



**INTERNATIONAL NETWORK OF WOMEN PHILOSOPHERS
SPONSORED BY UNESCO**



Headings Proposal
Issue no.0, December 2009



**INTERNATIONAL NETWORK OF WOMEN PHILOSOPHERS
SPONSORED BY UNESCO - INFORMATION BULLETIN**

Taking on the challenge of diversity and otherness

Networking or creating links and connections is all about gathering members around a common goal. Hence, the International Network of Women Philosophers sponsored by UNESCO, launched in March 2007, is based on the stimulation of a common strength of creativity and on the sharing of a common sense of community, although pervaded by diversity. Thus, three key notions are at stake: the sense of community, the sharing and the stimulation that are today more than necessary in the act of thinking.

As today it is commonly accepted that “plurality is a necessary breeding-ground for freedoms”,¹ the Network will strive to take on the challenge of diversity and otherness by offering – notably through the biannual electronic bulletin – a space for expression and exchange of ideas, of practices, maybe of claims, or sometimes of astonishment. This space is open to the members of the Network, “lovers of wisdom”, as well as to all the friends and supporters of philosophy.

This Information Bulletin aims to be a flagship component of the Network, a philosophical space of freedom, enriched by the women philosophers who are its substantial allies.

Thereby, UNESCO hopes to make a contribution to the various attempts made by each of us to answer the question “How do my unlike fellow think?”

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Barbara Cassin

Founding Member of the
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¹ *L'UNESCO et la question de la diversité culturelle : bilan et stratégies 1946-2004. Etude réalisée à partir d'un choix de documents officiels*, UNESCO, Division of Cultural Policies and Intercultural Dialogue, 2004, pp. 20 and 22 (French only).

First Assembly of the International Network of Women Philosophers sponsored by UNESCO

The First Assembly of the Network will take place on 14 and 15 December 2009, at UNESCO Headquarters, Paris. The objective of this Assembly is to allow women philosophers – Network members – to further inquire on the sense of the Network and identify possible actions to be carried out. This event includes two sessions.

On 14 December 2009, the Assembly will address any question related to the functioning of the Network, as well as its orientations and upcoming activities.

On 15 December 2009, will take place an international symposium on the theme “What do men philosophers think about women philosophers?”. This symposium will attempt to rethink philosophy from a gender perspective, taking into account cultural and regional specificities. The question is overtly impertinent and ironic, opening space for re-examination and self-interrogation.

A report of the First Assembly will be published in the *Events* column of the launching issue of the Bulletin.

Launching of the *Information Bulletin* of the International Network of Women Philosophers

Presentation

Through its *Information Bulletin*, open to all members' contribution, the International Network of Women Philosophers will offer an innovative space for exchange of information and ideas.

This *Bulletin* belongs to the members of the Network and it will reflect their diversity through the articles and the announcements that they will post.

The *Bulletin*, as open and as diverse as possible, will also be dedicated to the exploration of the diverse ways of philosophizing in different places, cultures and professions, far beyond any established disciplinary boundaries, with the view to reflecting all the power of thought.

Hence, under the heading *Philosophical Tribune*, the members of the Network will be able to post thematic articles. The purpose of this column, dedicated to articles authored by women philosophers, is to share philosophical thoughts and positions, as well as their impact.

Furthermore, the heading *Voices of otherness* will gather texts of women and men, philosophers and non-philosophers, who wish to share their thoughts on the meaning and the implications of the Network without becoming members.

Under *Events* will be announced philosophical activities and events that are taking place around the world, where women philosophers' participation makes or can make a difference.

Finally, *Vis-à-vis* will offer a communication space where members of the Network can post announcements related to requests/offers of scholarship or fellowship, as well as announcements and critics of new publications, academic programmes, conferences and seminars, etc.

Questions under discussion

- Relevance of the proposed headings, other possibilities;
- How to select the texts to be published, without excluding or censoring and while maintaining the “quality” of the Bulletin?

See under each heading...

Philosophical Tribune

This space of writing and of expression is open to all members of the International Network of Women Philosophers who wish to share their opinions and philosophical reflections on specific themes. This heading is dedicated to diversity under its manifold characteristics, be it the diversity of cultures, of intellectual references, of disciplines or of interdisciplinary approaches, etc. The objective is to generate food for thought by sharing conceptions that are consolidated by philosophical argumentation.

The following questions regarding the organization of this Tribune are to be discussed during this Assembly:

- 1. Is it pertinent to appoint an invited chief editor for this column?*
- 2. Is it pertinent to determine a different theme for each issue?*
- 3. Is it relevant to focus on a specific geographical region or country for each issue?*

As an introduction to Issue no. 0 of the Bulletin, this column shall reproduce the text “Fundamental Problems/Founding Problems”

which highlights the major questions and the unavoidable complexity that underlie the International Network of Women Philosophers.

“**W**hat exactly is meant by ‘woman philosopher’? Is it different, and if so in what respect, from a philosopher woman? Is it different from a man philosopher? Is there a distinction between a male philosopher and a female philosopher from the point of view of philosophy? If so, what is it? If not, from what point of view is this distinction relevant? These questions, which are as weighty as they are banal, cannot be avoided.

These fundamental problems are also founding problems.

The purpose is to determine the object of our study, which proves to be its subject as well – the active participant in this network, knowingly the woman philosopher. Is it sex or gender that is being accorded prominence here, stressed, lent greater visibility? What is indeed insisted upon? Is it the sexual differentiation, the sexually characterized aspects of beings? Or is it the impact of sexual differentiation upon the pursuit of knowledge and the individual or generic experience of this pursuit? Is a woman philosopher one

who calls herself so, or one who is called so by others — and who are the others? Can a man be a woman philosopher? Can he philosophise like a woman, this side of or beyond the being, the quality and the determination — sex, gender, sexuality mixed together? Is philosophy a way of liberation for women who, despite the major headway made, would still need this support for affirmation and conquest?

We have chosen a provisional response: Even if a man can be a philosopher “like” a woman, it is women that this network has chosen to bring together.

A network of this kind only makes sense if international, taking into account historical and geographical characteristics. It welcomes women whose circumstances are different, in terms of politics, economics, culture, perhaps language, nationality, place in the world, and the country in which they live and work.

One of the primary points of agreement among us concerns the radically transdisciplinary character of the network: women philosophers overturn generalisations; they call into question again the distinctions drawn between disciplines, the ways disciplines and universities have been differently carved out from country to country, and stereotypes such as “philosophy for men, literature for women”. To reflect upon the interpenetrations and to bridge the diverse expressions of thought between them are the very

core purpose of the Network. We are not precluding universal reporting and conversation.

There is also the problem of voice and of its echo. Whenever the notion of network is evoked, this implies thinking about members and non-members, which can possibly trigger feelings of being left out or discriminated against, which would be the opposite of the Network’s intended goal. The often blaring absence of the women philosophers’ voices on a good number of subjects — because not listened to or marginalised — induced us to create an international support system. But what kind of resonance do we wish to have? How far will the network have to go to realise the solidarity it is hoping for?

We neither wish to silence any question, nor put an end to any debate. As the network is enriched with new members, it will give rise to new questions. Precisely this will constitute its value and its utility. We are displaying prudence, not imposed prudence, but an earnest, resolute, and active one.

”

Barbara Cassin, Geneviève Fraisse and
Hourya Benis

Source:
www.unesco.org/shs/fr/philosophy/women_philosophers

Voices of otherness

The creation of an International Network of Women Philosophers was an event that did not leave anyone indifferent. It triggered curiosity, including on the meaning and the implications of expressions like “women philosophers”. Therefore this column intends to gather the different points of view on this Network, its justification, challenges and implications, expressed by those who wish to discuss this initiative, be it in terms

of objections, support or new proposals.

This column belongs to all those – women and men, philosophers and non-philosophers – who are not members of the Network, but wish however to contribute, raise questions, make comments, express reluctance, or – and perhaps thereby – become Ambassadors of the Network.

Events

Philosophical activities and events taking place around the world, where women philosophers' participation makes or can make a difference.

Examples for this heading

First Assembly of the International Network of Women Philosophers sponsored by UNESCO, 14 and 15 December 2009, UNESCO, Paris

This first-ever gathering of more than eighty women philosophers, members of the Network, includes two sessions.

The first session focuses on the discussion about the *raison d'être* of the Network, its future orientations and its mobilizing driving force.

The second session is a symposium around the question *What do men philosophers think about women philosophers?*

Exhibition *Elles@centrepompidou*, from 27 May 2009 to 24 May 2010, Centre Pompidou, Paris

“The main criterion for choice of the exhibited works of art [...] is intended to remain in the background. The Museum exhibits exclusively women, and yet the objective is neither to demonstrate the existence of a feminine art, nor to produce a feminist object. The objective is to lead the audience to consider this exhibition as a lovely history of art of the 20th century”.



Camille Morineau, Curator of the Exhibition, in *Elles@centrepompidou*, Exhibition Catalogue, 2009, Paris, p. 16.

The analogy between this exhibition *Elles@centrepompidou* and the International Network of Women Philosophers is amazing, and yet everything in this analogy is still to be discussed, in order to reach a finer comparison.

Vis- à-Vis

This heading offers a communication space where members of the Network can post announcements related to requests/offers of scholarship or fellowship, as well as announcements and critics of new publications, academic programmes, conferences and seminars, etc.

Examples for this heading

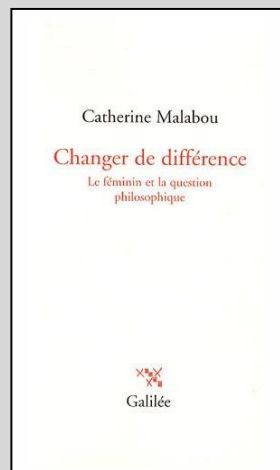
Recent publications

Boni Tanella,
Que vivent les femmes d'Afrique?,
Panama, Paris,
2008



Malabou Catherine, *Changer de différence. Le féminin et la question philosophique*, Galilée, Paris, 2009

“It may be true that women do not invent any philosophical question, but they create problems. Wherever they can, they put a spoke in the wheel of philosophers and philosophical systems.



Thereby, the impossibility of being a woman becomes the impossibility of philosophy itself.” (p.128)

Announcements

ACADEMIC EXCHANGE AND COOPERATION, COMMON PROGRAMME OF RESEARCH

REQUESTS/OFFERS OF INTERSHIP

SCHOLARSHIP