

THE STANDPOINT IN QUESTION

Situated knowledges and the Dutch minorities discourse

Een kwestie van standpunt.
Gesitueerde kennis en het Nederlandse minderhedenvertoog
(met een samenvatting in het Nederlands)

PROEFSCHRIFT

Ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor
aan de Universiteit van Utrecht
op gezag van de Rector Magnificus,
prof.dr. H.O. Voorma, in gevolge het
besluit van het College van Decanen
in het openbaar te verdedigen
op donderdag 4 september 1997 des ochtends te 10.30 uur

door

Baukje Prins
geboren 19 juli 1956 te Drachten

Promotores: Prof. dr. R. Braidotti (Universiteit Utrecht, Faculteit der Letteren)
Prof. dr. L.W. Nauta (Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, Faculteit der Wijsbegeerte)

Promotiecommissie:

Prof. D. Haraway (University of California, Santa Cruz)
Prof. dr. H. Kunneman (Universiteit voor Humanistiek)
Prof. dr. A. Mol (Universiteit Twente)
Dr. G. Wekker (Universiteit Utrecht)
Prof. dr. A. de Ruyter (Universiteit Utrecht)

Dit onderzoek werd mogelijk gemaakt door een subsidie van de Stichting Filosofie en Theologie van de Nederlandse Organisatie voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek (NWO).

PREFACE

Writing is a lonely and tedious business. Time and again, I had to overcome the fear for the empty screen. Without the support and interest of a number of friendly readers, who never seemed to doubt that my concoctions were going somewhere, this thesis would surely not have been completed.

Rosi Braidotti and Lolle Nauta proved to be an excellent team of supervisors. Their confidence in my project and their shared and ever returning insistence that I write in my own voice were invaluable to me. I already miss our joint meetings in either Utrecht or Groningen. I would especially like to thank Rosi for her energizing pep-talks in the beginning and her relentless deadlines towards the end, but also for her trust, and her quick and politically sharpened mind which made for a series of challenging and intense conversations. Lolle helped me along with his pointed and always useful comments in developing my own arguments more carefully. I thank him for his consistent support and friendship through the years.

Winter 1994, I had the opportunity to visit the History of Consciousness Program of the University of California at Santa Cruz. Participating in seminars with Donna Haraway, Dana Tagaki and Angela Davis was a great and instructive experience in many ways. I especially want to thank Donna for her willingness to read my work, her stimulating conversations, her warmth. I admire her ability to combine academic erudition with serious political engagement and a great sense of humour.

The Utrecht postgraduate seminar in Women's Studies proved to be an inspiring meeting point. I thoroughly enjoyed our lively discussions and the atmosphere of mutual support and interest in each other's work. I learned a lot from comments on separate chapters by Denise de Costa, Cris van der Hoek, Geertje Mak, Jann Ruyters and Anneke Smelik. The monthly *intellectueel atelier* of the Department of Women's Studies was another guarantee for intense explorations of topical issues within feminist theory.

I am lucky to have a number of friends who are colleagues, or vice versa. They were willing to listen to vague ideas, read preliminary texts and counter ever so many doubts. I thank Pieter Pekelharing and Charis Cussins for asking the right questions at the right time, and Mieke Aerts and Sawitri Saharso for a good talk on 'inappropriate/d others'. I am especially grateful for the attentive readership and useful comments given on separate chapters by Rosemarie Buikema, Geoff Cooper, Emilie Gomart, Bruno Latour, Annemarie Mol, Trees Pels, Frans van Peperstraten and Evelien Tonkens.

I could not have done without the help of several experts in documentation, such as Roelof Jansma of the Documentation Centre of the Library of the University of Amsterdam, and Gijs von der Fuhr of the *Amsterdam Centrum Buitenlanders*. I also thank employees of the archives of the *Anne Frank Stichting* and the *IIAV* (International Information centre and Archives for the Women's movement) in Amsterdam for their help, and Herman Vuysje and Philomena Essed for generously providing me with information from their personal archives.

Dick Pels has followed the process of writing the dissertation in its most intimate details, endured my uncertainties and my growing engrossment in the project. I cherish our talks at his kitchen table, our part-time family life with Zita, and learned to appreciate the mixed blessings of living on a ship in Amsterdam. Our emotional and intellectual partnership has been a true enrichment.

CONTENTS

PREFACE**Introduction**

1

Part I: SITUATED KNOWLEDGES

Chapter 1. **Epistemology under attack:****constructivist approaches of knowledge**

5

1. Edification: Richard Rorty
2. Genealogy: Michel Foucault
3. Anthropology: Bruno Latour
4. The problem of relativism

Chapter 2. **The prism of gender:****feminist epistemologies (1)**

35

1. Masculine prerogatives
2. Gender free science: Evelyn Fox Keller
 - 2.1 *Dynamic autonomy/dynamic objectivity*
 - 2.2 *A woman of genius*
 - 2.3 *The female sex: mystery or feminist prerogative?*
 - 2.4. *The recalcitrance of 'nature'*
3. What can she know: Lorraine Code
 - 3.1 *Positionality*
 - 3.2 *Narrativity*
 - 3.3 *Let's try relativism*
 - 3.4 *Experiential stories: mistaken or marginalized?*
4. The mesmerizing force of gender

Chapter 3. **The achievement of a standpoint:****feminist epistemologies (2)**

62

1. Early feminist standpoints
2. No 'normal science' for us!: Sandra Harding (1)
3. Strong objectivity: Sandra Harding (2)
4. Outsiders within: Harding and Collins
5. The modernist legacy
 - 5.1 *Innocence*
 - 5.2 *Identities*
 - 5.3 *Circularity*
 - 5.4 *The problem of representation*

| | |
|---|-----|
| Chapter 4. Situated knowledges: feminist constructivism according to Donna Haraway | 87 |
| 1. Objectivity revisited | |
| 1.1 <i>Objects as actors</i> | |
| 1.2 <i>Embodied subjects</i> | |
| 1.3 <i>Non-innocence</i> | |
| 1.4 <i>Beyond identity</i> | |
| 2. Hybridity | |
| 2.1 <i>Cyborgs and other tricksters</i> | |
| 2.2 <i>Heteroglossia and ecstatic speakers</i> | |
| 2.3 <i>The ethics of hybrid subjects</i> | |
| 3. Feminism and constructivism | |
| 4. Situated knowledges | |
| 4.1 <i>A multi-layered concept</i> | |
| 4.2 <i>Displacements</i> | |
| Part II: THE DUTCH MINORITIES DISCOURSE | |
| Introduction | 111 |
| Chapter 5. New realism: ‘I take them seriously, so I quarrel’ | 118 |
| 1. Murdered innocence | |
| 2. Guts versus care | |
| 3. The ordinary people | |
| 4. Identity and difference | |
| 5. The power of representation | |
| 6. Gender and sexuality | |
| 7. Feminist chivalry | |
| 8. ‘White in the Bijlmer’ | |
| 9. Ventriloquism | |
| 10. Multicultural feminism | |
| 11. Whose realism, whose reality? | |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Chapter 6. Understanding everyday racism: a case of oppositional realism | 144 |
| 1. The other taboo | |
| 1.1 <i>Everyday racism</i> | |
| 1.2 <i>A mixed reception</i> | |
| 1.3 <i>Anti-racism and feminism</i> | |
| 2. Oppositional knowledges | |
| 2.1 <i>The standpoint of black women</i> | |
| 2.2 <i>Realism</i> | |
| 2.3 <i>Representation</i> | |
| 2.4 <i>Objectivity</i> | |
| 3. Innocence murdered | |
| 3.1 <i>Black and white</i> | |
| 3.2 <i>Involved and resisting</i> | |
| 3.3 <i>Denunciation and empowerment</i> | |
| 3.4 <i>Let's turn to stories</i> | |
| | |
| Chapter 7. Denunciation, empowerment, emancipation: different stories to tell | 172 |
| 1. The genre of denunciation | |
| 1.1 <i>Silent suffering</i> | |
| 1.2 <i>Women as guests</i> | |
| 1.3 <i>The netherside</i> | |
| 2. The genre of empowerment | |
| 2.1 <i>Pioneers</i> | |
| 2.2 <i>Representatives</i> | |
| 2.3 <i>Visibility</i> | |
| 3. The genre of emancipation | |
| 3.1 <i>Making the object speak</i> | |
| 3.2 <i>Authorship</i> | |
| 3.2.1 <i>A present absence</i> | |
| 3.2.2 <i>An absent presence</i> | |
| 4. Different stories | |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Chapter 8. Heterogeneity: stories of difference | 198 |
| 1. Mine's curls | |
| 2. White, brown & black | |
| 2.1 <i>Skilful arrangements</i> | |
| 2.2 <i>A colourful palette</i> | |
| 3. Inter-ethnic friendships | |
| 3.1 <i>Young together</i> | |
| 3.2 <i>A lot to learn</i> | |
| 3.3 <i>Some and all</i> | |
| 3.4 <i>Everyday knowledges</i> | |
| 4. Shining in the shadow | |
| 5. Partial stories, risky stories | |
| Part III: CONCLUSION | |
| Chapter 9. The standpoint in question | 223 |
| 1. Constructivism and feminism | |
| 2. Cases of realism | |
| 3. A narrative turn | |
| 4. Style matters | |
| Bibliography | 237 |
| Samenvatting in het Nederlands | 263 |