreaming* as a broaden strategy of addressing social problems. In the second section, I give a short review of the institutionalization of “*gender expertise*” in Argentina, and its effects in feminist field of action. Third, I examine three dimensions (personal trajectories, policy diffusion patterns and cultural translation) that can help to understand the process of incorporation of *gender* as traveling idea to academic and social policy realms. To conclude, the paper draws attention to the importance of *gender* as category for critical analysis and broader terms of *cultural translation* political challenges.

2. From *Women* to *Gender* (*Mainstreaming*)

“You can't just add women and stir”⁸

This section describes main trends of the incorporation of women and inequality within development discourse⁹ with particular attention to poverty conceptualization and measurement: one of the main areas of concern of social policy. Focus is placed in post 1970's conceptualizations: WID (Women in Development) and GAD (Gender and Development)

⁷ mainly women movements and feminisms in this case.

⁸ Quote usually assigned to Evelyn Fox Keller American physicist and feminist. The quote refers to the low participation and visibility of women in the natural sciences field and the cultural changes needed prior to their incorporation: increasing the number of women is important but it is not just the “magical” solution to inequality.

⁹ Arturo Escobar defines *development discourse* as a “Perceptual field structured by grids of observation, modes of enquiry and registration of problems, and forms of intervention; in short... a space defined not so much by the ensemble of objects with which it dealt but by a set of relations and a discursive practice that systematically produced interrelated objects, concepts, theories, strategies and the like” (Escobar, 1995:42). According to this author, this set of techniques and power-knowledge relationships has been operating through different mechanisms on the *Third World* since *Development* was defined as “a response to the problematization of poverty that took place in the years following World War II, and not a natural process of knowledge that gradually uncovered problems and dealt with them, as such, it must be seen as a historical construct that provides a space in which poor countries are known, specified and intervened upon” (Escobar, 1995:44-45).

(Razavi, 1995; Zumbado, 2003). These are not the first approaches to this relationship but contemporary to *second wave*¹⁰ feminism theoretical concepts and to the state/policies transformation of the last two decades. They can be seen as wide descriptions of the changing ways in which relation between women and development were conceptualized.

According to the account of development discourse researchers, WID (Women in Development) can be considered a wide range of activities concerning women in the development domain that converged and were settled in the agenda of the 1975 UN World conference of the International Women's Year at Mexico City and the UN "Decade for Women" (1975-1985) where it incorporated equity demand within the international UN system¹¹. The expression "Women in Development" was coined in the early 1970's by a Washington-based network of female development professionals which started to challenge "trickle down" theories of development based in their mission experiences overseas, where modernization was impacting differently on men and women and even seemed to be deteriorating their position. These circles started to work with women in academics engaged with women reproductive and sexual division of labour and its impact of development processes on women. There were two main formative influences in WID: the resurgence of women's movement in "northern" countries in the 1970's and an emerging body of research on women in "developing" countries. WID descriptions in the literature reviewed give great significance to Ester Boserup work "Women Role in Economic Development" as a challenge to women traditional roles as wives and mothers which underlined most development policy concerning women up to those days. The main feature of WID was to place women as "productive" member of society (within and outside households) based in economic growth and modernization as definition for development, considered as an "undervalued economic resource in the development process" (Tinker, 1990:31 in Razavi Miller, 1995). Women subordination was understood within an economic framework regarding on "productivity" which had the possibility of being easily used as counter-argument due to cultural differences¹². Women were an "efficient inversion" of development resources in terms of economic and social returns.

¹⁰ Celia Amorós consider that, to be fair, First wave of feminism should be considered the early ideas of XVIIIth century such as those Pulain de la Barre and Olympe de Gouges in France and Mary Wollstonecraft in England (Amorós, 2000 cited in Chàneton, 2007)

¹¹ The following conferences were held at Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985) and Beijing (1995)

¹² That is to say that some activities not considered the same as "productive work" or which not comply with productivity standards could be underestimated and hence not paid.

This efficiency argument contained in WID approach easily complemented the *basic needs strategy* for treating poverty (Leguizamón, 2005), without raising households incomes. For advocacy, emphasis in poor women (and men) helped to make the feminist agenda “less threatening” to development industry¹³. However, the way in which women were made visible was through becoming a cost-effective instrument while becoming a target group (Razavi and Miller 1995). By the end of the 1970’s there were critics of the pertinence of focusing women in isolation while new theoretical works in social sciences stressed the importance of relational understanding of women subordination through considering *gender* as a social relation and “to demonstrate the gender subordination as constructed by rules and practices of different institutions, households, state and community” (Razavi Miller, 1995).

The research made during the UN decade of women is highlighted by Sylvia Chant (2003) as the “earliest substantial work on gender with implications for thinking poverty” In her description of the ways in which gender was incorporated to poverty conceptualization and measurement, identifies four main research tendencies. First, although later criticized as too economic she underlines the importance of detailed survey of income material well being disadvantage and discrimination in education, labour market and unpaid work carried out. She argues that this early research revealed the difficulties of obtaining data on any aspect of women’s lives due to non disaggregated data that could provide a basis for gender-aware policy interventions¹⁴. A complementary consequence of this initial “research impetus” was the awareness for poverty analysis of the plurality of households configuration and its complexity as a appropriate target for interventions. Second, during the 80’s research focus was placed in intra-households inequality and criticism about “unitary households model” raised while theoretical developments of New institutional economics increased their influence and structural adjustments made researchers examine shortfalls in households income and domestic provisioning which multiplied burden of “reproductive” work.

Third tendency of gender and poverty conceptualization described is growing attention paid to the increasing numbers of women –headed households during and after the so called “lost decade” which linked the idea of economic disadvantage comparison with male-headed households with women-headed as the “poorest of the poor” becoming what she calls a “proxy for women’s poverty” and mixed with the notion that poverty was also the *cause* of this kind of

¹³ The argument of feminist agenda as “threatening” was also raised by Moser (2005) when describing difficulties of Gender mainstreaming incorporation to development agencies and by Joan Scott (1986) as one of the main reasons why gender category seemed more neutral for Academy than “feminist” one and consequently more accepted.

¹⁴ According to the researcher this was one of the main impetus for CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women) in 1979.

households structure (due to migration and conjugal breakdown, among other similar explanations). Female headed households were seen as exacerbating poverty themselves. Chant however warns that “while it is undeniable that women suffer disproportionately from social and economic inequalities, whether these disadvantages can be *automatically* mapped onto women-headed households is less certain” (Chant 2003:6)¹⁵.

The fourth body of gender research with knowledge relevance for poverty is the concentrated in women’s *empowerment* since the late 80’s/mid 90’s. According to Chant the complexity of empowerment and participatory definitions (although not new techniques) added weight to the expanding idea that poverty is a dynamic phenomenon and that participatory approaches to poverty alleviation were fundamental. WID “women only” income approaches began to be replaced by GAD (Gender and Development) approaches “conceptualizing gender as dynamic and diverse social construct and which encompass men as well as women”(Chant, 2003:7). GAD introduces in its formulation power differential between men and women, gives more place to human rights perspective and also to some emerging feminist political economy agenda. There was no clear transition between one and other perspectives and in fact, both are still in place, complementing main features in different changing historical and geographical contexts.

GAD approach is also the result of increasing critics within feminist movement of “women” as a unified category specially coming from “southern” and black women. Development structure had become the organization basis for the production of knowledge about “Third World Women” as an homogeneous category (and so did the causes of their oppression). As Chandra Mohanty (1987) clearly states, in the very process of naming, habitats the possibility of colonialist effect from development discourse, but also by white academic feminists¹⁶.

As far as development definitions is concerned, GAD approach is also more coherent with early UNDP definitions of *Human sustainable development* and incorporated techniques such as empowerment from the margins to the center of development toolbox to address inequality.

¹⁵ Similar warnings can be found in Molyneux critical assessment to Social Capital approach and its relation with Gender Molyneux, 200

¹⁶ She describes “The rise of female-headed households in middle class America might be construed as greater independence and feminist progress, whereby women are considered to have chosen to be single parents (there are increasing numbers of lesbian mothers, etc). However the recent increase in female headed households in Latin America where women might be seen to have more decision-making power, is concentrated among the poorest strata, where life choices are constrained economically. A similar argument can be made for the rise of female headed families among black and chicana women in the US. The positive correlation between this and the level of poverty among women of color and white working class women in the US has now even acquired a name: the *feminization of poverty* (...) The meaning and explanation of the rise obviously varies according to the socio-historical context” (Mohanty, 1987)

Gender Mainstreaming is understood as a part of GAD approach to gender inequality and sustainable development (Zumbado, 2003) . Change from mere “integration of women into development” to “mainstreaming” came to replace the way women’s concerns are understood within development institutions. The change in terminology, however, did not in fact resolve the tensions that had marked integrationist approaches. Mainstreaming itself came to signify different things to different people. In 1995 Beijing platform for action prioritized *gender mainstreaming* as the “mechanism to achieve gender equality”¹⁷. As per Moser balance 10 years after “At the international level most development institutions have adopted the terminology of gender equality and gender mainstreaming, and are relatively consistent in their use” (Moser and Moser, 2005). There is as strong debate if gender equality policy should be developed as an end itself o promoted as a mean to development. Although it is clear that most international development institutions have put im place gender mainstreaming policies, it is at the level of implementation that significant changes remain¹⁸.

Elements from both, WID and GAD approaches are present in gender mainstreaming translation to concrete policies and institutions depending on the organization background. Sylvia Walby accounts this complexity: “Gender mainstreaming is constructed, articulated, and transformed through discourse that is clustered within frames that are extended and linked through struggle and argumentation. Expertise is a form of power, often neglected in conventional analysis, which is increasingly deployed by those representing gendered interests in and against the state, often articulated within epistemic communities that combine values, expertise, and politics to become advocacy networks, which are increasingly international” (Walby, 2005). In the next section, some of these interactions will be focused.

3. Activists, academics, experts: feminists

The personal is political

Having described the incorporation process of *gender* to development discourse at an international level, its time now to center the attention in the way in which *gender* categories were consolidated within academic and governmental fields in Argentina local level and the consequences the process had for feminism as political identity and field of political action.

¹⁷ For an account of the first attempts to apply of *gender mainstreaming* within ILO (International Labour Office), World Bank and UNDP (Razavi and Miller, 1995)

¹⁸ For a detailed description of Policy problems to commitment with gender mainstreaming description see Moser (2005)

Argentina has a long feminist and women rights activism tradition in a wide range of political orientations that go from philanthropic groups and suffragists to first university women members and active anarchists and socialists groups at the beginning of the XXth century. Although their core importance in shaping debates on what at the time could be identified as “woman question” and its main related topics¹⁹, for the purposes of this paper I will concentrate mainly on the “second wave”²⁰ feminists, that is to say, those who became visible in the late 60’s mid 70’s and who were the most actively involved in the debate on *gender* incorporation as a component of the public policy agenda during the 80’s and 90’s.

If *gender* is to be understood as a traveling, increasingly transnational concept, I consider important to recall that feminists groups have always had a strong “international” dimension of discourse and practice with different features in each historical context (as well as possibilities of expansion and resources). In the case of the socialist and anarchist groups of women at the beginning of the XXth century (later identified as “first wave” of local feminism) transnational bonds were built up through their relation to socialists parties and anarchists migrant groups mainly European. The reception of different publications get them in touch with international debates (such as suffragism) and international workers rights struggles. In the case of “second wave” feminism, the international circulation of ideas, theories, and people was, at the beginning guaranteed by the participation of women from families with important cultural and economic capital, with upper studies and the possibility to travel abroad (mainly Europe) and get in touch with other thoughts and experiences. During dictatorship some of the experiences included exile obligation due to political persecution and life menace (Masson, 2007). In the last two decades, debate over the international links of feminism has been mainly evolved around the possibilities of regional articulation and the incidence of international financing institutions which fostered the transformation of many feminists advocacy groups into NGO’s. This process had deep political consequences for the feminist field and shifting the main features of their public debates.

In a recent ethnographic work within feminist groups which sought to identify their particular narratives and action fields, two groups were distinguished in the way feminists define themselves. One group identified as “autonomous” and a second group identified as

¹⁹ For a description of the late XIXth early XXth century definition of Women Question and groups involved see Barrancos, 2005 and 2007.

²⁰ Second wave feminism has three main trends, particularly in Europe (Italy, France, England) and USA: Civil and political rights advocates, Socialists groups in the struggle for articulating Marxism and Feminism and “radicals” which introduced “sexual difference” into feminists practices and debates. This “second wave” had in Argentina a limited development to urban populations with some outstanding groups that were shadowed by the revolutionary militarized perspective of the armed organizations and then by Dictatorship (1976-1983) and its familial conservative policies. (Bacci and Fernandez Cordero, 2008)

“institutionalized” (Masson, 2007). The main opposition between these two groups was born due to the different positions on how to manage the increasing importance of the their political agenda at international financing institutions such as UN (through their already mentioned conventions and agreements) and many other smaller cooperation agencies financing projects (mainly European and for specific purposes such as violence or sexual education). International funding as relatively new actor in playground requested the participation of specialists and experts in gender issues that strongly addressed the classical feminists concerns, vocabulary and political strategies. The role of international cooperation was then strongly discussed in the “Feminist meeting of Latin America and the Caribbean”²¹. First discussions of the incipient process were held in Argentina 1990 meeting and, after a few years of debate in different forums finally movement split up in 1996 during the meeting held in Chile into these (at least) two groups: “autonomous” and “institutionalized”. Debates around Feminists NGO’s formation and international financing incipiently appeared in late 80’s and had strong influence in the 90’s changing completely the ways in which the internationalization had been understood and altered hierarchies and relationships inside the feminist movement as a whole with noticeably effects in the present configuration of feminist political spaces. It is clear that though this brief description unify very different processes with the word “internationalization” the scale of the economic, technical possibilities of communication and exchange are completely different.

As per the literature reviewed (Masson, 2007; Rosenberg, 2004, Barrancos: 2005), four phases can be identified for understanding the *international* dimension of feminism in Argentina, and can help to understand *gender* incorporation to public policy and that coincide with different political and historical contexts. In the first place, the already mentioned international links that socialists and anarchists maintained with their colleagues abroad. In a second phase, the possibility of women from traditional elite families with high social and cultural capital to travel (mainly to Europe and United States) and get in touch with feminists political experiences and literature. Third, the exchanges held during the years that preceded Argentine bloody dictatorship (1976-1983) by some social science professionals and researchers that could also traveled to take postgraduate studies in Europe and the foreign encounters with feminism of those who were obliged to leave the country in exile under dramatic political persecution. Finally, the fourth phase can be identified with the transnational networks built upon international financing and late 80’s early 90’s feminist field organization.

²¹ Meetings were held in: Colombia, 1981, Peru 1983, Brazil 1985, Mexico 1987, Argentina, 1990; El Salvador, 1993, Chile, 1996, Dominican Republic, 1999, Costa Rica, 2002, Brazil 2005, Mexico, 2009.

During the 80's once democracy returned in 1984, experience gathered through academic trajectories and exile (as two aspects of internationalization) converge in the struggle for institutionalization of gender within state, university and other dependencies while feminists (re)inaugurated their activism²². Some research organizations and center of studies that were founded at the late 70's and beginning of the 80's defined their profile as non state academic positions while consolidated themselves at the end of the decade "developed the capacities needed to become the intermediate instance between financing agencies and NGO of lower status" (Masson, 2007:165). This process leads to the consolidation of an incipient "gender expertise" that articulate through a network of personal and institutional relationships. During the 80's "the feminism "elite" would be formed by middle-class women, with a university degree in different areas (medicine, lawyers, psychology, sociology) who had become experts in *women issues* and had been part of a group of intellectuals related to universities, people and institutions such as CEDES, FLACSO, CEPAL²³" (Masson, 2007:168) consolidated. The possibility and legitimacy of this women to play in various grounds (national , non governmental, transnational) is a result of their capacity of mobilizing strategically social links and national experiences and abilities to use knowledge and resources in at the international context. This was reinforced in the 90's where International financing and promotion of NGO's as policy partners of State gave new roles to experts in public policy design²⁴.

In her analysis of the transnationalization process of Latin American feminisms Sonia Alvarez reinforces the argument of feminists NGO's is a phenomenon clearly occurred during the 90's and that has relevant (as well as polemic) consequences for the feminist action field. As we described before, the demand for non governmental institutions able to generate specialized information about "women situation" that could be introduced more easily and efficiently into the public policy process (Alvarez, s/f) gave new importance to the "expert" knowledge accrued by feminists. In the Brazilian case she identifies that the social policy focus on women as target of States and international financing institutions lead the more professionalized groups of feminists action field to receive financing. She describes how, although the idea of NGO was used with blurred limits within development discourse, it is clear for what she calls "the historical feminists

²² During the 80's 's were achieved : Divorce Law 1981, Shared child *potestad* 1985. In 1993 Feminine quota in congress of 30% . Since 1985 National Women Meeting is held on an annual basis. A campaign for legalization and strategies for healthy abortion was started in 2005. Initiatives in that sense were held since mid 90's 's.

²³ Acronyms for: CLACSO (Latin American Council of Social Sciences), CEDES (Center of studies of State and Society) CEPAL (Spanish acronym for Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean)

²⁴ Referring to analysis in terms of WID and GAD approaches to development Cristina Zuturuza states that absence of development financing during the 80's (Argentina was considered a middle income country) prevented the "experts" to go through training possibilities that were accomplished by other regional professionals.

of 70's and 80's" that NGO configure a different set of organizing practices and discourses (assessments, reports, projects, consultants, experts) changing political terminology and advocacy relationship with the state. So does Martha Rosenberg when she affirms: "quoting Fraser NGO traduce the reclaimed needs in potential objects of state administration and that in many cases they occupy the political space of grass roots movements in the dialogue with State, whether having been appointed by them for representation or not" (Rosenberg, 2004).

There was an event which is considered of great importance for the NGO reconfiguration of feminist practices in the region and for the transnationalization of *gender* issues in the regional agenda. That episode was the preparatory meetings and articulation within organizations for UN IV Fourth Women conference held in Beijing in 1995. According to Alvarez, the NGO's were the center of attention being called by the ECLAC/CEPAL and governments as advisors in preparatory documents and administrating the funds from international cooperation to organize activities and meetings all over the continent. Beijing process consolidates the transnationalization of the ones that had already some informal institutional international exchanges as experts in formal organizations and networks²⁵. This articulation of feminists and women movements became a study case (similar to Human Rights international advocacy) and are recognized as a crucial example of what called "international issues network" and "Transnational Advocacy Groups" this network action may be expressed in "relatively dull reports, or lively street protests, or private meetings, but in all cases, the stress is on changing discourses and practices. By creating new issues and placing them on international and national agendas, providing crucial information to actors, and most importantly by creating and publicizing new norms and discourses, transnational advocacy groups help restructure world politics" (Khagram, et al, 2002). As a local coordinator of a feminist group cited by Alvarez affirmed: "Beijing confirmed the idea that the gender agenda *has no frontier* (...) that a *Global* agenda was being created" expressions such as "global politics" through "construction of international civil society" became more and more usual. (Alvarez, s/f). In a wider scope, Free Trade agreements treaties and impact on populations as well as migrations and persons trafficking problems had already promoted the need of getting organized regionally. Described in those terms Beijing can be clearly identified as a "mega ritual of Transnationality" (Ribeiro, 1994:8) were transnational or potentially transnational get linked to the existence of the international networks.

²⁵ The multiplication of UN conferences about multiple issues (gender, environment, trade) during 90's 's also helped to build up the network (both for or against the way topics were discussed) (See Rosenberg, 2004)

Taking into account personal and institutional trajectories it is clear that “Interaction between national and international contexts cannot be understood separately(...) political relationships, personal links and even kinship are relevant to understand the ways in which national and international bonds are tied” (Masson, 2007). In the Argentina case, the feminists most active actresses of feminism political field during the 80’s are the same ones that participate in the international forums and assess the state on critical issues. It is clear that the formalization of the feminists demands at the UN conventions and formal and informal networks of advocacy and exchange gave more influence and somehow legitimated their word as “experts” at the same time debilitated their position within feminism as a political identity in permanent debate and struggle over its autonomy. This process in the wider field of feminist action had political consequences. “the proliferation of action spaces – transnational and formal networks, NGOs professionalized, State and international development institutions – do not reconcile easily with the traditional and cultural feminists political practices” (Alvarez, s/f) According to this author this difficult conciliation leads to the permanent negotiations and debates about feminists political strategies and the complex meaning of *feminism* itself²⁶. Institutionalization process is described with some regret in the way it finally occurred. As one of the feminists interviewed in Alvarez research affirmed Latin America feminism “jumped automatically from self conscious groups to ONGs and this created new tensions”. I selected the quote because it reflects another complex feature of this relation between tansnationalization and advocacy: the relation with grass roots groups. Do the professionalized feminists act on behalf of the “women movement”? Although they do not place themselves in that position, the mechanisms of “civil society consultations” in which they participate, generate that sense of representation in the international relations area. According to Piscitelli these complex articulations and tensions within the movement are reflected in the growing interest within feminists (activists, academics, experts) for the understanding of what she calls “the international transit of theories” and cultural translation processes. She points out what she considers political aspects to bear in mind when addressing this field of problems: not only the mediations between academic and NGO instances as privileged spaces of production, circulation and reception of theories but also interactions with governments and the “third sector” which resignify and re-appropriate concepts and techniques. As stated by Molyneux “Analytic concepts are always contested and bear different meanings; it is generally those with interpretative power who are able to give them content and who influence how they applied in he field” (Molyneux, 2003:5)

²⁶ One of the main points of this debate was the interpellation to the state as the most important strategy of the movement and the inclusion of the classical feminists vocabulary in the “masculine structures of international cooperation”.

Local effects of *gender* transit from feminist thought and its integration to development, academic, international financing and NGO's formation have a paradoxical effect. On one hand the first ways of institutionalization during the 80's set up the bases for and consolidated investigation spaces through the conformation of research institutes, background to the entrance of gender issues to University in the early 90's ²⁷. At the same time, the return of democracy allowed the expansion of public space expression of feminism as a political movement. Most of the scholars which identified themselves with feminist political identity and struggle to incorporate "women studies" to a reticent academy share both battle fields. The production of knowledge from those researchers (reinforced by feminist advocacy) increasingly helped to strengthen incidence in public policy issues within the State and international organizations, which requested their collaboration as advisors and shaped a field of *expertise*. This expertise formalized the previous relationships into advocacy networks and allowed other political articulations. However the rise of this *gender expertise* had (and still has) tensions within feminist as a political action field which fragmented and multiplied critics, breaking not only political but personal longstanding relationships and somehow (not the only reason) debilitating feminist appearance in public sphere and turning action to institutionalized spaces during. This would lead to a final question that exceeds this paper: Which are the political effects of the overlapping relationship of these institutionalized experts as increasingly professionalized and specialized knowledge production agents and the their political role of critical thinkers as part of the feminist political identity?

4. Traveling ideas

"Among the discourses of previous epochs or of foreign cultures, which are retained, which are valued, which are imported, what are the attempts made to reconstitute? And what is done with them, what transformations are worked upon them? what system of appreciation are applied to them, what role are they given to play?" (Foucault, 1991 :60)

Theoretical tools and categories are neither natural nor neutral. They always build some kind of *truth*. They draw maps and delimit territories; they identify subjects and design policies. Their scientific neutrality is a construction and has its own history, usually hidden by those who hold their power based on that neutrality and objectivity and "revealed" by those who criticize its consequences or effects. The way in which we examine and describe complex processes intervenes in the demarcation of the range of possibilities available to reach coherent description. In the last two sections I went through *gender* incorporation to development discourse and

²⁷ At the University of Buenos Aires, first experience is the "Interdisciplinary career of specialization in Women studies at the Psychology Dept. 1987-1993" and the Institute of Gender Studies (formed in 1992 as studies area and consolidated as institute in 1997). At the same University, within Social Sciences, Sociology career has just approved an "orientation in Gender and Human Rights" in 2008. For a detailed account of these first academic experiences regarding History field (Barrancos, 2007).

examined some of the local processes that lead to institutionalization and transnationalization of *gender* as a field of expertise with paradoxical political consequences within and for local feminist groups. In an attempt to systematize the explanations given to understand these kind of ideas “traveling” and incorporation across knowledge, I will now focus three aspects: a) *personal trajectories* as a vector of ideas traveling and incorporation, b) discussions concerning *public policy diffusion* and c) *cultural translation*.

a) There’s is a strong *biographical/personal* trajectory aspect in the description of the processes by which *gender* was incorporated to local academy and public policy vocabulary. First, because *gender* incorporation to intellectual work is most of the times closely related to the narrative of inaugural feminist experience open by personal political participation in any feminist heterogeneous field of action (from women grassroots social movements to left political parties/ cultural academic expressions of resistance). Second, as we stated in the previous section, there was a strong influence of personal possibilities (or produced by exile obligation) to travel abroad and get in touch with other ideas, concepts, political analysis. Third important aspect is the process of profesionalization and gender expertise conformation that assembled both activist trajectory and academic insertion. The last aspect would be the legitimating of this personal experience by being recognized as an “authorized voice” in front of international organization and nation states and thus a reinforcement of the possibilities to travel and be part of other networks. It is important to say that in some cases this place of legitimacy could be (and are) effectively used to introduce critical voices in political processes affecting women interests. Legitimacy has been mentioned before as conflictive aspect of the relation between “institutionalized” and “autonomous” feminists. The possibility of “cooptation” of autonomous critical thinkers by powerful organizations is in fact, one of the explanations usually given to the entrance of feminist categories to institutional levels. Moreover, when the subjects that circulate across these spaces and positions as academic scholar, activist, consultant, feminist are the same. This reinforces personal trajectory as a vehicle for understanding gender incorporation to public policy language.

b) At the level of *public policy* traveling ideas (in terms of public policy diffusion) a recent overview identifies four trends of analysis: *constructivism*, *coercion theory*, *competition theory*, and *social learning*, three of which allocate analytic attention to *ideas* (Dobbin, Simmons and Garrett, 2007). I will only focus in the first two as pertinent to understand *gender* traveling in policy contexts as competition and social learning aspects are both based in economic trends diffusion. Authors clarify that “in practice diffusion mechanisms described are sometimes mingled and sometimes the lines between them are blurred” and also warn that all spreading of policy tools and ideas

cannot be assigned (only) to economic liberalization as a global process. However, the late twentieth century added a distinctive feature to policy diffusion: wide geographic reach and its conjoining of political and economic reform. This gives more importance to studies that seek to explain not only the phenomenon but the *pattern of diffusion* of particular policies to certain countries at specific points of time. Two of the patterns are interesting to understand gender incorporation: constructivism and coercion.

Constructivism in this context refers to public policy diffusion as seen through the lens of social construction through cultural theorization of practices and ideas. This includes understanding how public policies become socially accepted as key to understanding why they diffuse (Simon, 1993 cited in Dobbin et al 2007). They identify processes of public policy diffusion in which “a) leading countries serve as exemplars b) experts groups theorize the effects of a new policy, and thereby give policy makers rationales for adopting it or c) specialists make contingent arguments about a policies appropriateness defining it as right under certain circumstances”(Dobbin et al 2007:453) simple network connections may also be at work. The driving idea is that changes in ideas drive changes and adjustments policy diffusion. One interesting example of this kind of mechanism can be the “best practices” exchange promoted by multiple level institutions²⁸.

A complementary argument of policy diffusion explanation focus in *coercion* : “coercion can be exercised by governments, international organizations and non governmental actors through physical force, manipulation of economics costs and benefits and even the monopolization of information or expertise” (Dobbin et al 2007). The main argument is that Governments, IMF World Bank or powerful states (such as USA or the European Union) can shape policy in countries reliant on these entities for trade, foreign direct investment, aid, grants, loans or security. Coercion can operate through *conditionality* when requirements are set for aid, loans or other considerations. As Argentina experience demonstrate, developing countries usually succumb to conditions because the need of financial assistance to ward off crises or to make infrastructural investments which cannot be financed privately. Unfortunately “Lenders typically condition support on economic or political reforms they deem desirable” (Dobbin et al 2007). Authors identify a second form of coercion, closer to their characterization of constructivism: *hegemonic ideas* which they define as “weakest, though perhaps most pervasive” form of coercion. Dominant ideas become rationalized, often with elegant theoretical justifications, and influence

²⁸ UNDP has recently launched an specific website for exchange of “best practices, knowledge database and experiences in gender mainstreaming called “Latin America Genera” <http://www.americalatinagera.org/> whose motto is “the city of gender knowledge”.

on how policy makers conceptualize their problems and order potential solutions. In a similar line to Walby definition of gender mainstreaming complexity, explanation for hegemonic ideas formation is a combination of constructivism and coercion: most policies are theorized by epistemic communities or policy entrepreneurs and “powerful countries with the research infrastructure, the critical intellectual mass and well developed connections between policy world and various research nodes are influential in the framing of policy discussions. According to the authors, Washington Consensus and the permanent contribution of World Bank to economic research are two main examples on how hegemonic ideas reinforce conditionality. Although they depict a world in which a few powerful players exercise disproportionate influence over others – through conditional requirements or through their role as focal point of hegemonic ideas, the authors warn, however that the focus on the influence of external sources of pressure sometimes can underestimate local government responsibility in decision taken process. “Experts” could be then considered as part of these complex translation process between policy diffusion patterns and local institutional contexts.

Expansion of *gender* as a traveling idea and some of the possible approaches to explain its increasing presence social policy vocabulary have been addressed from a *personal* (political and professional) *trajectories* point of view and the complementary public policy *patterns of diffusion*. There is a third aspect left to point out, which permeates all the dimensions of *gender* as a complex term stated at the beginning of this paper: as feminist theory result, as a political practice and as a field of public policy design and intervention: *cultural translation*.

c) Both *mainstreaming gender* critics as well as researchers focused on public policy agrees that some of the initial political subversive/transformation potential of *gender* was somehow “lost in translation” when incorporated to institutionalized intervention ambits (Molyneux, 2003). Gender mainstreaming (as any complex passage of concepts from political praxis realm to public policy structures and academic knowledge production ambits) implies multiple translation processes: within feminist theories different position about gender and sexual difference, within geographically and historically situated subjects and objects of policy design and application, within the incorporation of categories to development machinery and their own background research traditions, and within different levels of field policy application. Interaction between all these different levels can be understood as a *cultural translation* as it “does not suppose that the context of both languages is a symmetric one, but it has a main starting point the idea that every descriptive, interpretative ideas and world views cannot avoid being subject to the power relations and asymmetries that exists between languages, regions and people” (Niranjana quoted

in Lima 2002:190). In the specific case of feminists critical theories (that historically worked on the denaturalization of categories such as gender, women, experience) the *cultural translation* is a complex process these categories, although homogenized under some *gender* definitions, not only are formed in the dispute between heterogeneous feminist political positions but within different contexts of race, sexual orientation, nationalities, language and tradition. It is important then to say that *cultural translation* debates become pertinent anywhere political representation, power relations and language asymmetries have political consequences that should be questioned (Lima, 2002). Moreover, thinking in terms of *cultural translation* requires to analyze the structural economic relationships and territories across which ideas travel. As suggested before, a concept or set of theories might be critical and powerful to make a political rupture in a determined context and be completely harmless in a different one. Every translation is a way of deformation/reconfiguration of concepts and tools that should be taken into account.

This affects geographically situated feminist knowledge production of theory and experiences as political social movement. According to Lima Costa, an interesting way of understanding feminism political strength is to observe the irregular migrations of its main category, *gender*, within feminism itself. Just to be extremely brief (and surely simplistic), during 60's and 70s debate around biological determinism and in favor of social constructionist lead to differentiate between sexed bodies (biology) and gender (cultural personality, conduct) this was identified as the base/superstructure approach to gender (Nicholson, 1999 cited in Lima, 2002). This first view (gender complementing sex) was re-elaborated by Gayle Rubin in which theoretical frame gender was understood as social meanings constructed upon biological base. This paradigm was heavily criticized during the 80's by lesbian and black feminists who condemned the racism and heterosexism implied in "sex/gender system" category and introduced debate over "difference" in USA context²⁹. Fraser identifies three main views of "difference" concept in USA feminism: a) difference as gender difference (hierarchic difference between men and women) b) a more elaborated view of difference not only between men and women but among women themselves, as per lesbian, black and "third world" feminist contributions, and a c) third moment of "difference" that emphasizes multiple crossed differences of women between themselves and multiple gender identities. Those multiple stages and conceptual reconfigurations, not always are reflected in the definitions which finally travel to public policy domains. If, as we saw in the opening passages, *gender* category is incorporated to its mainstream to development and social policy with accent on economic, social, political, and cultural different (not unequal)

²⁹ These few references of difference debate apply mainly to USA context, as we stated in note 2 French debates over difference consider other elements as well. See (Varikas, 2004)

“opportunities and attributes” constructed on biological *binary* categories, whereas feminist theory is addressing a wider range of problems considering identity struggles/power relationships largely exceeding *cultural significations* built on biological differences, the possibilities of genuine dialogue becomes difficult.

The point would be to understand what is underpinning the unequal “attributes and opportunities” construction and cultural difference assimilation process and in which ways gender is important and constitutive of the different life conditions emerged from that inequality and cultural meanings. The difficulties in this dialogue carry the risk that more sophisticated and critical deconstructive versions of gender theory remain (only) placed in academy conforming a “gender intellectual endogamy” and separating the most productive theoretical aspect of feminist theory from public policy practices. The (im)possibility of this dialogue sends us back to the first questions mentioned in this paper. Which are the political consequences of the definitions adopted?. As Sylvia Walby recalls, although still an open process with many unanswered questions *gender mainstreaming* debates are a productive as they “position inequality and difference at the heart of social and political theory of the state and democracy, not as a separate field of study” (Walby, 2005).

5. Conclusion

This paper gives an account of the multiple theoretical and political challenges that *gender* as a traveling idea and *mainstreaming* as policy trend poses to feminism and social policy research, in the broader context of a ongoing research of *famil(ies)* and *households* discursive configurations in social policy field. To comply with this objective, the text was conceived somehow as a patchwork of debates which turned out to be more tangled than expected, fact that clearly affected its expositive clearness. Problems addressed went from the incorporation of women and gender to development discourse to the description of approaches (personal trajectories, policy diffusion patterns and cultural translation) that can help to understand the process of assimilation of *gender* as traveling idea to academic and policy realms. In addition, paper also examined the conformation of a local institutionalized and global “*gender* expertise” in Argentina. This local experience can be perceived as the “seam” by which development narratives, feminism, and social policy (just like patchwork pieces) get together.

To conclude, and considering Judith Butler reflections on cultural translation, I would like propose to think research on Social Policies as an inquiry about the terms in which each society understands, recognizes and enables intervention on the life and labor conditions of its population and *gender* as a constitutive part of this understanding. In other terms, these three

categories can be thought as core questions about “what makes a life livable”(Butler, 2006) in each historical and geographical context and a path to genuine cultural translation. At a first look “this means that local conceptions of what is human or, indeed, of what the basic conditions and needs of human life are, must be subjected to reinterpretation, since there are historical and cultural circumstances in which the human is defined differently. Its basic needs and, hence, basic entitlements are made known through various media, through various kinds of practices, spoken and performed”(Butler, 2006).

However this constitutive difference argument cannot prevent us from establishing norms (like international conventions or *gender mainstreaming* for example) but to be fully aware of their effects: “through recourse to norms, the sphere of the humanly intelligible is circumscribed, and this circumscription is consequential for any ethics and any conception of social transformation.” (Butler, 2006). It is in this context that when addressing *gender* (or any other category that sets boundaries for political action) the point is not just to “assimilate foreign or unfamiliar notions of gender or humanness into our own as if it is simply a matter of incorporation alienness into an established lexicon” but to “use this language to assert an entitlement to conditions of life in ways that affirm the constitutive role of sexuality and gender in political life, and (...) also subject our very categories to critical scrutiny”(Butler,2006). When confronting any norm or category “We must find out the limits of their inclusivity and translatability, the presuppositions they include, the ways in which they must be expanded, destroyed, or reworked both to encompass and open up what it is to be human and gendered” (Butler,2006).

That’s cultural translation political challenge.

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