

CIEG International Congress



The Shame of Being Overtaken: Feminist Scholarship and the Epistemic Status of Nations



Invoking the 'Modern Foreign'

'It was only very recently that some women scientists in Portugal began to be able to come out as feminists in universities, which is something that didn't happen in Northern Europe, they were able to do this earlier, and so they have been able to argue (...) for the institutionalisation of gender studies. (...) We must learn from the vast experience and success of Nordic countries.'

Senior WGFS scholar speaking in a non-WGFS conference

Invoking the ‘Modern Foreign’

‘This is (...) the first project on this issue [a theme in gender and sexuality studies] to be carried out in Portugal. (...) It corresponds to a complete gap in Portuguese social science research. (...) This immense gap in Portugal contrasts with a true boom in studies about this theme abroad. (...) There is so much work being published in this area abroad now, that it is very difficult for me to keep up with the literature.’

Junior scholar presenting a paper on WGFS
at a national non-WGFS conference

Invoking the ‘Modern Foreign’

‘One argument that we used [when trying to get approval for a proposal to launch a postgraduate programme] was “look at foreign universities, (...) look at what is done in Spain, France, England, the US, and there’s nothing here, nothing”. That argument usually works because what gives consistency and authority to this space [of WGFS] is the fact that it exists in other institutions abroad, right?’

Interview with senior WGFS scholar

The 'Modern Foreign' as Authorising Body

'We want to have foreign speakers at the conference, that is absolutely crucial, because their presence will allow us to more easily confront them [the representatives of HE and scientific institutions invited to the event], to make them have to face the contrast between the European panorama and the national one. Having the foreign speakers there will help exert pressure so that some change can happen, (...) so that this area [WGFS] gains visibility.'

Interview with co-organiser of a public WGFS event aimed partly at a non-WGFS audience

Projecting Portugal into the Modern Foreign

'The power relations between countries [within WGFS] are unequal, and at the moment the countries of the centre have other working conditions, namely in terms of being able to make their publications and products visible in ways that we can't, and we have to fight, I think gender studies in Portugal has to fight very hard. We pay attention to external scholarship and our foreign colleagues make stunning contributions, but it's hard for us to affirm ourselves internationally, both because of the language and because our research or case studies are seen as less relevant.'

Senior WGFS researcher

Projecting Portugal into the Modern Foreign

'I wanted to have more international publications and sent loads of book proposals to foreign publishers. One was interested and forwarded the proposal to reviewers who said, "well, ok, write it then, it's a pity that it's about Portugal though, because it's such an interesting theme and it would be perfect if it were about another context, but about Portugal, blergh". (...) I can only get my work published abroad if I make comparative analyses between Portugal and other countries, otherwise they are much less interested.'

Junior WGFS researcher

The Shame of Being Overtaken

'There's so much work published abroad (...). This production has been more prolific in the US and UK, but even right here next to us, a Spanish anthropologist has just published a book on this theme.'

Junior WGFS scholar speaking in a non-WGFS conference

The Shame of Being Overtaken

‘Only a few Portuguese universities have [WGFS] degrees (...) but we go right next door to Spain and all universities have postgraduate degrees (...). If we go and look at, I won’t even say the UK or US, all we need to do is look at our neighbouring country and the University of Granada, for example, which isn’t even one of the main universities, and it has a journal on women’s history, a subtheme of the theme of women’s studies!’

Junior WGFS scholar speaking in a non-WGFS conference

For more information...

...on this research project and ideas, see

Pereira, Maria do Mar (2014), ["The Importance of Being 'Modern' and Foreign: Feminism and the Epistemic Status of Nations"](#), *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 39 (3), 627-657.

