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Engendering Spanish geography

Sexuer la géographie espagnole

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Engendering Spanish geography

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Fabia Diaz Cortés, Maria Dolors Garcia Ramon and Anna Ortiz

- 1 For over two decades, gender studies have been advanced in Spanish geography constituting a subfield of social and cultural geography. On the one hand, they have incorporated the international perspectives that understand gender as a construction challenging the artificial boundaries between the social, the cultural and the economic which understands that culture, as a social construction, is a basic instrument of social change. On the other hand, there have been distinctive features of Spanish work on gender, consonant with national traditions. While it originated as an outgrowth of research by geographers interested in radical and Marxist perspectives in the discipline, even as it drew early inspiration from the British and American work, it has had more of a social orientation. Additionally, although it presented a rupture with earlier Spanish work, it has sustained the tradition of being more applied than theoretical.
- 2 The rupture has been expressed in terms of content, but also through its methodological innovations. In this respect, it contrasts with the practices in many Spanish universities where geographers have continued to work within the framework of traditional regional geography, although updated through the introduction of new technologies, in particular GIS, and have brought in applied approaches to environmental studies. By contrast, gender studies have made a marked break with traditional approaches, not only in their conceptual orientation but in introducing qualitative methodologies that were initially resisted but are today beginning to be accepted.
- 3 Qualitative methods have their origins in phenomenological theory which concerns itself with subjective experiences and the intent of defining and interpreting everyday lives. This methodology, drawing for example, on in-depth interviews, life histories, and participant observation (García Ballesteros, 1998), was exemplified early in Spanish work by Aurora García Ballesteros (1986). Although some early gender research on rural women drew on census data and quantitative methods (Solsona, 1989), it clearly revealed the limitations of such data for representing women's work and prompted a

turn to qualitative methods, especially of in-depth interviewing (Sabaté *et al.*, 1995). Many of the PhD theses that have dealt with gender have used these methodologies, some of them quite early in time (Baylina, 1997, 2004a ; Blanco, 2005 ; Caballé, 1997, 1998 ; Cánoves, 1990 ; Morales, 2002 ; Ortiz, 2004 ; Prats, 1997, 1998). All these works and the following publications that we will cite have contributed to the growing recognition of qualitative methods as legitimate by Spanish geographers, a recognition that is becoming acknowledged as orthodox in Anglophone geography, not constantly in need of justification (Crang, 2002).

- 4 In this paper, in the first section we will deal with the institutional aspects linked to gender and power within the discipline in Spain ; then, in the second one, we will deal with three topics that have been relevant in Spanish gender geography : the study of rural spaces, research on urban spaces and studies in postcolonial geography.

Gender and power in Spanish academic geography

- 5 In the 1980s, several studies were carried out which examined the presence and status of women in geography as well as their scientific production as indicated by publications in specialised journals (García Ballesteros, 1982 ; Sabaté, 1984 ; Castañer *et al.*, 1985 ; Garcia-Ramon *et al.*, 1988). Numerically speaking, women's presence was relatively high compared to other more established disciplines and also to women's representation in academic geography in a number of other countries, due in part to the fact that university degree programmes in geography were not created in Spain until the late 1970s and that they were heavily teaching-oriented. Women's status, power and scientific production in the discipline, however, were rather low. Recently, this topic has been re-examined and it has been found that although the Law on University Reform (LRU) has contributed to raising female geographers' academic status, there are signs that the discipline is becoming more male-dominated, in terms of both professors and students (Garcia-Ramon *et al.*, 2004). This most likely reflects the fact that the discipline is becoming more and more professional and technical, and it is widely understood that women are less inclined to choose technical and scientific university majors and professions. It would be important to examine this avenue of thinking in more depth in the near future in order to discern more accurately the mechanisms involved and to be able to take measures to create a friendly, attractive environment for women in academic and professional geography.
- 6 It is also true that attention to gender studies within geography and of women geographers is unevenly represented in Spanish universities (Pujol, 2004). Two well-established research groups, one at Complutense University of Madrid, the other at the Autonomous University of Barcelona, have been the impetus and unifying force in gender studies within the discipline. The gender research in these programs has been supported by an array of grants from national and regional governmental agencies, including those dedicated to work on women¹ and by some international funds². Geographers in these two institutions have formed a supportive group for each other and have also built strong and steady relations with individual researchers interested in gender studies at five additional universities (Girona, Santiago de Compostela, Valencia, Sevilla and La Coruña). Nevertheless, only two courses on gender as such are offered at the undergraduate level, though the degree in geography is given in 26 departments. Gender-aware teachers have introduced the topic into other regularly

taught courses, however, though the syllabi only occasionally make explicit reference to gender. At the graduate level, the case differs somewhat, courses on gender having been taught in at least seven universities, often in interdisciplinary programs. During the last 14 years, 13 doctoral degrees and at least twice as many master's degrees focusing on gender have been awarded, a good number of them at the Autonomous University of Barcelona. Additionally, publication of a textbook on gender (Sabaté *et al.*, 1995) has provided a resource for teaching that has been used at the university level and also in some schools.

- 7 The Autonomous University of Barcelona offers an interesting example of the strategies that have been adopted to advance gender studies. The Group on Gender Studies in Geography was created in 1987 and formally recognized by the administration of the university in 1995. From its initiation, this Group was directed by Maria Dolors Garcia- Ramon, an established full professor. This situation contrasts with that in some other countries where those attempting to introduce gender research and teaching are junior scholars. The Barcelona group consciously adopted strategies that would advance and consolidate its position. These included: incorporating multiple members of the department, including young researchers and graduate students; seeking external research funds (regional, national and international); developing competitive scholarly records by publishing in refereed journals, nationally and internationally; teaching specialised courses in gender; establishing a modest documentation centre on themes related to its research; presenting at international meetings; forming a supportive local informal network; and establishing relations with geographers outside Spain, by going abroad themselves and inviting foreign geographers into the department.

Relevant research topics in gender geography in Spain

- 8 We will not aim to be exhaustive in reviewing the work carried out since the 1980's as some detailed state of the art articles on the topic have recently been published (Garcia-Ramon, 2005; Prats, 2006). But we will discuss the research carried out in specific topics that seem to have been predominant in Spanish gender geography.

Gender and processes of rural and regional restructuring

- 9 For many years, this avenue of research has been important, in keeping with the rural tradition of Spanish geography. Studies have mainly been undertaken by the gender groups which emerged at the end of the 1980s at the Complutense University of Madrid and the Autonomous University of Barcelona. Two main lines of research were developed, both examining women's work in the rural environment: women's contribution to work on family-run farms and the role of women in the economic diversification of rural areas. Within the former, a series of studies on women's contributions to family-run farms in different regions is worth mentioning. These demonstrated that women's contributions to work are quite important when all the real work (both productive and reproductive) is taken into account. Women's work on farms is discontinuous, irregular and highly diversified, so that many of the productive tasks are difficult to separate from household work. It is therefore difficult to take into account in agricultural statistics which thus poorly reflect women's work. This research

showed that the survival of family-run farms in Spain hinges on women's participation, both in areas where agricultural activities are more marginal and in areas where agriculture is intense and competitive (Garcia-Ramon *et al.*, 1995 ; 1996). It has also contributed to theoretical debates on the division between productive and reproductive labour, making clear that any attempt to explain women's work in this context had to take into consideration the patriarchal control of the work process and the ownership of the means of production (Nieto, 2004). In sum, these studies offered significant ideas on the cultural construction of masculinity and femininity in the rural contexts of different Spanish autonomous communities. We should also note that the comparative approach adopted in these rural studies, involving research at multiple sites, has been one of the hallmarks of Spanish geographic work on gender. Since geographers are especially interested in differences between distinct spaces (Garcia-Ramon *et al.*, 1993), this approach also enhanced the identification of the work as *geography*, both within and beyond the discipline.

- 10 Because the agricultural sector in Spain has been losing ground in the past fifteen years, it was crucial to inquire what has been and is the role of women in the process of rural restructuring, since understanding this is necessary for designing rural policies. One of the earliest studies centred on the processes of economic diversification, especially on the location of light industries ; this research demonstrated that the advantages provided by women, including lower-cost labour and a lower tendency towards conflict than identified with men's labour, were very important factors when attracting industry (Sabaté, 1993). Later, other types of activities, some of them innovative, such as rural tourism (Cánoves *et al.*, 1997) and telecommuting (Blanco, 2005) and some more traditional, such as jobs in agro-industries or at home (Garcia-Ramon *et al.*, 2000 ; Prados, 1998), were examined in different Spanish autonomous communities. In particular, informal industrial at-home work has been studied in various autonomous communities (Baylina *et al.*, 1998, 2004b). The work carried out by women in such settings is characterised by being informal, labour intensive, and barely remunerated. Nevertheless, it cannot simply be placed alongside marginality or represent the survival of forms of work bound for extinction. In many cases the practice of homework puts roots into new soil, constituting a show of resistance against the competitive pressures of the market. In this context, women are seen as the best candidates for working in the home because they are identified as being more dependent than men on local employment opportunities and socially perceived as more adaptable and docile. In this sense they constitute a social and human capital that is crucial to rural and local development (Pallarès *et al.*, 2003 ; Baylina 2004b). As researchers committed to equal opportunity, we must not marginalise their role (even if it is of this type), rather we must make these women more visible and condemn the specific circumstances in which they must do their jobs and insist on the need for a substantial change in gender roles and relations (Sabaté, 2002).
- 11 Recently, two topics have been examined which fall within the theoretical framework of inter-gender relations and the environment. First, work has been done in the field of ecological agriculture, namely on women's participation in the different productive phases of biological foodstuffs in an attempt to answer the question of whether men and women have a different relationship with this production (López, 2000). The results demonstrate that women producers are in a position to fully profit from their advantages and play a leading role in an emerging sector in rural areas. A second area

of research has studied the roles of rural women in natural resources management and sustainable development, especially in regions with protected areas (Canosa *et al.*, 2000). Emphasis is placed on the consequences for women of current policies on rural development and nature conservation implemented by various public administrations, both in Spain and in the European Union (this is being examined mainly via the *Leader* programmes that are part of initiatives to revitalise lagging regions). It is important to continue work on both lines of inquiry in order to have at our disposal the elements needed to design rural development policies that take into account these recent processes which are so closely linked to the environment.

Gender, time, work and urban spaces

- 12 The earliest urban studies centred on female mobility, especially in terms of commuting to work, a research topic with deep roots in the field of geography (Díaz *et al.*, 1989). The study of women's timetables in the city was undertaken as early as the 1990s, inspired by the debates coming from the Italian left wing (Prats *et al.*, 1995, 2004). Given the challenge of the massive influx of women into the labour force and the rigidity of lifestyles and timetables in cities, especially in southern Europe, an attempt was made to consider how women managed their time and to study the timetables of businesses and services and their appropriateness in light of the demand, as well as to provide recommendations aimed at fostering greater freedom and equality in the use of time. For the city of Barcelona, it was shown that there was fierce competition in finding time for both productive and reproductive work, for leisure activities and at night, but the time spent on productive work clearly emerged as the most important and the most rigid, around which all the other times were organised, thus creating a feeling of anxiety and "time famine". Based on the recommendations generated, the Barcelona Town Hall initiated a series of policies that proposed, on an experimental basis, a series of changes in the timetables for services, facilities and shops in one Barcelona neighbourhood. In a subsequent phase of action, "Time Banks" have been organised in various neighbourhoods in order to exchange time benefits. The issue of making work schedules more flexible was also a central point in the study of women's work in the retail sector in metropolitan areas; however, in this case, it is a type of flexibility that benefits not women but only the companies (Ortiz *et al.*, 2000).
- 13 The role of women in defending the urban environment has also been approached in studies of female citizens' movements or women-led movements (Brú, 1995, 1996). This work has involved comparative regional research on mobilisations protesting environmental risks (related to the presence of industrial waste) in municipalities in various autonomous communities. It has revealed that women's views of the environment were quite different from usually accepted rigid, androcentric views. It also suggested the need to define the concept of environment more broadly in order to encompass a conception that is much more closely tied to the consequences of environmental impacts on daily life (on health, on our surroundings, on our families' well-being, and so forth).
- 14 Another recent avenue of research involves analysing a series of urban planning actions undertaken in the past fifteen years in Catalan cities of varying sizes (Baylina *et al.*, 2004; Cucurella *et al.*, 2006; Díaz-Cortés, 2007; Garcia-Ramon *et al.*, 2004; Ortiz *et al.*, 2002; Serra, 2003). Women have been absent from urban planning, not only as users of

public spaces, but also as urban planners. The research examined a series of actions aimed at rehabilitating urban spaces which had included among their objectives the fight against socio-spatial exclusion. These actions were examined first by analysing the concepts and strategies underlying these actions, and second by looking at the nature and degree of the real impact of these measures on social and gender exclusion. In addition to comparing different sites, an important focus in these studies has been the integration of social characteristics such as ethnicity and age as they intersect with gender. The research carried out to date has focused on four types of measures: reassessing public spaces, public transport, housing, and promoting the functional and social complexity of urban spaces. The potential of public spaces as an integrating force has been shown, as has the fact that their design is a crucial element to foster the presence of women in an effort to overcome their traditional social and spatial isolation and, in short, to encourage the processes of emancipation. In considering differences within groups, as well as between males and females, these studies question the hegemony of the knowledge of professional planners that assume “absolute” values in physical design and do not take into account cultural diversity, relations of power within communities, or how the perceptions and identities of the users might differ from their own. It would be interesting to delve more deeply into this line of inquiry because the planning of public spaces from the perspectives of human diversity could be an important step toward creating socially and culturally meaningful spaces, and ultimately toward achieving more inclusive participation in city life.

- 15 One particular line of this research on uses of public spaces has focused on boys and girls, seeing the spaces as educational sites and learning in everyday life. One of these (Baylina *et al.*, 2005, 2006) situates the research in mid-sized Catalan cities. It demonstrates without doubt that play spaces are basic for children’s development and are sites in which they observe, question, and contest traditional gender roles. This observation is especially pertinent in Spanish cities where public space is so much a part of everyday life and where gender norms have been so little transgressed. The research concludes that not only planners and architects should be involved in design, but also that specialists such as child psychologists, teachers, and children themselves should be incorporated into initiatives by municipal governments.
- 16 Most recently, the interest in difference has turned to aspects of sexuality within cities. Recent studies by García Escalona (2000) and Santos (2002) highlight connections between sexuality and processes of gentrification and also how the appropriation of urban spaces forms part of an empowerment strategy for these groups.

Reinterpreting colonial discourses : travellers, cultural borders and gender identity

- 17 Colonialism, and its ideological justifications, frequently exemplified in travel writings, became a crucial component of a nascent geography at the end of the 19th century. If it is true that its study has been incorporated into the historiography of the discipline in recent years, it is also the case that the contributions of travel writers and explorers have been significantly undervalued. But recent postcolonial and feminist studies aim to evaluate the contribution of travellers - especially of women - to colonial discourse since this literature offers a less monolithic vision of this discourse. In fact, some of the women travellers transform their own identities through colonial contact, seeking to

supersede cultural boundaries and establish a non-hierarchical contact with women living in overseas environments. The ambivalence between the world of the coloniser and the colonised is more frequently observed in writings by women travellers than in the writings of men who were serving colonial administrators (Garcia-Ramon *et al.*, 1998 ; Albet *et al.*, 1998, 1999 ; Garcia-Ramon, 2003, 2007).

- 18 Currently, research is being carried out on the role of geography in colonialism in the Spanish Protectorate of Morocco (Nogué *et al.*, 1999 ; Garcia-Ramon *et al.*, 2007) and on the role of Spanish travellers in the construction of colonial discourse in Africa. This research has revealed quite a few women and men travellers from mid 19th to mid 20th century. The initial hypothesis is that the vision that the Catalan traveller offers of the Africa colonies, and especially of the Spanish possessions, may differ from that of Spanish travellers who tended to be in the military or in the diplomatic or administrative service, and therefore more likely to represent the “official” colonial version of the metropolis. Catalan women and men, by comparison, not only belong to none of these categories but also offer an image more “distant” at times more critical and frequently also more oriented to leisure or commerce. One important focus of this research has also been the analysis of the images of women that appear in men’s travel narratives (Cerarols, 2007), images that confirm the orientalist gaze of most of the travellers. Finally, we should mention that new topics are emerging that adopt postcolonial and postmodern perspectives. Gender identity has been one of the main foci in postcolonial interpretation of extra-communitarian women migrants to Spain (Pedone, 2006) while Brú (2004) has adopted a postmodern approach to research on the theme of the gendered body in relation to nature and landscape.

Concluding Thoughts

- 19 We consider that the focus on gender has enriched the discipline of geography in Spain in multiple ways, especially by bringing to light certain aspects of society that the pragmatic tendency of applied geography so prevalent in our country tends to neglect. The use of powerful and presumably “neutral” techniques and methods of analysis in effect neglects fundamental dimensions of social reality, among them the gender relations that permeate and affect both aspects of daily life, especially the use of space, the allocation of time and the very concept of work.
- 20 Additionally, we believe that while feminist research in other disciplines has come to use notions such as context, location and situation, yet this is almost always in reference to a cultural space. To the field of geography, sensitivity to context means observing facts and objects on the ground, in specific places and at specific times. The geographic tradition has always been fascinated by difference, that is, differences in space and territory. We recognise that people learn culture in different ways in different regions and that also includes specific social constructions of gender roles. We must gain insight into how the economic environment, but also the cultural, social and natural ones play a decisive role in constructing gender roles and relations. Thus the empiricism and attention to detail that characterise a large part of geographic research compared to other social sciences, and which have frequently been viewed as a disadvantage, might, in fact, be a useful instrument for helping to contextualise the processes being studied. The geography-based approach provides gender studies with a

dimension that should not be ignored : the systematic search for regional differences and specificity in the relations.

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NOTES

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ABSTRACTS

During the last two decades gender studies have advanced in Spanish geography, constituting a subfield of social and cultural geography. They have incorporated the international perspectives that understand gender as a construction which challenges the artificial boundaries between the social, the cultural and the economic. On the one hand, Spanish gender geography drew early inspiration from the British and American work but, on the other, it has sustained the Spanish tradition of being more applied than theoretical. In this article, we will deal first with the institutional aspects linked to gender and power within the discipline in Spain ; then we will deal with three topics that have been relevant in Spanish gender geography : the study of rural spaces, research on urban spaces and studies in postcolonial geography.

Pendant les vingt dernières années, les études de genre se sont développées dans la géographie espagnole, constituant une sous-section de la géographie sociale et culturelle. Elles ont inclus les perspectives internationales qui considèrent le genre comme une construction qui questionne les barrières artificielles entre le social, le culturel et l'économique. La géographie espagnole du genre s'est initialement inspirée des travaux britanniques et américains mais elle a également suivi la tradition espagnole qui prône la mise en application plus que la théorie. Cet article s'occupe d'abord des aspects institutionnels qui ont un rapport avec genre et pouvoir dans la discipline en Espagne ; ensuite, on examine trois sujets qui ont été importants dans la géographie du genre en Espagne : l'étude des espaces ruraux, la recherche sur les espaces urbains et les travaux en géographie post-coloniale.

INDEX

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