

IN THE UK ACADEMIA HAS BEEN DESCRIBED AS THE LAST BASTION OF MASCULINISM. MARCELA LINKOVÁ TALKS TO BARBARA BAGILHOLE.

On 22 September 2011 Prof. Barbara Bagilhole from Loughborough University in the UK delivered a keynote presentation at the 2nd national conference on woman and science titled Gender as a Social Innovation: Equal Opportunities in a Changing Research Environment, in Prague. On this occasion we asked her about her research on gender and research, major obstacles facing women in science and developments in feminism over the past quarter century.

Barbara Bagilhole has a long and strong commitment to Gender Studies and Equal Opportunities and Diversity. She is Professor of Equal opportunities and Social Policy, in the School of Social Sciences, Loughborough University, UK. She has researched and published extensively in the area of equal opportunities and diversity across gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, religious belief, age, and intersectionality.

She has published over 30 academic articles on women and science. Her latest books are *Understanding Equal Opportunities and Diversity: The social differentiations and intersections of inequality*, (2009), Policy Press; and Bagilhole, B. and White, K. (eds.) (2010) *Gender, Power and Management: A Cross-Cultural Analysis of Higher Education*, Palgrave Macmillan. She was a member of the Founding Committee of ATGender, the Professional European Association of Women's and Gender Studies, Feminist Research, Gender Equality and Diversity. She is the current Treasurer of ATGender.

Marcela Linková: You have been involved with gender equality for some thirty years now. I was wondering what the main change is that you have seen since the 1970s—let's say in the UK and on the European level—in addressing gender equality? In my perspective, it's sometimes really difficult to say now whether we are seeing a backlash or whether we are seeing really major progress, and I think we're in a particularly difficult situation now.

Barbara Bagilhole: If I can talk about the UK, to start with, the 1970s were a very progressive age for gender equality and race equality. We had a socialist Labour government and they passed the first anti-discrimination legislation and the Equal Pay Act. So we had anti-discrimination legislation on the grounds of race first and that was followed by gender and we had the Equal Pay Act; all came through and were implemented in 1975 although the trade union movement and the women's movement have been fighting for equal pay since 1890, so it was a long

hard-fought battle. We were all very optimistic about what happened. Throughout the 1970s there was progress; there was slow progress on equal pay and people were very aware of the anti-discrimination legislation, even business, the private sector was moving in that direction. Then came the eighties and recession and the election of the Conservative government under Margaret Thatcher. They were totally opposed to equal opportunities legislation; they were also totally opposed to the European Union. During the 1980s the only progress we made on gender equality was that our Equal Opportunities Commission, which was set up under the 1970s legislation, took cases to the European Court of Human Rights against our government, to make them take seriously issues such as pension rights for women, social security rights for women etc. The European Court of Human Rights made our government reluctantly conform. And then, eventually, with the election of the New Labour in 1997, there was a much more optimistic view about it, but there was a fear amongst feminists that the move towards diversity was tending to shift gender off the agenda. There is now one common commission; we used to have a commission for gender, a commission for race, a commission for disability, but now the move to a common commission means that the race issue has moved up the agenda and they've always had more money than the gender commission, so diversity is recognized by feminists as being important because women are not homogeneous, but it's a very difficult political line to draw because it can push gender out of sight. Now we have a Conservative, Liberal Democrat coalition government and they are definitely showing ominous signs of retracting on all the equal opportunities issues.

Marcela Linková: And in terms of attitudes among women do you see any generational differences?

Barbara Bagilhole: I think there is a small shift, a very small shift, I would like to emphasize. In the 1990s a lot of the women, younger women, didn't want to hear about the old struggles; as we used to say, they didn't want to see the battle scars. There was definitely a backlash against feminism. It was also because of the fact that the younger generation were brought up in a very individualistic type of a political system, which meant that everybody should look out for themselves, you shouldn't have any extra support. And I think now we are seeing a slight uprise in feminism,

certainly among university students. Of course, we no longer have many women's studies courses, we don't have gender studies courses, so it's only really in the social sciences where feminist academics are still pushing the cause and that you see a little bit of movement. But I am fearful what will happen now under this government.

Marcela Linková: There seems to be a more general move toward the fight for women's rights becoming institutionalized at the state level. As feminists managed to advance the issue to the political agenda, grassroots organizing practically disappeared.

Barbara Bagilhole: Certainly that is the case in the UK. State femocrats and feminist academics do seem to be isolated from the very few grass roots women's groups that remain.

Marcela Linková: Nancy Frazer talks about the *cunning of history* and how feminism of the second wave got gradually entangled up with neoliberalism and how there has been, since the 1970s, too much stress on recognition but not redistribution of power, and that the way out is to join them again and talk about redistribution. What is, in your opinion, the future of feminism with the current very strong neoliberal push in policies?

Barbara Bagilhole: Well, talking about the UK, I think, as mentioned before, there has always been a problem with the relationship between academic feminism and activist, grassroots feminism; we have never really got together very well. Talking about academic feminism and the second wave feminism I think we were thrown by postmodernism and poststructuralism. A great emphasis on identity politics and fragmentation of the fact there is no such thing as a category of women. So it was very much moving along the theoretical line and away from political activism even more. And some of us old structuralists, redistributionists, wanted to pull it back and I think it's pulling back now. But at the same time in the grassroots activist level, trade unions have been decimated in our country as well, so there isn't really what I would call now a women's movement in the UK. When I was younger in the 1970s and 1980s, I used to go to along women's movements meetings but they no longer exist now. So the only bastion against that withdrawal of activism is the trade unions and, of course, these were decimated and are still being attacked by neoliberalism so I think it's very a difficult course we have to take. I think I would like to see academic feminism moving back towards more political reality and the revival of an engagement of trade unions with women.

Marcela Linková: Today we are seeing, in policy documents but also by advocacy organisations, the uptake of the neoliberal rhetoric of utilization of human resources, the human potential. How do you see the use of this rhetoric as an activist, how do you navigate the landscape?

Barbara Bagilhole: I think, as a pragmatist, I would argue that we have to cautiously and with our eyes wide open use their language and adapt all causes to their language; in the UK it would be the business case for equal opportunities, which has been pushed for a very long time. The trouble with that is that the business case can be undermined if we have high unemployment, you no longer need women. It's a dangerous line to take; but I think, as a pragmatist, you have to take that line, otherwise you would be totally defeated. So pragmatically and realistically I think we need to do that.

Marcela Linková: In your research you have been looking into the managerial and leadership positions in science and what sort of skills are needed to make it and how different those experiences are for women. Could you talk a little bit about your findings about the ways the managerial and leadership culture is gendered and how that impacts on women in academia?

Barbara Bagilhole: It's really interesting. In my previous career, in my previous job I worked in local government. I was actually an equal opportunities adviser and activist in local government. There I was always committed to equal opportunities. When I came back into the academy as a lecturer in 1991, I was shocked by how archaic, masculine and non-affected by the equal opportunities legislation academia had been. So I decided to start up a research project to look at why so few women got into academia at all, even at the lowest levels; I mean the figures are just appalling. In the UK academia has been described as the last bastion of masculinism and I think it maintains it to a large extent. There is a huge old boys' network, but only for certain boys, not for all boys. They pick the boys who come to the old boys' network. There is the informal nature of appointments; there is the invisibility of criteria for promotion and selection; there is the idea that people are asked to apply for positions and if you are not asked to apply, you might not even bother because even if they are openly advertised, nine times out of ten it's like appointing the pope. The puff of white smoke goes up and you are told who has been appointed, not how, why or who has decided, but this is the person. I think that that's still maintained in academia. To a large extent, the professorial level in academia is allowed to talk about their academic independence and are largely untouched by human resource development. They have power because the power within universities lies in bringing in large research grants, bringing in students, and if male professors are doing that, nobody challenges their equal opportunities policies.

Marcela Linková: So how are the skills, perceived to be necessary for leadership positions, portrayed and communicated by the people in positions of power to the incoming young generations?

Barbara Bagilhole: Well, it's quite interesting because I think in the latest work we have done on this we talked about hard skills and soft skills which is usually the masculine-feminine bipolar thing. More and more, managers in a more managerial system of higher education are beginning to talk about the benefit of soft skills, but what that means is not that they are bringing more women in, but the men are now talking soft skills. So they're talking team work, collaboration, empowerment, etc; but at the same time they are using very hard-core skills of financial management, managerial talk, so they're talking the talk, but they're not walking the walk. They're doing very clever adaptation of maintaining their power position.

Marcela Linková: Based on your research, are the skills perceived as necessary for leadership attributed equally to women and men or did you find differences in how skills and behaviours are interpreted in women and men in leadership positions?

Barbara Bagilhole: Basically there is still a wide held belief in stereotypical images of women and men, with women perceived as for example, more collaborative, good communicators, less aggressive, etc. This means that men are favoured for positions of leadership. Universities are increasingly developing competency frameworks of what they expect from managers, but they tend to appoint managers who do not have these competencies. Some senior managers say that they value the collaboration and communication skills that women bring to management teams, but there is still a tendency to reward 'hard' managerial leadership, which is aligned with traditional transactional leadership style, mostly associated with men.

Marcela Linková: What would be the way or is there a way, according to the research findings, for women to move up? Because there is huge body of literature now that shows how women are penalized for success and ambition, not doing the proper feminine gender but then if they do the masculine gender, it's not the right way to do it either...

Barbara Bagilhole: Absolutely. One of the most important things right at the early stage of the women's career is they need to know how the system works, and then they can make strategic decisions about where they go with that. There still is a culture among women, young women and older women, to think they can get ahead with hard work only, that somebody will notice them. Whereas the reality in academia still is its networks and who you know, not what you know. I think strategically women have to be helped to decide if they want success in academia, and they have to find the strategic route that they're comfortable with. Now that might be with talking to other women who are feminists because not all women who have got to the top are sisters, and talking quite strategically with them and making decisions along the way. I mean there is a role for mentoring, but the trouble with mentoring

is that if it is female only mentoring, it puts a big burden on senior academics unless that mentoring is rewarded by them being given less teaching hours, etc., that's I think we should be pushing for as well.

Marcela Linková: Anyway mentoring shows very openly what happens implicitly, tacitly in the old boys-young boys inbreeding system into the academic habitus. Do you have any experience in the UK with having mentoring teams where men would be also involved and how that is perceived. Are male professors willing to mentor and do they see it perhaps in terms of understanding the women's lot, so to say, in academia?

Barbara Bagilhole: I would move from the word mentoring to the word *championing* because it's more than mentoring. The old boys' network does not just mentor, it champions, it finds positions, it finds opportunities for young men, some young men. I think there is a role for men to champion women; the men I found who are very good at championing women are men who have daughters, particularly in academia because they see what's happening to them and are very positive and supportive and want to change things. Interestingly, the best advice I got when I started my career in academia was from a man. He was very supportive and he saw what was happening. It was quite enlightening.

Marcela Linková: So what did he tell you?

Barbara Bagilhole: He told me certain things like if you go to international conferences, you say you are invited. You don't say you have put in an abstract and they accepted it. You big up everything; you big up and you make sure as many people know about it as possible. So you broadcast; you publicize it. The first advice I was given when I first came to academia was: Concentrate on your teaching, which was bad! I mean as much as I think we should be very conscientious about our teaching; if you want a career in academia, you do not concentrate on teaching; you do your best for teaching but you also have to work upon an international profile for your research and publishing. So if I would have followed that first advice, I wouldn't be here now.

Marcela Linková: This plays out neatly with some of the findings that we have from our research that women prefer teaching; they don't want to boast; they don't want to self-promote; they are very shy about self-promoting.

Barbara Bagilhole: Absolutely. I think it's very hard. I feel like that myself. I know even now I don't push, I don't publicize as much as I should do.

Marcela Linková: So in a way if you are socialized to do gender the way you are supposed to as a proper woman, you

don't stand a chance in the academia. You also did research on masculine fields, construction, engineering, where the numbers of women are really, really low. Would you have a comment on how women in these fields go about doing gender and moving up? How they carry themselves in gender terms and whether these strategies can have effect on how they progress up in these masculine fields?

Barbara Bagilhole: One of the strong findings we have, because women are in such a minority in those particular fields, is they try to be like the boys and they try very individualistic strategies. They definitely do not want to associate with other women because that is seen as subversive by the men. They try individualistic strategies and they can at times, at the most extreme, be quite derogatory about other women. Interestingly, even the students in those disciplines would say things like: "Oh, we are different to other women students; we are not like in sociology, they're the girly girls, we are not like that." They put up with a lot of sexism, a lot of harassment, sexual harassment; that is rife, absolutely rife, and they feel they have to do so individually because there is no support system for them. If they complain, they're seen as a troublemaker, and eventually a large number of them leave. Because it's like a drip, drip, negative problem for them. Also, I found a lot of them said that they only coped by becoming more masculine, becoming aggressive, swearing, etc., and they have decided when they became mothers or wanted to become mothers they would leave because they didn't think that's how mothers should be. So they would try to reclaim or maintain femininity while acting masculinity.

Marcela Linková: What would be a solution to this sort of very masculine culture? Obviously saying that this is bad and you should change won't do a job. Are there any measures that the institutions in these fields would be developing themselves to attract more women or is the culture so well established that they don't really care that they don't have many women?

Barbara Bagilhole: In the private sector it varies from company to company; there are some companies in the UK that are very good and that are very progressive in terms of gender equality and race equality as well. They are very successful in that way, but then we have a lot of old traditional ones that are still making the profit and therefore do not want to change. I don't know what the solution is apart from showing good examples from these new companies and how they are progressing and how they are making more profits. At the moment, when the construction industry is in a boom, they want to bring women in, but now we are having recession again, they decided they don't. That's the trouble with the business case. It's all about the culture of these organizations. It's not just construction which is one of the extremes but it's also law; it's medicine. I would say it's not just a masculine culture, it's a very tradi-

tional masculine culture which also excludes some younger men, and some young men who come into it also leave, like the women do. So they're losing massive talents.

Marcela Linková: Right. So what would be your argument to change the situation? What we often hear here is that: Well, you know, if people don't like it, like if women, and some men, don't like to be competitive and fight with other people and sometimes be very nasty about progressing up, they just can leave, there are other people lined up to take their position. How would you respond to this?

Barbara Bagilhole: The culture of individuality has leached into academia from the private sector and I think that's bad. The main strength of academia is the collaboration of minds; diverse teams are more productive in terms of ideas, innovations, and changing things. The trouble is that the big push is from the quantitative measuring, managerial position in academia. What I also fear is, as the funding from the research councils dwindles (which could attract more diverse, imaginative, innovative research and interdisciplinary teams which is a good way of allowing women to show their skills), is the rise in industrial funded research, which does affect the integrity of research, particularly in sciences, in medicine. What is funded is what will be profitable. And that's a very dangerous road to go down. It's hopeless for social science, apart from the more applied sociology, which at our department is social policy and criminology. There is the funding to find out why the people have rioted but they want the right answers. If you give the wrong answers, they repress the research, which has happened to me. I did some research, which I was commissioned to do by our Economic and Social Research Council, our National Research Council and I was actually commissioned to examine whether there was any gender bias in giving of research grants. I did the research and gave the report to the president who was in power showing that there was a problem. In the meantime, a new president had come in and he told me to go away to do the research again because the answers weren't right. I went back and looked again, I came back with the same answers and he said, "Thank you very much" and that's never been published.

Marcela Linková: What were the problems that you were finding in the system?

Barbara Bagilhole: The particular problem were the nominations to research council committees because it was the old boys' network again. The appointments to the committees where funding decisions are made are done informally, and without transparency.

Marcela Linková: What are some of the strategies that women academics in the UK are taking and how does class and race play into it?

Barbara Bagilhole Well, I think in terms of UK women academics there is still a strong tendency not to have children. You could say the more educated women are the fewer children they have, and this was explained in America in the early 1900s by saying that if you educate women, their wombs will get smaller! The choice women are making in academia is not to have children or to have one child. After that, there is the use of working class women in child caring and housekeeping areas and obviously with the recession, there are more people there to do it and they're cheaper and cheaper. It's the exploitation of other women that's a problem.

Marcela Linková: Last question I guess: One startling thing to me is that when we talk about gender equality how totally taboo it is to talk about power. You know when you get outside feminist gender studies circles, the talk is all about the women's handicap of having children and how they make up for it later in the career which is totally not true. So how have you tackled with the issue of bringing in the issue of power in the positions that you have held in terms of equal opportunities and being in leadership positions in academia and trying to promote change?

Barbara Bagilhole Well, I think it's quite astounding. I didn't realize how powerful those positions were till I got one, because what I found was when I got into the position of Associate Dean, people were listening to me, even though I was a woman. I had this label of Associate Dean so I had this aura of power even though I probably didn't have a lot of power. But I had this aura of power, so you can see how those powerful positions can impose themselves on structures and cultures of institutions and how easily that is done and how seductive it is and how seductive in terms of maintaining the status quo. Power is one of the most essential concepts that we should think about; we

should think about patriarchy which is absolutely rife and maintained! I was looking at the UN summits and the like and it's just staggering: a man after a man after a man, old men. I was just working out to myself what is the ideal person to have most power: a white, old, heterosexual man, not disabled and upper-class. I mean it's just staggering maintenance of power, of the power system. And I think there is a lot of naiveté around that means we don't recognize it.

Marcela Linková: In all the equal opportunities initiatives in academia the issue of power does not enter the picture. Jeff Hearn wrote once that if we are serious about gender equality, we really need to talk about how men have to give up power.

Barbara Bagilhole: But will they or how do we make them?

Marcela Linková: Yes, exactly. And even the ones who are sympathetic to the cause. And I think that this is one of the most difficult issues when you are trying to promote gender equality. You don't want to look like you're trying to grab more power for yourself. But even to say that it's about power and control is very difficult.

Barbara Bagilhole: But the big and most important question is how you shift power, because it's a political question. How do you shift power? Maybe we should become great politicians. But then the only way women have become great politicians is to become like the men. I think it is the important role of feminist academics to continue to research and expose the power structure, and to promote change within academia and elsewhere wherever they can influence decisions. Also, we need to cultivate and educate the younger generation of women to take the fight forward.