Excellence and gender

Playing the game of scientific excellence or being played by the game? The Swiss example

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Abstract

Purpose – Discussing the Swiss case, the purpose of this paper is to examine how gender equality policies deal with the present requirements for scholars to be considered "excellent". It aims to pinpoint the lines of tension or coherence between excellence, meritocracy and gender politics.

Design/methodology/approach – In order to specify the norms of academic careers and their different renditions, the author draws on two studies (at local and national levels) to illustrate where the changes and resistances are taking place.

Findings – The translations of a number of demands of feminist movements into the policies set up to favour equality between the sexes may combine to challenge the norms of academia as a gendered realm. Nevertheless, without strong pressure from feminists at local level and the conduct of research pursuing the enterprise of deconstructing norms, top-down policies may prove less "corrective" than affirmative action. This pressure is not only useful to build gender equality in science but also to broaden the spectrum of knowledge that can become a common good.

Research limitations/implications – As neither the names nor the positions of the experts who select the candidates at national level are made public, we had to opt for other, less satisfactory means.

Originality/value – The originality of the paper lies in the link made between the enhancements brought by Equalities policies and the changes they bring. It attempts to bring to light the extent to which gender equality policies conform to the neo-managerial order or challenge its norms to build a world that is more just.

Keywords Gender, Sciences, Organizational culture, Higher education, Equal opportunities, Academic staff

Paper type Viewpoint

Focusing on the case of Switzerland, this paper aims to re-examine the situation of teacher-researchers in higher education and to show how questions raised in gender studies can challenge the "myth of meritocracy" (Latour, 2008). It examines how feminist movements' demands for gender equality can be translated into policy that may challenge the academic norms. Academic careers have become increasingly organised, but more precarious, particularly as a result of the development of the agonistic and individualistic ethos (Fusulier, 2011) that pervades the short-term research projects favoured by the organisation of science. This appeal to performance takes place in a context of internationalisation of the elites' market and intense competition among universities and academics. The former are no longer in equal positions, as underlined by international rankings such as that produced by the University of Shanghai. "Institutions having been unequally shaken by the performance

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measuring systems" are therefore imposing this "new order" unequally (Bezes *et al.*, 2011, p. 319), which creates a situation in which academics face unequal careers perspectives.

Drawing on the work of Butler and Spoelstra (2012) , who analyse how critical management scholars "negotiate the demands for excellence at the same time as maintaining a critical ethos in relation to one's work" (p. 891), this paper examines how gender equality policies deal with the present requirements for scholars to be considered excellent. It attempts to pinpoint the lines of tension or coherence between excellence, meritocracy and gender politics, in order to bring into light the extent to which gender equality policies conform to the neo-managerial order, or challenge its norms to build a world that is more just. To put it another way, one purpose of this contribution is to analyse to what extent gender equality policies are being "played" by the game of publication and careers and align themselves with a hegemonic discourse. A second aim is to clarify under what conditions gender equality policies may help women to become real players in the game and participate in setting its rules: as insiders, as outsiders or in adopting a hybrid "third space […] a liminal space in which the 'cutting edge of translation and negotiation' between the coloniser and the colonised is to be found" (Frenkel, 2008, p. 928, quoted by Prasad, 2013, p. 943). Answering this question is also of the utmost importance to me as a person since I take part in some of the committees set up in my university to promote gender equality. I am a member of my Faculty's Equality Commission, but I also act as a professorial delegate from the University Equality Office in various committees responsible for appointing new professors. My task in these committees is to monitor so as to ensure that women candidates are not discriminated against and that gender equality is taken into consideration during the appointment process. So, I very often wonder what are the results of my working within mainstream organisations and professions while I intend to be a change agent. Should I consider myself a "tempered radical" and endorse the ambivalence that, according to Meyerson and Scully (1995), makes me "an outsider within?" (p. 589) Or should I see myself more as an outsider with the opportunity to give a critical say and to restate the grassroots critiques made of universities as androcentric realms? Or should I, finally, accept becoming an insider whose critiques have been little by little smoothened until they reach a compromise?

Whatever the response, these commitments provide me with an observer position to understand when and how the national rules are referred to as norms, or not. Despite their limited scope, they thus help me to understand how different local bodies may translate the federal regulations set up to increase the number of women in science.

Starting out from the contemporary discussions on inclusion and exclusion in education, I use the Swiss academic system and the way it has framed the question of women in sciences as a departure point to discuss the connections between excellence, meritocracy and gender equality policies. I review the broad lines of the debates between feminists who advocate affirmative action to level the playing fields of meritocracy and excellence (Scully, 2002, and to some extent Deem, 2009) and those who conclude that the first necessity is "to mainstream gender equality into scientific cultures and institutions" (Rees, 2011, p. 142). In line with Garforth and Kerr (2009), I consider that "equalities solutions pertaining to women and science are locked into a narrow stock of taken-for-granted assumptions about the nature of the problem" (p. 380). Hence equality policies are aimed at objectives that are not all inspired by the same principle. Therefore, the meaning of the "femocrats" action (Jacquot, 2009) is linked not only to the motives that inspire them but also to the international, national or regional configurations and the importance they give to questions of gender equality

(Jacquot, 2003; Bereni, 2009). I draw on two research projects that we undertook in the Swiss academic world (Fassa *et al.*, 2012; Fassa and Kradolfer, 2013) at the local level and at the national level to illustrate where the changes and resistances are taking place.

1. The debate on meritocracy and excellence

Meritocracy and pursuit of excellence are nowadays powerful ideas that are widely shared, as they seem to reward a person on an objective basis, be it talent, effort, capabilities, skills, intelligence or whatsoever. They thus seem to provide fair treatment to everybody and they are seldom discussed, on the basis that they provide clear criteria to distinguish outstanding persons from the average. But as Liu (2011) points out, the issues deserve an "insightful and nuanced consideration [[…] because] in a meritocracy, social status becomes increasingly dependent upon an individual's level of education" (p. 384). Working on the selection process that tracks students who enter the University of California, she shows that the criteria upon which merit is measured are contextual and "can be rather divisive when the focus concerns access to scarce societal resources" (Liu, 2011, p. 385), such as access to higher education. They depend on the objectives set up by educational policies and thus vary according to the time and the priorities given to different, and sometimes contradictory, objectives, because education should also take equality and justice into account when distributing social benefits.

Lamont, analysing peer review evaluation of fellowship programmes, reaches the same conclusion about the contextual aspect of academic excellence. She shows that selections for fellowships are the result of face-to-face exchanges among panellists from different disciplines who develop a specific "group style" while engaging in evaluation. She also emphasises that there is so little cross-disciplinary consensus about what excellence means among the panellists who make the appointment for a fellowship that "it can seem like a minor miracle that consensus emerges from this sea of differences, and that the black box can actually produce awards" (Lamont, 2010, p. 52).

Working from macro-data on US universities and adopting the ambivalent sexism paradigm (Glick and Fiske, 1999) as a starting point for her analysis, Krefting relates discourses on merit and excellence to the situation of women in academia. She shows that while women (and other "others" as minority representatives (Cockburn, 1983)) have entered US universities, they are still outsiders to the academic game, "necessitating continual efforts to prove skill rather than strategising reputation" (Krefting, 2003, p. 266). Thus, they are put in a position such that they have to play the game while they do not really get access to its full rewards. Set in a position of "honorary males" (Cockburn, 1991), their status as players can be withdrawn if they dispute the rules.

The points made by these authors identify without doubt that, although merit and excellence seem ubiquitous, judgements made by evaluators vary with circumstances. In doing so, they allow us to discuss what are the criteria that exclude some people from the rewards they could claim to be entitled to, as it is clear that meritocracy and the pursuit of excellence are exclusive processes (Deem, 2009), described by Dubet (2009) as a form of social Darwinism. Dubet stresses that if equality of opportunity is to be realised, the ground for the game should, in some ways, be levelled to make up for structural inequalities. Otherwise, the whole process will, despite its claim of fairness, be only a reproductive one. For this very precise reason, merit and excellence have especially difficult connections with diversity or equality policies in higher education

where senior professorial positions, not to speak of senior management positions (Deem, 2009), are made scarce by employment policies.

What kind of measurements and programmes should be implemented to increase equality of opportunity for women (and other "others") in order to ensure that everyone is in a position of "parity of participation?" (Fraser, 2003, p. 36). Although there is a growing "recognition that merit, as it has been defined and measured in academe, intertwines aspects of gender and privileges males", answering this question remains particularly tricky in a realm such as higher education, where "questioning the gendered basis for academic merit destabilises both academic and gender identities, gender relations and systems of knowledge/belief that comprise worldviews", which is supposed to be governed by the "neutrality of science" (Krefting, 2003, p. 273). The feminists themselves are divided on that point: while some (Scully, 2002; Deem, 2009) support affirmative action, others (Rees, 2011; the femocrats of the European Commission) advocate a gender mainstreaming line in the scientific institutions. Deem emphasises the fact that merit and excellence go hand-in-hand with exclusion of individuals, while the latter consider that the inclusion of gender as a relevant topic in research and career monitoring and management will mend the leaky pipeline that is to be observed when feminine academic careers are concerned.

This dividing line is based not only on a strategic analysis but also an epistemic and political positioning. Those who favour positive action consider that academic institutions are foci of a gendered scientific culture, despite their claim of neutrality (Haraway, 1991; Harding, 1995) and therefore want to change the rules of the game to adapt it to all "others". The advocates of gender mainstreaming consider first and foremost that the game must be open to all: "The first policy implication of this paper […] is that *in order to promote excellence in research quality*, it is necessary to mainstream gender equality into scientific cultures and institutions" (Rees, 2011, p. 142, my emphasis). In my view, they more or less adopt a "tempered radical" (Meyerson and Scully, 1995) position that very often underestimates the price that may have to be paid to be part of the game. My argument is that the translation of a number of the demands of the feminist second-wave movements into the policies set up to favour equality between the sexes (top-down regulations and gender mainstreaming) work towards more social justice only if the pressure of the feminist movements (bottom-up claims) remains active and if gender studies maintain a vigorous critique. Since it includes the necessary deconstruction of so-called academic neutrality, this combination may challenge the norms of excellence and merit that are "disseminated, circulated and maintained as taken-for-granted and self-evident through discourse, through everyday language activity" (Krefting, 2003, p. 270).

2. The Swiss example

2.1 Organisation of research and teaching

While Switzerland is not immune to the neo-managerial logic, in that federalist country the traditionally loose relations between the universities and the confederation are being redefined in favour of the central State (Benninghoff and Leresche, 2003; Fleury and Joye, 2002; Bashung *et al.*, 2011). More immediately, these movements are reflected in Switzerland by the renegotiation of the relations between the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) – "the most important Swiss agency promoting scientific research; as mandated by the Swiss Federal government, it supports all disciplines from philosophy and biology to the nanosciences and medicine" (www.snf.ch/E/Pages/default.aspx) – and the universities, which traditionally enjoyed strong autonomy from

Swiss federalism and thereby constituted a fragmented landscape made up of ten cantonal universities and two Federal Institutes of Technology (Lausanne and Zurich), with different rules.

While this renegotiation mainly concerns research activities, it does not leave teaching untouched, since there is no university structure in Switzerland devoted exclusively to research. Research activities are conducted in the universities but they depend on the financial support of the SNSF, which funds projects[1] of varied importance. Whether they be individual projects or inter-university projects, such as those of the National Centres of Competence in Research (NCCRs), they are all subject to regular reporting and are of limited length of time; renewed financing depends on achievement of the intermediate targets, in the case of the most ambitious of them (NCCRs). Some schemes to support individual researchers remain but are again based on fixed-term projects. The only people in a secure position are the teacher-researchers at professorial level or those in the intermediate upper echelon (roughly equivalent to senior lecturer), who occupy academic posts in a university.

The importance of the SNSF in this fragmented context is even greater because its role is not limited to financing research projects. It also plays an increasingly important driving role in a science policy directly linked to the management of public affairs, being the privileged interlocutor of the federal government when it comes to reviving and selecting the fields of research considered for the economic, scientific or social development of the country. In this context, the SNSF criteria of "good research" or an "excellent researcher" tend to become norms and progressively pervade the universities themselves, changing the place assigned to teaching, and even its content, through the demands specifically linked to research financing.

These features show that, like other European academic institutions, Swiss universities have undergone rapid and profound changes in the last two decades. In Switzerland too, the massification of universities and the internationalisation of careers have played their part in creating a context of intense competition which is one element in the promotion of "academic excellence" as the central criterion in the selection of applicants for posts of professorial rank. The number of persons eligible to apply for such posts has increased considerably in recent years, because of the strong growth in women's participation in higher education. But here, more than elsewhere, the feminisation observed in the academic professions is explained by the large influx of foreign female researchers[2]. Thus, although not a member of the European Union (EU), Switzerland has not been exempt from the phenomena that have occurred in all European universities over the last decade and more, often underpinned by texts aimed at promoting a "knowledge economy" and a "knowledge society". The rhetoric of these discourses, omnipresent in the EU, now makes universities "tools and resources in international economic competition" (Kogan *et al.*, 2000) as part of the strategy to enable Europe to emerge from the crisis: "It should remain focused on increasing the EU's competitiveness in the world, but should, on the other hand, introduce knowledge and innovation into the very heart of its economic, social and environmental development" (European Commission, 2009a). These tools must be adapted to the "neo-managerial" perspective and prove their good management through the systematised practice of evaluation. On the other hand, to avoid "over-fussy, bureaucratic State intervention" (Musselin, 2009, p. 73), there is a growing transformation of the relationships between universities and the State, which strengthens the powers of their executives in exchange for greater autonomy in staffing and curricula. This process of managerial recomposition of the relationship between the State and the universities has direct

consequences for the work of academics – but also, in our view, for the mission of the universities (Calhoun, 2006; Brennan and Naidoo, 2008) – since "rationalisation decontextualises and desingularises activity. It thus opens the way to exogenous, impersonal and comparative measurement of performance, and stimulates the producers – academics turned into "knowledge workers" – through competition for access to resources" (Paradeise in Bezes *et al.*, 2011, pp. 313-314).

2.2 Women in science

In the case of women in science, the culture of evaluation and international comparison that belongs to this new neo-managerial order has played a positive role. In Switzerland, as in other European countries, numerous studies have been carried out to provide a better understanding of the effectiveness of the various programmes to support research, or the modes of functioning of higher education institutions in the context of implementation of the Bologna process[3] and the reorganisation of higher education. Under the influence of the second-wave feminist movements, the data of most of these studies have been disaggregated, bringing to light considerable differences between men's and women's careers. Thus, numerous surveys on women's participation in higher education, whether studies on local cases (e.g. Dafflon Novelle, 2006) or at national level (Inversin and Teichgräber, 2009; Von Erlach and Segura, 2011), and evaluations conducted on programmes aimed, directly or indirectly, at increasing gender equality in higher education (Dubach *et al.*, 2012; Felli *et al.*, 2006; Goastellec *et al.*, 2007; Leemann and Stutz, 2008; Spreyermann and Rothmayr, 2008) have flourished, while some more qualitative or mixed methods studies have also been also produced (Fassa *et al.*, 2012; Studer, 2012). They have all concluded that inequalities still exist and stressed the urgency of tackling the gender gap in academic careers in order to comply with equality regulations. The report that the OFS produced in 2008 on "Equality between women and men: Switzerland in international comparison" (Branger, 2008) shows clearly the need to make up for a major delay in this area and it stresses the speed of the changes that are increasing women's participation in the university world, both as students and as producers of science: "Switzerland thus shows one of the *strongest growth rates for the proportion of women among new graduates* […]. With 36.9% of doctorates awarded to women, Switzerland ranks low among European countries, but *is catching up*" (Branger, 2008, pp. 6-8, my emphasis). Since 2000, structures designed to keep these questions on the agenda have also been made permanent. At present, and in response to gender mainstreaming, almost all Swiss universities, and also the SNSF, have structures responsible for equality questions, and these are active at all levels (from the faculties to the SNSF). Paradoxically, in the light of the strongest critiques of the managerial transformations within universities (Dardot and Laval, 2009, for example), these instruments for monitoring women's and men's careers and studies provide information that help bring to light the non-neutrality of the world of science and the persistence of the problem of gender equality. In this sense, a particular form of alliance has taken shape between "gender equality policies" and the instruments of public policies inspired by a neo-managerial ideal. The audit culture has thus played a part in the introduction of various programmes aimed at facilitating women's careers and improving the place of women in tertiary education (the federal "Equal opportunity in universities" programmes, 2000-2016).

Despite these profound changes, and as in other European contexts (European Commission, 2009b), women remain very much in the minority in the teaching bodies of

the various Swiss universities. In 2010, 17 per cent of professors and 25.5 per cent of other teachers were women (Von Erlach and Segura, 2011). Moreover, and as elsewhere in Europe, there are considerably fewer women in some disciplines than in others: 28.1 per cent of professors in the human and social sciences are women (but 73.7 per cent of the students) as against only 9.5 per cent in the technical sciences[4]. Thus, in the last two decades but at different times, the science policy of the SNSF and the universities has been marked by the question of gender equality. This theme has thus followed the path that has enabled it to be recognised, then institutionalised, as a result of gender mainstreaming policies (Boussaguet and Jacquot, 2009; Jacquot, 2003); but Switzerland had much ground to catch up. Nevertheless, as Jacquot (2009) and Bereni (2009) remark, the local and regional configurations and the importance they attribute to this question in relation to the pursuit of excellence are the real loci of profound changes in academia. Some of the results of the two research projects that we have carried out in the realm of Swiss higher education highlight the fact that the translation at local level of the SNSF's norms regarding equality also depends on the traditions of the university and the faculties.

3. Meritocracy in the University of Lausanne (UNIL) and the SNSF excellence programme

The first study (Fassa *et al.*, 2012) was conducted in a French-speaking university between 2006 and 2008. It aimed to understand, at the local level, what factors assisted or obstructed careers in the world of research and tertiary education. The second project studied the criteria defining what are called "careers of excellence". It took place in 2011-2012 and analysed in particular the requirements of the SNSF for the annual award of professorial bursaries to some scientists described as outstanding. The decision to place local and national levels of reality under close scrutiny examination is not due to chance. It aims to clarify what is due to national policies regarding women's' participation in science and what is the result of the local understandings of them. As the national science policies are directly influenced by the European context, it also helps to distinguish what is due to the movements under way in the whole area of European higher education and what is attributable to the particular contexts and the local resistance which may be encountered.

3.1 Study one: when gender marks the trajectories of the teacher-researchers of the UNIL

Methodology and methods. The research project entitled "Relève académique: un doctorat pour quoi? Entre institution et parcours" was conceived in the framework of a workgroup of the Centre en étude genre LIEGE of the UNIL. It was funded by the Equality Office and the Rectorate of the University. It also received support from the Faculty of Social and Political sciences. It was therefore part of an effort made by the management to better understand the situation of teacher-researchers at the UNIL and we concluded our research with 17 recommendations that aimed to promote "some rules that will make the route to professorship not fundamentally more just but somewhat less unequal, offering correctives that will make it possible to increase everyone's chances of participating on equal terms in competitions that that would thus be more clearly based on merit" (Fassa *et al.*, 2008, p. 9). Despite the tempered critique that inspired them and the practical proposals we made to implement a more egalitarian and more transparent policy, none of them has been fully taken into account

in the regulations promulgated by the university regarding the management of academic careers.

Our project aimed to establish the trajectories of the teacher-researchers at the UNIL between 1990 and 2005 and to document the modes of access to the professorial career within that institution (Fassa *et al.*, 2012). The research design (mixed methods study) was intended to bring to light the factors that acted as facilitators or obstacles in this process of qualification and professional recognition.

The administrative data concerning the staff of teacher-researchers of this university (7,830 persons) over the period 1990-2005 were analysed to construct their trajectories. An online questionnaire ($n = 1{,}008$: 575 men and 433 women) was divided into four parts that investigated the professional and private situations of the respondents at the time of the survey (Parts A and B); their training and professional trajectories (Part C) and their representations of the academic career (Part D). We performed mainly different descriptive analyses (ranging from contingency tables to correspondences analyses) on these data with the help of the statistical software SPSS 7, in order to bring to light the similarities and differences between sexes, plus between sexes in the different disciplines, as regards representations of requirements for an academic career, careers expectations, working conditions, entangling of private and professional lives.

In total, 42 semi-structured interviews (20 men and 22 women) were conducted with researchers at different stages in their careers. They were all recorded and then transcribed. These persons were questioned about their life and professional trajectories and we asked them to try to explain why, in their view, they encountered facilitating factors and/or obstacles on their professional paths. The senior management of the seven faculties of the UNIL were also interviewed. In all, 14 university officials (seven women and seven men, mainly deans, sometimes in the company of their vice-dean/s) were questioned on four topics: their representations of the academic career and the type of profiles they would privilege for professorial appointments; the specific requirements of their disciplines; the changes that the Bologna process was bringing into their own faculty policy; and the equality policies that they were implementing.

Results. Our analysis showed considerable differences between women and men, with the former more often leaving the university after their doctoral studies (Fassa and Gauthier, 2010). Briefly and in (too) general terms, we could observe that the employment conditions as such were much more advantageous for men than for women. The men had been recruited in equal numbers as graduate assistants in disciplines where for several decades the majority of students were female; they thereby enjoyed an advantage from the outset of their careers. Likewise, the tasks linked to teaching were less onerous in the scientific domains where men predominated, and often had full-time posts. By contrast, women were more often employed part-time and changes were imposed in their rate of professional activity. When asked "how they had obtained the post they occupied at the time of the survey", at all levels of the hierarchy a significantly higher proportion of men than women (overall 14.3 per cent as against 7.1 per cent) replied that "A post matching my qualifications was created and I applied for it" (Fassa *et al.*, 2012, p. 251). We were led to conclude that a glass ceiling (Laufer, 2004) – or an iron ceiling? (Fassa and Kradolfer, 2010) – i.e. "visible or invisible obstacles" that more often block women's careers than those of their male counterparts – still exists in the academic world.

At first sight, this finding, which is classic in the world of professional organisations (Gadéa and Rezrazi, 2004), might appear surprising in the university world, since this historic space of knowledge production claims to be "neutral" and "universal". These advantages are even less explicable given that the faculty managers whom we met assured us of their commitment to the principle of equality. Asked about the reasons for the scarcity of female appointments at professorial position, these managers (both male and female) emphasised their search for excellence ("the best researcher and the best teacher" – dean, male) and said that they did not have a sufficient pool of female researchers to find a woman corresponding to the post, attributing this to the organisation of disciplines and/or differentiated socialisation. They did not refer to possible stereotypes that might guide their choices and took it for granted that merit and excellence were measurable, with comments such as, "Universities hire the best people; the market decides" (another dean, male). According to these respondents, the best indicators of these qualities were the number and quality of publications, sometimes determined by the ranking of the journals they were published in. Despite this market-oriented explanation, and the implicit assumption of its fairness, faculty officials admit that appointments are ultimately the result of "luck", which is something that is also, from their point of view, fair. One person demarcated herself from this absence of problematisation of "luck" and presented it as a particular configuration whose social characteristics should be deconstructed (vice-dean, female). Another aspect, very frequently mentioned, was the impossibility for women to fully commit themselves to academic life, as they had to divide their time between family obligations and professional requirements.

References to luck and the recruitment-pool argument were not reflected in the statistical reality (Fassa *et al.*, 2010). Yet these comments indicate a desire to legitimise an order that gives preference to an androcentric representation of science. The "rules-in-use" (Kenny and Lowndes, 2011) of the university as a professional organisation thus are retained as guidelines that cannot transform a hierarchical order of class and gendered social relations.

3.2 Study two: the excellence of the funded professors

Methodology and methods. Opening the black box of selection to the SNSF Professorships through a close study of the board of experts is impossible, as neither the names nor the positions of the experts who select the candidates are made public. Nevertheless, one should note that the proportion of women within the National Research Council, which constitutes the core of the experts, amounts only to 20 per cent. Given this limitation, we decided to opt for a content analysis, which we performed on a corpus of documents and web pages that can be found on the SNSF web site (concerning equality policies and other tools used to support academic careers). Like the documents that are directly related to the SNSF Professorship programme, these documents were read and analysed by two different researchers who were instructed to pay special attention to the changes that appeared in the web site in respect to the different instruments set up to support academic careers and advancement of women and/or in the requirements for applying to these different types of individual support. Regarding the SNFS Professorship programme itself, we then compared the requirements laid down by SNFS with the knowledge we had acquired on careers through our previous work (Fassa *et al.*, 2012) and on equality policies through our participation to different bodies dedicated to promote women in academia.

Since Switzerland was lagging behind regarding women participation in science, equality policies were especially active during the last 15 years to make up for the previous delay. Therefore, and in line with Bacchi's (1999) work, we focused our analyses on changes in these documents, considering them as textual traces of provisional agreements, framing a public policy issue in a specific and contextual way.

Results. The discursive politics approach (Lombardo *et al.*, 2009) that we adopted in relation to the SNSF Professorships programme shows that the same type of criteria are mobilised to award these national bursaries in all disciplines. This is one of the SNSF's flagship programmes, set up to support highly promising "junior researchers" but it is also intended to increase the proportion of women in the ranks of professors, since one of its objectives was to include at least 30 per cent women among its beneficiaries. This programme assigns *ad personam* funding, of up to 1.6 million CHF over four years (with a possible extension for two years), to about 30 persons each year. It was introduced in 1999 to replace other schemes to support young researchers in the universities, and its underlying philosophy differs very clearly from that of previous schemes. Whereas the latter offered universities additional resources to pursue the local or regional development objectives that they had chosen for themselves, the new scheme aims primarily to advance the individual careers of researchers regarded as particularly outstanding. Although the selection criteria appear at first sight neutral and based solely upon excellence, as Benninghoff *et al.* (2009) show, they also result from a political input which seems to us to relay the global changes in the market for academics (Musselin, 2010), particularly the imperative of competition (Dardot and Laval, 2009).

The web site and other documents produced by the SNFS specify the criteria that candidates must meet. The aspects presented as decisive for judging the excellence of a dossier are the scientific importance of the research projects already completed and the publications that confirm this, autonomy plus the capacity to manage a research team to address a freely chosen problem area. Based on measurement of the productivity of researchers evaluated individually, these measures imbue the scientific ethos with managerial and productivist *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1990) which keep the researchers in a state of high stress (Fusulier and Del Rio Carral, 2012). They contribute to making science a competition of all against all, in which the number of publications in the journals that "count" (high "impact factor", published in English, accreditation by review bodies – Carnets de Bord, 2011) is taken as the "standard of quality" of researchers who are led to practise, as Fusulier puts it, "CV body-building". This also leads one to forget "research that matters", such as "research that helps us understand the world of work and contribute to meaningful improvements for individuals and organisations" (Ozbilgin, 2009, p. 113).

Despite these neo-managerial aspects, a close study of the Professorships programme in respect of the selection criteria and the implicit model of the masculine scientific show that two changes have emerged over time. We have identified two points on which the requirements of the SNFS have been modified: the age limit and the emphasis set on the types of publication that are valued. As we shall see below, these two changes are especially interesting to review, since they allow one to think that feminist critiques of the conditions in which science is produced were taken into consideration, especially those that concern the work-life balance[5] of female academics and those that relate to horizontal segregation in scientific fields, plus its consequences for the criteria used to decide what is or is not "good science".

Age. The age limits for applying have disappeared and years are now counted only in relation to academic training. Initially, only scientists aged under 40 could submit a dossier to the SNSF to apply for such a bursary; the competition is now open to persons with "postdoctoral research experience of no less than two years and no more than nine years". The shift from biological age to "academic age" took place in 2008 and takes account of the very clear statement at that time of the determination of the SNSF to practise a genuine equality policy. As stated by Imboden, President of the National Research Council and the Equal Opportunities Commission of the SNSF:

> Ten years of work by the Equal Opportunities Commission has significantly sensitised everyone involved to all sorts of inequalities, not only between men and women, but also between young and old researchers and those with or without family commitments. […] Among other measures, the Equal Opportunities Commission] initiated the replacement of the biological age by the academic age in career funding and suggested relief measures for researchers with child care commitments (Imboden, 2011, p. 1).

The SNSF also took note of the fact that maintaining such a limit had the consequence of multiplying the number of exceptions to the rule, which amounts to a kind of affirmative action, in order to achieve the target of 30 per cent women among the beneficiaries. According to our calculations, on the basis of the evaluation report produced by Goastellec *et al.* (2007), 37.5 per cent of the women – but only 3.4 per cent of the men – were over the age limit initially set and were thus exceptions.

The publications dossier. Linked to the demand for rapidity, the emphasis placed by the SNSF on the scientific portfolio as a criterion for the award of professorial bursaries, and above all the type of measurements proposed in order to evaluate its quality ("publications in high-level scientific journals"), do not place men and women on an equal footing. The formulation chosen is relatively neutral at first sight ("high-level scientific journals") but it is recent. On the web site presenting the Professorships programme, at some point between October 2011 and summer 2012 it replaced a much more explicit formulation of the way of evaluating the quality of the portfolio: "publications in scientific journals with high impact factors". This modification shows that the initial choice was oriented by a specific conception of science which, as even the SNFS official contacted on this point admitted, could discourage applications from persons whose profiles are remote from this mainstream vision of science.

The types of research and publication that were previously valorised correspond on the one hand to disciplines that are under-feminised (horizontal segregation) and on the other to methods that often privilege quantitative and experimental approaches leading to publications in the form of relatively short texts, such as scientific papers (Nederdorf, 2006; Seglen, 1997). Different kinds of research undertakings, as in the work of researchers in the social and human sciences (in which women are in a large majority), whose findings are often published in monographs (as in history or anthropology), were consequently often relegated to a less prestigious category, giving less scope for these "profiles of excellence".

The two changes we identified have a heuristic value, since they demonstrate that the institutionalisation of questions of equality within the main national scientific institution has had the direct effect of inflecting the career norms for all individuals towards a better redistribution by enhancing "parity of participation" (Fraser, 2003). These modifications reflect, in our view, new equilibria within the SNFS, resulting in

part at least from the institution's strong preoccupation with equality between women and men and the growing salience of this theme in science policy. They also seem to show that some "play" does exist within the national science policy that can give rise to a "third space" in which moves towards gender and other inclusive policies could be negotiated. Such a change suggests a greater awareness than in the past of the effects of the type of measurement of scientific quality, and thereby of the excellence of the candidates, and tends to minimise the biases that would prevent "participatory parity".

Unfortunately, we did not observe the same kind of awareness at the local level some years before. Albeit with some nuances, the growing centrality of the theme of excellence is taken for granted, as are its normative and androcentric criteria. The views of the deans and vice-deans on the best person to be chosen for a professorial position were in their majority finally guided by gender stereotypes, reflected in organisational policies, and framed by the rhetoric of excellence. For example, academic age was not considered to be a good angle for assessing candidates' achievements. My present commitments as equality delegate in various professorial appointments processes show that few deep changes have occurred during this short period. Although the types of publications rewarded depend on the "group style" (Lamont, 2010) being developed during the processes of evaluation, my observations suggest that these group styles tend to remain androcentric, since the experts usually endorse the mainstream view of "doing good science", whether they are men or women. Without someone trained in Gender Studies and who is reframing the discussions through the lenses of equality and/or diversity policies, the mainstream view on science dominates and women are made to perform as "honorary males" (Cockburn, 1991), all the more so because "they are also confident that they are deserving of their reward […] because it has been the product of their own talent and effort" (Liu, 2011, p. 384).

4. Gender critique and questioning of career norms

Bringing the tensions that pervade the lives of women academics to light and deconstructing the processes that engender scientific processes has been part of the feminist work done on careers in the academic world[6]. This has served as a basis for the setting-up of equality policies in higher education, and has sometimes led to the introduction of new norms that scientists must meet in order to "make a career" in the world of research and higher education. This work has been done mainly through studies of the micropolitics that organise different academic settings (e.g. Van den Brink and Benschop, 2011). Although these studies have revealed that the "rules-in-use" (as Kenny and Lowndes (2011) call them) of the university as a professional organisation based on hierarchical gender and class relations, they very often had to be backed up by extensive surveys to demonstrate that gender inequalities were still active in the academic realm, so powerful was the belief that merit, as the sign of individual talent and/or effort, is (and should remain) the organising principle of academic achievement. Despite their necessity, these types of research treat women's experience in academia mainly through the measurements of the respective positions of women and men in the academic realm (number of women/men in management, senior professorial positions, etc.). Therefore, they very often do not address the individual processes and experiences that are at the roots of such a situation and do not work towards the questioning of the "conventional wisdom" that governs academia.

Analysing the SNSF Professorship programme, we have observed that the criteria for the award of these bursaries of excellence have, little by little, changed, probably under the influence of the SNFS Equality Commission. In particular the introduction of academic age allows more atypical trajectories (late start, time taken out to bring up children, a move to a new discipline or theme, etc.) to be taken into consideration, different personal profiles to enter the corps of teacher-researchers, and new questions and approaches to find a legitimate place in the academic world. Allowance should be made for a diversity of publications and work that responds to local needs and debates. Levine stresses the need for scientists to reconsider the local dimension as essential, because this alone enables individuals to experience diversity (people from different horizons living in the same neighbourhood) and offers an ideal ground on which to "build associational commons with roots in geographic communities" (Levine, 2007, p. 263). The questioning of some of the so-called excellence criteria is therefore advancing, albeit at present in a rather minor way, towards a potential subversion of the norms inspired by the neoliberal logic described by Dardot and Laval (2009). While these questionings are a response to the manifest inequalities linked to gender, they also have the effect of underlining what higher education owes to the public good (Calhoun, 2006), in particular through a revalorisation of teaching activities and dissemination of research findings in civil society.

These advances do not appear revolutionary at first sight, because they leave intact the principle of competition and the necessity of becoming the entrepreneur of oneself (Ehrenberg, 1991). As Strathern (2000) notes, the audit culture functions on the basis of the standardisation of procedures and helps to normalise research practices and career trajectories, but she also adds that the diffusion of this culture is difficult to criticise insofar as it promotes values of openness, transparency and democracy.

We find today the trace of this difficult critique, and also of its limits, in the top-down solutions recommended by the advocates of gender mainstreaming. Without strong pressure from feminists at local level and the conduct of research pursuing the enterprise of deconstructing norms, these policies may prove less "corrective" than affirmative action. They may, above all, have the effect of stabilising systems that offer no real parity of participation to all individuals (Fraser, 2003, p. 36). This is at least what emerges from the resistance to considering other ways of doing science, and the qualities necessary for it, which we have observed at Faculty level and during the appointments procedures I follow as a delegate from the University Equality Office. My work in these committees shows that my interventions might sometimes change the "group style" in a single appointment process and open up opportunities to women. But to achieve this goal, I have to prove that I am an "insider" and will therefore adopt the language of expertise and the mainstream rhetoric of excellence. Adopting this strategy means silencing my deep understandings that the current structures in which science is produced are gendered and unfair. This positioning is not only unsettling and frustrating on a personal level, but also has consequences in the long run since it creates conditions in which any profound discussion on the criteria that define excellence is avoided. It could therefore help to stabilise the mainstream view on excellence in science and hamper any radical critiques, such as feminist ones, on the gendered processes that are occurring in the realm of the universities (Van den Brink and Benschop, 2011). It is therefore somewhat complicated to decide whether I should temper (Meyerson and Scully, 1995) my social and gender beliefs to become a change agent in a particular appointment process or if I should voice my viewpoint clearly in order to weaken the "taken for granted" rules-in-use. This dilemma no longer exists

when and if there is a feminist pressure that legitimises the radical critiques made of the university as a gendered and highly hierarchical world. Thus, the condition for a critical questioning of science lies in maintaining social and feminist pressure for the university to be open to all and for the conditions of access to the knowledge that it produces to remain as democratic as possible.

As we have seen, the translation of a number of demands of the feminist second-wave into policies set up to promote equality between sexes was efficient to show that, contrary to the lay belief, academia is a gendered realm. Therefore, these policies participate to increase the number of women in science and working in the universities and they are important elements to relieve gender inequalities. Nevertheless, these improvements can work in the direction of more social justice only if the pressure of the feminist movements remains active and if gender studies maintain a vigorous theoretical critique.

Notes

1. According to the Federal Statistical Office (OFS) data, the SNFS provides between 69 (Federal Institute of Technology, Lausanne) and 100 per cent (University of Lucerne) of the resources assigned to research and development (source: spreadsheet su-f-15-02.03_HE-2010.xls; www.pxweb.bfs.admin.ch/Database/French (accessed 21 November 2012).

2. According to the statistical table of OFS (su-f-15-02.03_HEU-2010.xls – www.pxweb.bfs.admin.ch/Database/French (accessed 21 November 2012), the proportion of foreign professors rose from 37.6 per cent in 2006 to 47.6 per cent in 2010; among other tertiary teachers it also rose by ten percentage points. The proportion of women professors rose from 9.1 to 17.0 per cent and the proportion of foreigners among women professors rose from 46.0 to 56.4 per cent over the same period (among other teachers, from 26.0 to 37.8 per cent).

3. Although Switzerland is not part of the EU, its representative for Higher Education, Charles Kleiber, signed the Bologna Declaration with 28 other European ministers in 1999 in order to increase the mobility of students and academics. The implementation of the Bologna process began in 2003 and brought huge changes to higher education in Switzerland as all universities had to align themselves on this European single model, which reorganises the curricula and standardises the requirements to obtain two different types of degrees: 180 European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) are required to obtain a bachelor's degree and 90 to 120 ECTS to get a master's degree.

4. Table 3.6 of *She figures* (European Commission, 2009b, p. 80) shows marked differences in certain countries – e.g. women make up more than 60 per cent of "Grade A" staff in Cyprus – but the most common tendency is similar to that in Switzerland and most western European countries: women are clearly more present in the human and social sciences than in other disciplines.

5. In contrast to France, but like Germany and the Netherlands, Switzerland shows very marked differences in the proportion of full-time employment according to sex. In 2004, 58.4 per cent of the women working in Switzerland were employed part-time (29.9 per cent in France). This situation is due in particular to the limited development of childcare facilities and very probably contributes to the persistence in Switzerland of a model of the family that leaves the man the privileged role of breadwinner and defines women's paid work as a supplement. The researchers of the OFS conclude that "this model of a mother working part-time and a father full-time is fast becoming the 'normal family model' in Switzerland" (OFS – Office fédéral de la statistique, 2009).

6. On this, see the Gender and Science Database and the national reports at www.genderandscience.org and Caprile (2012).

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