Gender Representation in Academic Geography in Catalonia (Spain): Towards a Masculinization of the Discipline?

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ABSTRACT  In the mid-1980s Spanish geography seemed to be a success story in relation to gender and geography (Garcia-Ramon et al., 1988). But in recent years this positive aspect has been less marked, at least in Catalan geography. The total percentage of women staff has remained quite steady but the male:female ratio has significantly increased among younger age groups. Gender approaches to teaching and research in geography are still available in only a minority of departments in Spain. Contrary to the growing number of women geography staff in the English-speaking world, the image of geography in Spain today is more masculine than before, probably due to the fact that geography has moved from a more traditional to a more technical focus linked to the growth of professional practice outside the university.

KEY WORDS: Professional geography, academic geography, gender, Catalonia, Spain

Introduction

In 1985 we carried out a survey on the place of women geographers in Spanish universities, and their presence and significance in the production of scientific geography (Garcia-Ramon et al., 1988). We also wrote a short report on the state of teaching and research of gender geography in Spain (Garcia-Ramon, 1989) and pointed out that, although it was a very new topic, some important work was being undertaken. We found out that the presence of women geographers on faculties was quite significant (about a third of the teaching staff, although concentrated in low positions) but that they were publishing less and earned...
their doctorates less frequently than men. Nevertheless, the situation was much better than in the English-speaking world, where, for example, in the UK in 1982, women represented only the 11.4 per cent of the total teaching staff (Johnston & Brack, 1983).

It is interesting that the data we analysed reflected the situation in 1984, just before the implementation of the Ley de Reforma Universitaria-LRU (University Reform Act). This new law gave more autonomy to universities and tried to deal with the chaos arising from the extraordinary expansion of college education in the 1970s, in numbers of students as well as size of teaching staff. Instead of maintaining the former national competition among candidates for tenure, the new law established a procedure by which each university had more control over the selection of its permanent staff. We predicted that ‘endogamy’ would be strengthened and that local candidates would be in a better position than outsiders (as proved to be the case). We also thought that sex ratios could change because, first, endogamy would benefit women—as they usually have less mobility than men to look for a job—and, second, that the LRU enhanced the opportunities of those in low status jobs—who have usually been in departments for a long time—many of whom were women.

Although the Spanish case may have been a success story in relation to gender and geography (Monk, 1994), in recent years this positive appraisal may have been overstated. The total percentage of women has risen only slightly higher (34.6 per cent versus 33.0 per cent). Gender-sensitive approaches to teaching and researching in geography are still available in only a minority of departments. Contrary to the growing number of women geography staff in the English-speaking world (Brinegar, 2001), the image of geography in Spain today is more masculine than before, although it is true that the departure points were very different, since English-speaking geography was in a much worse position initially. We should ask why Spanish geography is now following such a different path from the discipline in the English-speaking world.

In order to analyse the situation, we shall focus first on the presence of women in academic departments, and we shall then analyze data concerning their scientific production. We shall try to compare the present situation with the results we obtained 15 years ago. The data for the study (for the academic year 1998–1999) cover only the seven geography departments of the Autonomous Region of Catalonia whereas the data for our previous work (Garcia-Ramon et al., 1988) reflected all 26 existing geography departments in Spain. But we believe that the comparison is quite relevant because Catalonia’s population is over six million, amounting to almost one-sixth of the total of Spain, and Catalan departments of geography do not differ much from the other geography departments with regard to the issues of interest. The seven Catalan departments included in the survey are the two geography departments at the University of Barcelona, the departments at the Autonomous University of Barcelona, University of Lleida, University of Girona and University Rovira i Virgili at Tarragona, and the Department of Humanities of the University Pompeu Fabra at Barcelona where geography is taught (the university does not offer a full degree in geography). The total number of students enrolled in a geography degree programme in Catalonia in 1998 was 2000, of whom 42.7 per cent were women (Institut Català de la Dona & Idestat, 2001). It is interesting to remember that Spain—as well as Catalonia—has a very high proportion of college student: about 40 per cent of 18- to 22-year-olds.
Table 1. Geography faculty members according to age in 1984 (Spain) and 1999 (Catalonia) (percentage of the total for each sex)\textsuperscript{a}

|        | Men 1999 | Men 1984 | Women 1999 | Women 1984 |
|--------|----------|----------|------------|------------|
| > 61   | 3.3      | 3.2      | 3.1        | 0.0        |
| 46–60  | 28.9     | 9.0      | 32.8       | 10.3       |
| 31–45  | 45.5     | 64.4     | 48.4       | 59.5       |
| < 30   | 22.3     | 23.4     | 15.6       | 30.2       |

Source: \textsuperscript{a}Data collected through questionnaires to departments.

The Presence of Women in Geography Departments

The total number of women on the teaching staff of geography departments in Catalonia is 64; the number of men is 121. Thus, the percentage of women in geography is 34.6, very similar to the percentage of women on the teaching staff of all departments in Catalonia, which is 33.2 per cent (Izquierdo, 1999). But it is interesting to observe the gender distribution by age groups (Table 1). Most women geographers are concentrated in the age group 31–45 years (48.4 per cent of the total of women geographers) and 46–60 years (32.8 per cent). In both cases the percentage of men in these age groups is slightly lower. The relative proportion of men and women in the upper age group (above 61 years) is similar but the interesting number for the near future is that the percentage of women under 30 years old is significantly lower than for men (15.6 per cent versus 22.3 per cent).\textsuperscript{2} The male:female ratio for the older group is 2:1, for the central age groups it is 1.6:1 and 1.8:1, and for the younger group it is 2.7:1. It is likely that the lower ratio of the middle age groups is a result of the implementation of the LRU, as it favoured the access to tenure of local non-permanent staff among whom women were conspicuous. The concentration of women in the 46 to 60 age group is also related to the enormous growth of Spanish universities during the 1970s when many new academic jobs were created, and women were already an important percentage of the student population. But the high male:female ratio of the youngest age group demonstrates declining feminization of the teaching staff and suggests that the future in Spanish geography will be more masculine, in contrast with the dominant trend in most disciplines. If we compare gender ratios for all disciplines in Catalan universities, there are important differences (Izquierdo, 1999). The male:female ratio of the age group older than 60 years is 4.7:1 versus 2:1 in geography but in the youngest age group—less than 30 years—the ratio is 1.3:1 versus 2.7:1 in geography. Although most of the staff within this youngest age group are non-permanent, this is the pool from which future permanent teachers will be recruited. Therefore, geography is evolving differently from other disciplines in Catalan universities.

It is also informative to analyse the distribution of men and women according to academic status (Table 2). In the highest permanent position (professor or \textit{Catedrático/a}), the percentage of women is about 33 per cent, which is equivalent to the average of their total presence in geography (34.6 per cent) and much higher than the total percentage of women professors at the Catalan universities—only 14.2 per cent (Izquierdo, 1999, p. 106). In the second highest
Table 2. Geography faculty members according to academic status in Catalonia, 1999 (absolute numbers and percentage for the total of each category)*

| Category | Men | Women | Ratio | Total |
|----------|-----|-------|-------|-------|
| Permanent staff (with tenure): | | | | |
| Full professor | 12 (66.7) | 6 (33.3) | 2 | 18 |
| Associate professor | 42 (66.7) | 21 (33.3) | 2 | 63 |
| Lecturer in university teaching school (TEU) | 3 (21.4) | 11 (78.6) | 0.3 | 14 |
| Subtotal | 57 | 38 | 1.5 | 95 |
| Non-permanent staff: | | | | |
| Teaching assistants | 12 (66.7) | 6 (33.3) | 2 | 18 |
| Research fellows | 19 (73.1) | 7 (26.9) | 2.7 | 26 |
| Short contract teachers | 33 (71.7) | 13 (28.3) | 2.5 | 46 |
| Subtotal | 63 | 26 | 2.4 | 90 |
| Total | 121 (65.4) | 64 (34.5) | 1.9 | 185 |

*Data collected through questionnaires to departments.

category (associate professor or Titular), the percentage of women is 33.8, which again is very close to the average percentage of women faculty in geography and also quite close to the general percentage for this category in Catalan universities. But in the category of Lecturer in University Training School (Titular de Escuela Universitaria o TEU), where the PhD is not needed, the presence of women is much higher (78.6 per cent). As far as the non-permanent categories are concerned, the percentage of women is around 30 per cent, slightly below the general average of women’s presence in Catalan universities (34.6 per cent).

In many ways this can be considered a positive picture, and is probably the result of the implementation of the LRU, which made it easier for women to secure permanent university positions. Women geographers, in general, have performed well in their academic career (with the exception of women TEU who have lagged behind because of the difficulties in gaining a PhD). The greater number of women geography professors compared with the total number of women in universities (34.6 versus 14.2) can be explained by the low percentage of women professors in all the technical and ‘hard’ science disciplines, and by the fact that the degree in geography was suddenly institutionalized in Spanish universities during the 1970s, creating a strong demand for teaching faculty when there was a pool of women students who could be candidates. The women in those cohorts had opportunities to pursue their academic career because the environment was less competitive and less masculinized than in other disciplines with established professorships.

After analysing the presence of women geographers in faculty positions, it is interesting to consider the number of women students in geography. In our previous survey, women amounted to 56.1 per cent of the total of geography students in Spain. In 1999 the percentage of women students in geography in Catalonia had dropped to 42.7 per cent—a significant change in just 14 years. Among the social sciences, where the average representation of women is 59.6 per cent (Institut Catala de la Dona & Idestat, 2001, p.168), geography has one of the lowest percentages of women students. If we compare geography with the
percentage of women students in other humanities degrees (69.5 per cent) the
difference is much greater. It is clear that this masculinization of the student
body is related to the masculinization of the younger age groups of the teaching
staff, as we have already pointed out.

Women’s Contribution to Scientific Production

We have analysed the authorship of all of the articles published in Catalan
academic geographic journals from 1967, when the first Catalan journal ap-
peared, to 1999. The data are cumulative. In total, five journals are included, all
currently or previously published by University Departments.\(^3\) *Revista de Ge-
ografia* (1967–1996) was published by the University of Barcelona, which also
published *Geocrítica* (1976–1995), *Notes de Geografia Física* (1979–1996), and *Scripta
Nova/Biblio 3W* (an electronic publication that started in 1996); *Documents
d’Anàlisi Geogràfica* (since 1981) is published by the Autonomous University of
Barcelona at Bellaterra, and *Tarraco* (1980–1995) by the University of Tarragona.
With the exception of *Geocrítica*, all have women on the editorial board, and
*Documents d’Anàlisi Geogràfica* and *Notes de Geografia Física* had women editors
for long periods of time.

The total number of articles reviewed was 857 and the proportion authored
by women was 23.5 per cent. In the previous survey for Spain (Garcia Ramon et
al., 1988), the percentage of articles written by women was only 11.7 per cent, a
low figure in comparison with the presence of women among staff at that time
(33.0 per cent). Now, as noted previously, the presence of women is only slightly
higher (34.6 per cent) but the percentage of articles authored by women has
more than doubled in less than 15 years. Thus, women show growing productiv-
ity as measured by publications in Catalan journals. It should also be remem-
bered that most of the articles we have analysed were published during the
1980s and 1990s, a period when the LRU was still in the process of being
implemented.

We have also examined the subject matter of women’s publications.\(^4\) Al-
though the results are difficult to interpret, some interesting points emerge. In
general, women publish less in physical geography than men (who stand out for
their contribution to biogeography, environment and climatology); by contrast,
the number of articles by women in human geography is noticeably higher,
particularly in population geography\(^5\) and the analysis of work and daily
activities (the latter has been a main research focus of many women geographers
working on gender all over the world). Women contribute less to theoretical
debates and geographical thought but tend to publish state-of-the-art surveys on
different aspects of the discipline more frequently. In general terms, the results
are similar to the findings of 15 years ago. Thus, women’s publications are
primarily oriented toward subjects that do not demand much fieldwork away
from home (it is clear that mobility is a crucial issue for Spanish women
pursuing an academic career).

It is also important to review unpublished research carried out by women.
The basic research papers in the Spanish university system are the *tesina*
(graduation thesis, similar to the MA thesis) and the doctoral dissertation. Data
are not published on these works, and we have only been able to obtain
information about PhD theses for the University of Barcelona (from 1968 to 2001)
and for the Autonomous University of Barcelona (from 1981 to 2001). The total
number of PhD theses is 164, of which 37.8 per cent were defended by women. We only have information for the MA thesis from the Autonomous University of Barcelona. From 1974 to 2001, 140 MA theses were submitted, of which 42.8 per cent were defended by women. This relatively high participation of women in the first steps of research (MA thesis) as well as doctoral dissertation probably reflects the stimulus provided by the opening up of career opportunities to them in geography departments during the 1980s and the early 1990s.

Is Professional Geography Encouraging the Masculinization of the Discipline?

In 1985, when we undertook our first survey, women’s presence on the faculties of many geography departments in Spain was significant, although they were predominantly in low-status jobs. The situation seemed very optimistic at that time in comparison with geography in English-speaking countries and also in relation to some well-established disciplines in Spanish universities. To a large extent, the position could be explained by two facts. First, the rapid growth of universities in the 1970s facilitated the integration of women in a period when women were already a majority of the geography student population. Second, at that time, a geography degree most often led to a teaching job—an expanding sector in the 1960s and 1970s traditionally considered appropriate for women. Thus, many women were attracted to geography and a significant number qualified for faculty positions. In the second half of the 1980s and early 1990s the LRU provided opportunities to obtain tenure for local non-permanent staff in all categories and enhanced the prospects of those in low-status jobs where women were more conspicuous.

After 15 years, women’s presence in geography seems at first sight to have improved but it should not lead us to overly optimistic conclusions. On one hand, the percentage of women full professors is equivalent to the women’s overall presence in geography, and the percentage of articles authored by women has more than doubled in this period. On the other hand, some indicators foretell a more masculine future: the high male:female ratio of the youngest faculty age group and the shrinking number of women students.

A plausible explanation might be that the image of geography in Spain has moved since the early 1990s from a more traditional and feminine look linked to a teaching job, to a more masculine and technical one linked to the sudden growth of technical geography and professional practice outside the university. In effect, the job market for teaching geography in secondary schools was shrinking (and in part has also been taken by historians) while the number of graduate students in geography was expanding enormously (in the late 1990s, a thousand students were graduating in Spain every year). Consequently, the increasing number of new arrivals on the job market required new outlets (Albet & Garcia-Ramon, 2001). In the new curricula leading to the degree of geography, established in the very early 1990s, the weight of the technical and, above all, quantitative subjects was very high if compared with the more traditional curricula in which regional and descriptive geography was predominant. This transition has been strongly welcomed by students as well as most of the younger staff. We could say, then, that for many Spanish geographers ‘modernization’ of the discipline has come hand in hand with its professionalization. In effect, in Spain (and Catalonia and Andalucia have played a leading role)
geography has established itself as an emerging profession in four different but related fields: city and regional planning, environment, cartography and GIS (Tarroja, 2000). They represent new opportunities for skilled geography graduates, though competition with other professionals is very strong. Thus, voices are more and more frequently heard demanding reinforcement of those aspects of the curriculum in which the expertise of geographers can be most valued (Boletin, 2001). Moreover, the Colegio Profesional de Geógrafos (a professional body of geographers in Spain) was created in 2001 to promote the presence of geographers outside the university and to safeguard their professional rights in an open market society.7

In this new environment it seems that women are not attracted as much to geography as previously, probably because of an emerging masculine image and environment, even at the microlevel of the department. It is a widely known fact that women are generally less attracted than men by technical fields (National Science Foundation, 1998). It is also clear that the development of gender geography has slowed down and has not advanced in the way we predicted some years ago (Garcia-Ramon et al., 1988; Garcia-Ramon, 1989; Sabaté & Tulla, 1992). Owing to the pressure to introduce technical and applied subjects in the curricula, it has been more difficult to introduce specialized courses on gender at the undergraduate as well as the graduate level.8 Moreover, the applied focus of the degree has not enhanced interest in new theoretical debates (and new theoretical courses), in which gender geography could play an important role, as has been the case in the English-speaking world. In Spain, there are two established research groups working on gender, one in Madrid and the other in Barcelona, with strong relations with researchers at four additional universities (Santiago, Valencia, Seville and La Coruña), and during the last 12 years 10 PhD theses (and at least twice as many MA theses) have been defended on topics of gender and geography (most of them in Barcelona). But the number of geographers involved in research on feminist topics has stagnated as young people are more interested in the applied and technical aspects of geography, which have better prospects in the labour market.

In sum, the image of geography today is clearly more masculine than 15 years ago. The near future might bring changes but it is not clear in which direction. On one hand, and for the first time in many decades, since 2001 the number of students in geography has decreased in Spain (and even more in Catalonia) due to the fall in the birth rate about 20 years ago (and this decrease will steadily continue). On the other hand, in December 2001 a new University Reform Act was passed in Spain (Ley de Ordenación Universitaria—LOU) with a series of regulations that will enhance centralization rather than the autonomy of universities, the opposite of the previous law (LRU) that, as we have pointed out, facilitated the entrance of women geographers into teaching positions. It is too soon to evaluate the impact but, perhaps and it is hoped, the reduction in the number of geography students will lessen the competition for jobs. New openings in secondary teaching positions might also be available as cohorts that entered in the 1970s and early 1980s begin to retire. This new environment might prove to be less rigid (as far as the demands of the job market are concerned), and less utilitarian so that theoretical approaches to geography (such as gender geography etc.) will offer opportunities in a new type of Spanish academic geography that can ‘afford’ to be more critical and broader in social and political scope (and thus, more gender aware).
Notes

1. The kind of data that interested us—now and then—are not published in a disaggregated way for each university department and had to be based on a questionnaire sent to each department of geography. The difficulties in obtaining precise data from all Spanish geography departments have led us to restrict the survey to the Catalan universities, which we consider fairly representative of general trends in Spain. This is suggested by partial data from a small sample to which reference will made below. Nevertheless, in our present analysis of Catalonia we will use some additional published data to complement the picture for the totality of the disciplines at Catalan universities.

2. A partial survey that we have carried out in six Spanish geography departments outside Catalonia (Navarra, Valencia, Las Palmas, Madrid Autonoma, Alicante and Cantabria) for the year 2002 suggests a similar situation in Spain in general: 41.3 per cent of women in these departments are concentrated in the age group 46 to 60; 47.6 per cent in the age group 31 to 45, and only 9.5 per cent in the age group below 30 years. In the case of men the situation is similar but the proportion of those in the youngest age group is slightly higher (11.6). But it should be noted that women amount to only 30 per cent of the staff in the same youngest age group.

3. There are 20 academic geographical journals in Spain currently published but not all have appeared on a regular basis until recently. Nevertheless, during this period only six or seven journals were well known and established, among which three were Catalan journals, Revista de Geografia, Documents d’Analisi Geogràfica and Geocrítica.

4. Ascribing each article to one specific thematic field inevitably leads to simplifications and data must be interpreted cautiously. For an explanation of the methodology see Garcia-Ramon & Caballe (1998).

5. Until recently population geography in Spain has not been particularly demanding as far as sophistication in statistical techniques is concerned. At the same time this type of research did not require much mobility.

6. In the case of the University of Barcelona, 80 per cent of the PhD theses were supervised by a male professor.

7. However, the prospects for geography as a professional field appear to be vulnerable because of an excessive dependence on the public sector (regional and local administrations), where about 73 per cent of the professional geographers in Catalonia are employed, and the trend in the rest of Spain is very similar (Tarroja, 2000).

8. As far as we are aware, the only course specifically on gender and geography at the undergraduate level in Spain was Gender and Geography, which was established in the curricula of the Autonomous University of Barcelona in 1991 and, recently, at the University of Girona as well. At the graduate level—where there is much more flexibility—some courses have been regularly or irregularly taught in about five or six universities (two of them in Catalonia) and, often, the courses are organized within a multidisciplinary programme on gender at the university.

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