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**“ON WHAT TERMS SHALL WE JOIN  
THE PROCESSION OF EDUCATED MEN?”  
TEACHING FEMINIST STUDIES  
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF COIMBRA**

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**“On what terms shall we join the procession of educated men?”<sup>1</sup>  
 Teaching Feminist Studies at the University of Coimbra\***

When Hilary Owen - a generous and brave friend - invited me to come to Manchester and speak on Feminist Studies at the University of Coimbra, under the sponsorship of Instituto Camões, I accepted at once, implicitly trusting her good sense and without giving it a second thought. When preparing this paper, however, I began to suspect my motives. I had grabbed at the chance of looking back and taking stock of our experience of establishing and teaching two courses in the area of Feminist Studies at the oldest and most traditionalist University in Portugal, without asking myself for a moment why would other people want to know. My misgivings, once there, refused to go away. I can only hope that our «petite histoire» (I won't claim to present you with a proper case study) may add to your understanding of the history of Portuguese feminism and that the political questions it raises may be thought relevant beyond our local context.

I will start by giving a brief outline of Women's Studies in Portugal<sup>2</sup>.

Women's Studies, as an independent area of academic knowledge, is barely institutionalized in Portugal: there are no separate departments or chairs/professorships of Women's Studies in our Universities and, with the exception of an MA programme started in 1995/96 by the Open University in

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<sup>1</sup> - This question was asked and discussed by Virginia Woolf in *Three Guineas*[1938] (1977:72).

<sup>2</sup> - For more details see Santos (1995;1996); also Araújo (1997). For information on research in the area of Women's Studies, see CCF (1984), CIDM (1993), Santos (1995) and Vaquinhas (1996).

Lisbon, no degree-awarding programmes in the field. At under-graduate level, the School of Education in Setúbal and the Faculty of Psychology and Education in Oporto both offer an elective in *Gender and Education* as part of their teacher training programmes. The University of Coimbra now offers an optional two semester introductory course in *Feminist Studies*, and a credit-awarding one year course on *Sexism and Education* was integrated this academic year into the teacher training programme of the Faculty of Arts. The Lisbon Institute for Social Sciences (ISCTE) offers *Gender Studies* as a subject at first-degree and Master's levels (Araújo, 1997:160). Some other courses are occasionally included in M.A programmes<sup>3</sup>. But the most common situation in our higher education institutions, and one that totally relies on the teachers' individual initiative and is therefore heavily dependant on the power relations within a given department/faculty, is to have courses, or sections of courses, dealing with themes or, more rarely, using theoretical approaches related to Women's Studies, Feminist Studies or Gender Studies (and I do not use the terms interchangeably), but usually not identified as such, in different kinds of programmes. This is the case particularly in the Humanities (Modern Languages and Literature and, more rarely, History programmes), the Social Sciences (Sociology, Anthropology and Social Psychology) and Education.

This situation doesn't however reflect the amount of research done in the area and published by Portuguese scholars in the last decade and the increasing number of M.A. and Ph.D dissertations aware of feminist issues and methodologies, when not dealing explicitly with Women's Studies, that have been submitted in different academic subjects (Santos, 1995). We may say that it has been less difficult to accept, if not to institutionally recognize, Women's Studies as an academic area of research than to accept it as an area of learning and teaching. It is symptomatic that while a number of research centres or nucleus/groups for Women's Studies within research

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<sup>3</sup> - For instance, *Gender, Education and the State*, M.A. on Education, 95-96, Faculty of Psychology and Education, Oporto; *Women in Contemporary Society: Comparative History*, MA in Contemporary Economic and Social History, 95-96, Faculty of Arts, Coimbra.

centres<sup>4</sup> have been created in the past few years in Portuguese universities, their links to departments are at best tenuous and strictly based on individual double affiliation. Characteristically, even the institutions that have, for the past 15 years, organized major conferences in the area seem as reluctant as most of the scholars who publish in the field (and it should be mentioned that the Portuguese Association of Women's Studies - APEM - has nearly 200 members) to cross the line that divides research and teaching.

The higher degree of inertia of higher education institutions (where disciplinary compartmentalization is still the rule) and the greater flexibility of research centres (in general more open to interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary endeavours), the traditional rigid structure of our undergraduate degree programmes, with few or no optional courses, and strongly discipline based<sup>5</sup> (vs the more malleable research-based postgraduate programmes<sup>6</sup>) may help to explain a special resistance in our universities to bringing feminism into the classrooms. This is by no means an exclusively local phenomenon<sup>7</sup> - but there are some historical and political particularities to the Portuguese case.

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<sup>4</sup> - GEN (Group on Gender Studies), ISCTE, Lisbon; «Philosophy in the Feminine», Faculty of Arts, Lisbon; Area of Women's Studies, CIE (Centre for Educational Research and Intervention), Faculty of Psychology and Education, Oporto; Centre for Feminine Studies, Universidade Portucalense Infante D. Henrique, Oporto; CIEM (Interdisciplinary Center for Woman's Studies), University of Madeira; CIOE (Centre for Equal Opportunities in Education), School of Education, Setúbal; NEF (Nucleus for Feminist Studies), Centre for Social Studies, University of Coimbra. GREF (Feminist Studies Group), Faculty of Arts, Coimbra, of which more below, is not integrated in a research centre.

<sup>5</sup> - Organised in years/semesters composed of a set of compulsory courses. Credit units and other modular systems, despite the pressure of European interchange programmes, are very rare, particularly in the humanities. It is not easy to add something new to this type of curricula - and even less easy to suggest that one course could be replaced by something else, particularly if that something is not recognized as an autonomous academic subject. MLL programmes (with the exception of Portuguese Studies) must combine two languages as major subjects: there is a strict half by half division of the courses between two departments and no collaboration/articulation whatsoever between them. The case of Canadian Studies (a one year elective offered jointly by the Anglo-American and the French Department in my Faculty) is an exception made possible by a particular situation, and remains an exceptional case.

<sup>6</sup> - Though we have taught postgraduate Master's level studies in Portugal, we only have partly taught programmes at Ph.D level in the Sciences. In the Humanities, postgraduate degrees of Ph.D level are by research only.

<sup>7</sup> - Women's Studies having developed along the lines of least resistance within the institutions, in most European countries some degree of institutionalization was first attained in research and postgraduate programmes. And in several countries (eg. France, Greece, Italy, Austria, Germany and Norway) there are no autonomous departments of Women's Studies (*SIGMA National Reports*, 1995).

Women's Studies came into being in North America and Western Europe with the development of the second wave of the feminist movement, toward the end of the 1960s. The social movements of the sixties drew much of their base from university students, and it has been argued that this made it inevitable that the kinds of claims they were making, both in terms of values and in terms of claims about the nature of reality, would have to find some kind of reflection in the academic curriculum (Yeatman, 1994:42); and so they did, particularly when they met faculty also actively engaged in the movements<sup>8</sup>. Many Women's Studies courses, and this was the case of the UK, also originated in informal adult education located in extra-mural departments, where the links with the feminist movement were more easily established<sup>9</sup>. The institutionalization of Women's Studies can thus be seen, in most western countries, as the expression of the impact of the feminist movement and of the students' movement of the late sixties and early seventies within the universities.

What was the situation like in Portugal in those days?

There was a strong students' movement in the sixties in Portugal: 1962 and 1969 were moments of high mobilization and struggle, marked by huge demonstrations, students' strikes, the closing down of universities and the imprisonment and compulsive draft of student leaders into the army (the colonial war had started in 1961). But the main political emphasis of the movement was on anti-fascist and anti-colonial struggle, though, as elsewhere in Europe and North America, anti-authoritarian values, libertarian social and individual transformation promoted by direct democracy and sexual liberation were, particularly in 1969 and in the wake of May 68 in France, questions addressed by important sectors within the movement. But feminist issues, despite the active involvement of women students in the movement and some isolated initiatives to debate women's situation and roles in Portuguese society<sup>10</sup>, were not relevant items on the agenda. We find

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<sup>8</sup> - The importance of feminist women faculty in this process has been stressed by Boxer (1982:663).

<sup>9</sup> - See Elizabeth Bird's Report on Women's Studies in the U.K. (SIGMA, 1995:9).

<sup>10</sup> - The seminars organized by the Students' Union of the Faculty of Law in Lisbon (in 1968 and 1969) and by a group of students from the University of Coimbra (in 1970) were particularly important and resulted in publications (see footnote 11 below). Although the debate on sexual

no women's collectives within the students' movement - as was to be expected, when no such thing as a women's movement existed in Portugal at the time.

The narrow gaps opened in the regime by the so-called «Marcelist Springtime» (named after Marcelo Caetano, who succeeded Salazar as Prime Minister in 1968) had allowed the impact of the second wave French, Italian and US feminisms to be felt in intellectual circles - as can be attested by the number of books dealing with feminist issues published in Portugal in the years immediately before the 1974 Revolution (the translation of Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* came out in 1969, and many other texts - translations, proceedings of seminars and small conferences, etc. - were published in that period<sup>11</sup>). *Novas Cartas Portuguesas*, the Three Marias' *New Portuguese Letters* - that unique critical, literary and political document of rupture that came out in 1972, to be immediately banned on charges of pornography and to become the object of a famous trial - is not, also in terms of its intellectual and political background, a book that came out of nowhere. It would be tempting to draw a parallel between this period of our history and the last decades of the monarchical regime, where in the context of the pre-republican crisis of the turn of the century (the Republican Revolution took

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politics (centred on sexual repression and women's sexuality) was not taken up by significant groups within the students' movement until the late sixties, there were earlier symptoms of its underground presence, for example, the «Carta a uma Jovem Portuguesa» (Letter to a Portuguese Young Woman), published in *Via Latina* in 1961, which caused the zealous reaction of Catholic circles and agitated Coimbra for months (students had it reprinted in 1970, in *Igualdade Radical para a Mulher*, see below).

<sup>11</sup> - Kate Millett, *Política Sexual*, Lisboa, D. Quixote, 1969. Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* had been translated as early as 1963 (*A Mística da Mulher*, Lisboa, Ulisseia). Among the other titles published in the late sixties and early seventies, before 1974, we have: Pierrette Sartin, *A Promoção da Mulher*, Lisboa, Guimarães, 1966; *A Condição da Mulher Portuguesa*, Lisboa, Estampa, 1968 (with a 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. in 1972) (papers presented at a Conference org. by the Students' Union of the Faculty of Law, Lisbon in 1968); *A Mulher na Sociedade Contemporânea*, Lisboa, Prelo, 1969 (papers presented at a Conference org. by the Students' Union of the Faculty of Law, Lisbon in 1969); *Igualdade Radical para a Mulher*, Coimbra, Almedina, 1970 (texts prepared for a seminar - Jornada da Mulher - organized by a group of students from the University of Coimbra); *Situação Actual da Mulher*, ed. and trans. by Luz Cary /Joaquim José Moura Ramos, Lisboa, Presença, 1970; *A pílula é um perigo?*, Cadernos D. Quixote, 33, Lisboa, 1971; *Mulheres contra homens?*, Cadernos D. Quixote 37, Lisboa, 1971; Antónia de Sousa, *O Mercado de Trabalho e a Mulher*, Lisboa, Arcádia, 1971; Isabel Largaia & John Dumoulin, *Para uma Ciência da Libertação da Mulher*, trans. Maria Angela Morais, Lisboa, Prelo, 1972 (issue 65/6 of *Revista da Casa das Américas*, 1971, La Habana, Cuba); *O Problema Feminino e a Questão Social*, Lisboa, Prelo, 1973 (anthology of classical

place in 1910), an organized and vocal feminist movement finally emerged in Portugal<sup>12</sup>. The parallel can't be drawn, however, because of the nature of the regime: despite Marcelo's "vernal" gaps, Portugal in the late sixties and early seventies remained a fascist dictatorship, a police state involved in a colonial war. There were no political conditions for developing a social movement, even if more female intellectuals than ever before were growing aware of their own need for social and political change.

In 1974, the Revolution finally created the opportunity for radical change, and the Constitution of 1976 brought formal legal equality to the sexes. But the opportunity for an autonomous women's movement to develop never came<sup>13</sup>: women of all classes took part in large numbers in grassroots movements, engaged in party activities, but class and anti-colonial struggle were the top priorities, and women's issues, when considered at all, were seen as part of the second phase of the revolution<sup>14</sup>. The dilemma of double political engagement vs separatism, so much debated elsewhere, was a problem for very few in the revolutionary situation of 1974-75. The only radical feminist lobby in those days (Movimento de Libertação da Mulher, MLM - Women's Liberation Movement), founded on the day of the trial of the Three Marias outside the Court House (two weeks after the Revolution, on May 7), soon broke up. Other small radical autonomous groups followed (often organizing around magazines/newsletters<sup>15</sup> or single issues, like contraception and

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socialist and marxist texts with an introduction by Helena Neves), Sheila Rowbotham, *A consciência da Mulher, o mundo do Homem*, Lisboa, Iniciativas Editoriais, 1973.

<sup>12</sup> - The first Portuguese feminist periodical, *A Voz Feminina*, was published in 1868, one year before Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women* (1869) was available. The first Portuguese feminist manifesto is Ana de Castro Osório's *Às Mulheres Portuguesas* (1905). Two years later, the Grupo Português de Estudos Feministas (1907) was founded. The Liga Republicana das Mulheres Portuguesas (1909-1919) and the Conselho Nacional das Mulheres Portuguesas (1914-47) were the two most important organizations of Portuguese feminism in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>13</sup> - For a different argument - that in the seventies and eighties there was a feminist movement in Portugal, see Magalhães, 1998, esp. 90-5. Magalhães's book, an important contribution to the history of Portuguese feminism in the last 20 years, came out soon after I had written this paper.

<sup>14</sup> - For an analysis of women's issues in the programmes of the political parties running for the 1975 elections, see D'Arthuys, 1976:85-95. The left, when considering women's issues at all, usually restricted them to the sections of their programmes on work (wages) and the family (divorce; protection of mothers and children).

<sup>15</sup> - *Artemísia* (Porto, 4 issues - 0-3 -, 1984-1987) and *Lua* (published by the Women's Publishing Cooperative, Lisbon, 1981-1982) were the feminist magazines published in the early 80's that reached a wider audience, but they too couldn't survive long.

abortion<sup>16</sup>), but they were also shortlived and rarely managed to transcend class barriers. The publishing of feminist texts by mainstream and small left wing presses increased with the end of censorship<sup>17</sup>, and a Women's Publishing Cooperative (editora das mulheres, later Cooperativa Editorial de Mulheres) was founded (launched by MLM and later supported by IDM - Informação, Documentação, Mulheres)<sup>18</sup>. But the most visible activity of women's groups after the early eighties will take place in the frame of political parties (as is the case of Movimento Democrático da Mulheres, MDM - Communist Party and UMAR - UDP, two groups still active today), trade unions and the Church (Graal). It is symptomatic that it would fall to a governmental organization - The Commission for Equality and the Rights of Women (CCF, later CIDM, founded in 1977) - to play in the eighties and nineties the major role in the promotion of research in the area of Women's Studies (organizing an archive, a library and information centre, supporting and promoting publications, seminars and conferences); but also in activities of networking, information and legal support that in the early decades of the century had been performed, though on a much smaller scale, by the republican feminist movement.

In the aftermath of the 1974 Revolution, with no organized women's movement (only very small atomized groups, many of them under direct or indirect party control), it is no wonder then that students' pressure to change and politicize university curricula, to innovate teaching methods and to democratize the institutions did not contemplate feminist issues<sup>19</sup>. Marxist

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<sup>16</sup> - It was the case of MCALG (Movimento pela Contracepção e Aborto Livre e Gratuito) and the Grupo da Cova da Piedade (Group from a popular Clinic in Cova da Piedade, a suburb of Lisbon) (D'Arhuys, 1976:37-44), and later (1979-1982) of CNAC (Campanha Nacional pelo Aborto e Contracepção).

<sup>17</sup> - To mention just some examples of "classical" feminist texts: Beauvoir's *O Segundo Sexo* (Bertrand) and Kollontai's *A Mulher no Marxismo* (Delfos) and *A nova mulher e a moral sexual* (Textos Políticos) were (finally) translated in 1975; Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex (A dialética do Sexo*, Editorial Labor do Brasil), Rowbotham's *Women, Resistance and Revolution (Mulheres, Resistência e Revolução*, Iniciativas Editoriais) and Greer's *The Female Eunuch, (A Mulher Eunuco*, Bertrand) were published in 1976.

<sup>18</sup> - The first book published, in 1977, was *As mulheres rompem o cerco*, the translation of *Les femmes s'entêtent (Les Temps Modernes*, avril-mai 1974, repr. Paris, Gallimard, 1975), followed, in December 1977, by *Cartas de Mulheres à Cornélia*.

<sup>19</sup> - Within the Students' Union of the University of Coimbra, a small women's group - Grupo da Mulher da AAC - was active in the late seventies (1977-80). They published a bulletin (*Da Mulher*) and undertook several initiatives around women's issues, although not so much in the



theory, class and 'race' problematics were taken up within the universities - to vanish gradually and discretely as the democratic regime became «consolidated» in the eighties. And it is precisely at the time when the trend had changed in the universities towards a de-politicization of knowledge and teaching, but when scholars were becoming increasingly aware of the international impact of Women's Studies issues in their own field<sup>20</sup>, that the first major Women's Studies conferences were organized in Portugal, in February and March 1985<sup>21</sup>. In a progressively post-ideological academic context, it is no accident that one of the organizers of the second event warned a (male) colleague of mine, with whom I was to present a paper, that, since the conference would be «strictly scholarly (estritamente científica), no feminisms would be accepted». In fact, in many quarters (it is only fair to add, less so in the Social Sciences than in some sectors within the Humanities), the acceptance of women's studies as an academic area of research was (still is) predicated on a depoliticization of the subject, and therefore on a clear division between women's studies, or, more recently, gender studies (seen as, at least potentially, scholarly/ objective/ impartial/ apolitical) and feminism<sup>22</sup>. The argument powerfully developed by Mary Evans (1982) that Women's Studies *is* Feminist Studies, does not really apply to our context, where, given the different history of the establishment of the field (and particularly given the absence of a strong women's movement), much that went (and still goes) under the label of Women's Studies sticks to traditional

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area of academic life (students' politics, curriculum reform, teaching methods). It was the only organized women's group within the students' movement in Portugal, and its activities ended when the founding members graduated and left the university.

<sup>20</sup> - The Commission for Equality and the Rights of Women (then CCF) had invited some Faculties, in 1980, to consider and debate the possibility of implementing Women's Studies in Portuguese universities, but had then met with a mild condescending support, indifference or a barely disguised hostility from the governing bodies of the Faculties (CCF, 1984:6-17). The situation would gradually change in the eighties, thanks to individual initiatives within the institutions, but also because of a growing exposure to international academic contacts. That is why the (Italian) academic joke Chiara Saraceno mentions in her SIGMA Report (SIGMA, 1995:6), of male colleagues coming back from sabbaticals abroad explaining to their female colleagues the importance of women's and gender studies scholarship, may ring a bell in Portuguese ears.

<sup>21</sup> - «Women in Portugal», Institute for Social Sciences, Lisbon, February 1985; «Woman in Portuguese Society: Historical and Present Perspectives», Institute of Economic and Social History, Faculty of Arts, Coimbra, March 1985.

<sup>22</sup> - As I remarked elsewhere, to be allowed to speak on women's issues in the Academy then, one was asked to think and behave like a male Professor, or like a lady (1994:220).

canonical approaches and in no way challenges patriarchal thought (Santos, 1995:24-5), let alone proposes “a radical change in the theoretical organization of the universe” (Evans, 1982:19).

That is why some of us would argue that it is important, in our context, to reclaim the term *feminist*: to try and avoid the misconstruction of our work as an implicit reproduction of the patriarchal view of female identity as an undifferentiated object of knowledge that the use of «Woman» might convey (Jeffries *et al.*, 1989:76); to affirm the political nature of our reading perspective, refusing, in our turn, to mystify it as the natural or obvious (objective?) explanation of allegedly textual «facts»; but also to assert, in the words of Monique Wittig, that we have a history, and to emphasize the political link with the old feminist movement (1992:15). The notion of feminist genealogies as politically informed counter-memories (Braidotti, 1994:207) is crucial to our interrogation and re-vision of dominant canonical assumptions about knowledge, value and truth.<sup>23</sup>

And we come to the history of GREF.

Since the late seventies, a few literature, language and culture courses incorporating feminist perspectives or issues have been taught in my department (Anglo-American Studies)<sup>24</sup>, on the individual initiative of a few teachers but always, it should be stressed, with the whole support of the Head of the department, Professor Maria Irene Ramalho de Sousa Santos.

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<sup>23</sup> - Only two groups (both at the University of Coimbra) have the word feminist in their names: GREF (the Feminist Studies Group of the Faculty of Arts) and NEF (the Nucleus for Feminist Studies of the Centre for Social Studies) Other groups use “gender”/“feminine”/“woman’s”. One should note that there are also political problems of a more linguistic nature involved in the translation of «Women’s Studies» into Romanic languages (*of/belonging to women, by women, on/about women, for women?*). It is interesting to see that the standard Portuguese translation (after a first and soon dropped - French influenced? - proposal by CCF of “estudos femininos” - feminine studies) (CCF, 1984:7) is that of Studies *on/about* Women (sobre as mulheres), or *on* Woman (sobre a Mulher), while in Spain *of/belonging to* was generally preferred (de la mujer, de las mujeres), “as a means of excluding the contribution of men and of highlighting women as the subjects of research”; subsequently, most groups in Spanish universities tried, sometimes with no success due to institutional pressures, to change their names and include the word feminist in their official designation. (Margarita Birriel Salcedo, *SIGMA Reports*, 1995:11).

<sup>24</sup> - In 1977-78 I taught a literature course on «Women and the Novel: from Jane Austen to Doris Lessing», which was, to my knowledge, the first course in a Portuguese university to explicitly reclaim a feminist theoretical stand. The discussion of *A Room of One’s Own* with my students

The importance of English and American Studies to the earliest developments of Women's Studies in the US and the major British and North-American contributions to feminist theory, the more or less regular presence of American feminist scholars among us (Santos, 1996:2-8), as well as the political attentiveness, the commitment to a questioning stance and an openness to transgressive methodologies that continued to characterize the department's academic and pedagogical policy when the imprint of the Revolution in university life had begun to fade, helped to define an intellectual context where such ventures were possible. The traditional rigid compartmentalization of disciplines and the great autonomy of departments within their own discipline were in this case a blessing, given the official academic policy of the Faculty. A 1980 statement from the Arts Faculty Board (Conselho Científico da Faculdade) explicitly disavowed Women's Studies on the grounds that "there is only one Knowledge (a Ciência é só uma), and that is how it should be studied" (CCF, 1984:13). Outside my own department, but within the area of Modern Languages and Literature, two other colleagues, from the German and from the French Departments, had also been teaching, since the mid eighties, feminist-orientated courses at first level<sup>25</sup>. We used to meet regularly - we were all relatively marginal within the institution<sup>26</sup>, and we were all activists in the teachers'union. That militancy provided us with a political context that, I would argue, was crucial at the time in strengthening our sense of collectivity, complicity and solidarity. We talked and discussed a lot, we exchanged books and ideas. And then, during two major Conferences organized at the University in 1991 and 1994<sup>27</sup>, some of

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in that course was at the origin of my essay «Re-lendo a Room of One's Own», *Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais*, 4/5, 1980, 129-156.

<sup>25</sup> - The important contribution made by colleagues of the History Department of my Faculty to research in Women's History (we owe to them the organization of the first major conference on the History of Portuguese Women in 1985), and the unremitting commitment of Professor Irene Maria Vaquinhas to the development of Women's Studies in History must be emphasised here (Santos, 1995; Vaquinhas, 1996). The History Department does not offer courses in the area of Women's Studies or feminist-orientated courses at undergraduate level.

<sup>26</sup> - It is no accident that half the members of GREF were language *leitor/as*, thus occupying posts outside the so called "carreira docente", and two others, one of them myself, have tenure in secondary education. That institutional position of marginality allowed us a relative freedom from the pressures of the heavily hierarchical medieval structure of Portuguese higher education.

<sup>27</sup> - «The Canon in Anglo-American Studies» org. by the Anglo-American Department in 1991 and «Le Temps de la Femme» org. by the French Department in 1994.

us took the opportunity to debate the difficulties and resistances we were encountering in our more or less under-cover work. One of the problems we then addressed was the fact that our students, immersed in a deeply sexist students' culture (and it should be stressed that the revival of the rituals and traditions of the students of the University of Coimbra, abandoned by the students' movement of 1969, had taken place along extremely reactionary lines in the early eighties) and increasingly receptive to the dominant ideology of higher education that proclaims true knowledge to be value-free (or, in the words of our Conselho Científico, "Knowledge to be only one"), often considered our politics pointless or threatening (Abranches, 1994; Mesquita, 1994; Galaise, 1995). This was particularly evident in the mainstream courses where the piecemeal breaks we had managed to introduce failed to provide our students with a theoretical context and a vocabulary that would allow them - and occasionally us - to avoid defensive and simplifying positions; but it was not the case, for example, of the few English Literature courses I had offered where a feminist theoretical approach had been used throughout and where the analysis of the textual construction of gender was at the core of our readings (Abranches, 1994: 222-3)<sup>28</sup>. But it was the uproar that greeted Carole Galaise's presentation at one of those conferences (when she dared to publicly denounce the «machismo» of the University of Coimbra's student tradition and culture<sup>29</sup> and the sexism of many practices within the Faculty), that finally decided us to join forces and go public. We could not travel any further if we did not manage to give a collective expression and visibility to the work that we had been individually carrying out for several years, and if we did not provide ourselves with a context in which to debate our pedagogy. And so, in February 1995, a

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<sup>28</sup> - For a similar point, and for the ensuing argument of how feminism raises fundamental questions about the construction of courses and the role of theory see Jeffries *et al.* (1989:76;85).

<sup>29</sup> - To mention just a couple of the examples given by Galaise: the present *Código da Praxe Académica* (Students' Code), uses student/students in the masculine throughout its 279 articles; in article 249 though, women (55% of the University's student population) are finally mentioned; but the word used is «girl» (rapariga) and not «student» (estudante), as the latter word apparently should only apply to "normal" students, meaning, male students; women students are also forbidden, in the name of tradition, to sing the «fado», the traditional students' song (Galaise, 1995:151-2).

group of eight teachers<sup>30</sup> from three Modern Language and Literature departments joined to form GREF (Grupo de Estudos Feministas<sup>31</sup> - Feminist Studies Group), a working group independent of institutional structures, and proclaimed our aim of pedagogical, academic and cultural intervention in the area of feminist studies<sup>32</sup>. If I had to choose a motto now to characterize the spirit of joyful, affirmative passion in which we then “conspired” to come out, I would borrow the image Caroline Andrew used to look at Women’s Studies in Canada: that of «laughing together» (Andrew, 1991) - an echo of the «‘ring-a-ring-a-roses’ full of laughter» (uma roda de riso) called for in the last pages of *New Portuguese Letters* (Barreno *et al*, 1972: 384). We did laugh together, and we were aware that our collective joy was a deep political emotion and statement (Braidotti, 1994:167).

A couple of circumstances were to facilitate, in the following months, if not a legitimation, at least an official recognition by some sectors within the University of feminist studies as a field in higher education and research, and to provide institutional grounding to the initiatives of GREF.

In July 1995, the University of Coimbra hosted the SIGMA Conference on Women’s Studies in Higher Education in Europe (Portugal was represented in the Scientific Committee of the SIGMA project by Maria Irene Ramalho de SousaSantos)<sup>33</sup>. This major event, and the University’s involvement in the subsequent launching of AOIFE (The Association of Institutions for Feminist Education and Research in Europe), was to give a decisive impulse to the development of our own project, and of feminist studies in Coimbra. A Nucleus for Feminist Studies (NEF) was created, on the initiative of Maria

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<sup>30</sup> - Six of us belonged to the Anglo-American Department (Isabel Pedro dos Santos, Kathleen Hart, Maria Helena Loureiro, Roger Lemos, Teresa Tavares and myself), one to the French Department (Carole Galaise) and one to the German Department (Elfriede Engelmeyer).

<sup>31</sup> - The name pays tribute to the first feminist organization in Portugal (Grupo Português the Estudos Feministas, founded in 1907 on the initiative of Ana de Castro Osório and Maria Velleda). The pun of the acronym GREF/greffe/(griffe/greve) made us keep the R of GRupo.

<sup>32</sup> - Besides our teaching and research activities, we have promoted and organized seminars, lectures, talks/readings by women writers, book exhibitions; we have shown films, and regularly participated in several initiatives on women’s issues organized by local groups, schools and community grassroots organizations. Together with NEF, GREF organized the *3rd European Feminist Research Conference*, which took place in Coimbra 8-12 July 1997.

<sup>33</sup> - In his opening speech, and to the astonishment of many quarters, the Rector explicitly mentioned GREF as a testimony of the University’s commitment to Women’s Studies, thus conferring us official existence.

Irene Ramalho de Sousa Santos, at the Centre for Social Studies<sup>34</sup>. And the following January, GREF decided to propose, under the institutional umbrella of the Anglo-American Department, the creation of two optional semester courses, open to students of all faculties in the University and to the community - *Introduction to Feminist Studies* and *Sexism and Education*. The first of these courses - which was the first formal course in Feminist Studies to be taught at a Portuguese University - was to be organized in modules<sup>35</sup> and team-taught by all the members of GREF (we took it as an additional teaching load with no costs to the institution); the second one, particularly aimed at students in the teacher training programmes and at secondary school teachers, was to be taught by myself (I was then, following my experience of using a feminist critical perspective in the course of *Didactics of English*<sup>36</sup>, a compulsory subject of our Teacher Training Programme, involved in a Pilot Project, funded by the European Commission and coordinated by CIDM and the Open University, on Equal Opportunities and Initial Teacher Training). The two new courses were approved, with the full support of my department and the apparently benign tolerance of the Faculty.

Some months later, thanks again to the personal commitment of Maria Irene Ramalho (whom I had in the meantime replaced as Portuguese representative on the Steering Committee of AOIFE), I received from the Rector a full-time appointment for the development of feminist research and education in the University.

In July 1997, the University of Coimbra again hosted a major international conference: the 3<sup>rd</sup> European Feminist Research Conference (*Shifting Bonds, Shifting Bounds: Women, Mobility and Citizenship in Europe*), organized by GREF and NEF. The General Assembly of AOIFE took place at the same time,

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<sup>34</sup> - Since the eighties that Virgínia Ferreira, from the Department of Sociology (School of Economics) and a member of the Centre for Social Studies, has been active in the area of Women's Studies (one of the founders, and now President of APEM, she chaired the organizing committee of the 3rd European Feminist Research Conference). For a report on her experience of teaching a feminist-orientated course on *Methods and Techniques of Sociological Research*, see Ferreira, 1997

<sup>35</sup> - In module 1, we focused on the history of feminist movements and feminist thought (from 1790s to 1970s), with a strong emphasis on Portugal; module 2 dealt with contemporary trends in feminist theory; module 3 addressed the question of language and power and the strategies for the development of non-sexist language and discourse; module 4 focused on women's autobiography; module 5 on the *New Portuguese Letters*.

and I was elected Council President (1997-2000). We are now deeply committed to the first major project of AOIFE, ATHENA (Advanced Thematic Network in Activities in Women's Studies in Europe), coordinated by Rosi Braidotti, from the University of Utrecht.

One year after their creation, both courses offered by GREF became one year courses: the introductory course on *Feminist Studies* is now split into two semester courses, one concentrating on the history of feminism and of feminist thought and on contemporary theoretical trends, and the other on language, discourse and literature; the course on *Sexism and Education* was integrated in the general Teacher Training programme, as one of the introductory courses in Educational Sciences.

The most rewarding aspect of our experience has been the enthusiasm of the students' response: students from our own departments, but also students from other disciplines (Philosophy, History, Portuguese Studies, Law and Psychology), postgraduate students, Erasmus students, former students, school teachers. We do not attract crowds - but as we insist on the seminar format, all we can handle at present are the two courses on offer<sup>37</sup>.

If growth (or mere survival) are to be driven by demand, our problem will not be, if our experience of the last couple of years is to be trusted, so much the lack of demand from students or from the community, as the system of rigidly subject based programmes that hinders or heavily conditions the possibility of students making choices in their studies. It is no accident that the majority of our "regular" students in *IFS* (meaning those who take it as regular option and not as an extra-curricular option or a free course) are those who have opted to divide their final year of studies in two and stay an extra year at the university. Without modular degrees and flexible pathways, all courses available only on an elective basis, irrespective of topic, methodology or politics, are doomed to be taken by a small number of students, and run the

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<sup>36</sup> - I reported this experience in Abranches, 1996.

<sup>37</sup> - I am still the only one in the group who has not a full teaching load in mainstream disciplines, and I am therefore responsible for the *Sexism and Education* course and for most of the teaching in our collectively run *Introduction to Feminist Studies*.

permanent risk of extinction<sup>38</sup>. I would nevertheless strongly argue that our courses should continue to be offered on an optional basis: the voluntary character of students' participation and the opening to the community<sup>39</sup> are indispensable steps of our educational project. We have not forgotten our earlier debate on the political and pedagogical problems involved in trying to «impose» an egalitarian and liberating agenda to our students in the midst of patriarchal noise (I am not implying here that the contradictions inherent to the issue of “authority for emancipation” cease to be a problem in optional courses, or that we believe them free from the regulative function of institutionalized pedagogy<sup>40</sup>, but just that they offer conditions which allow those issues to be articulated and integrated in the process of production of knowledge). We remain committed, as citizens and as teachers, to the transformation of a social order that exploits, excludes and silences people on grounds of sex, ‘race’, sexuality and class. But we need our students' commitment and cooperation in order to create what Deborah Cameron has called “enclaves of language in the general state of silence” (1989:13). And those enclaves have proved to be crucial as the “disciplinary” and, even more importantly, as the pedagogical contexts on which to ground the feminist perspectives and themes we continue to adopt in the teaching of mainstream subjects.

Teresa Tavares has recently summed up the strategical advantages of our present marginal position, while cautioning against the well known dangers of remaining long in the margins (1998:5). This is a familiar debate and one to which there are no ready-made answers. We are aware of the weaknesses of marginality, particularly those arising from the heavy dependance on individuals (on their presence - people leave and change jobs<sup>41</sup>, and on their

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<sup>38</sup> - In the last few years several popular options in the Faculty have not attained the minimum number of 15 students, and their survival is dependent on the continuing support of the departments involved.

<sup>39</sup> - Portuguese universities have no tradition of (and continue to show little interest in developing) Extra-Mural studies or Adult and Continuing Education programmes/courses. In such an institutional context, options offered as free courses open to the community are one of the ways to reach out of the academy and bring in different types of students.

<sup>40</sup> - The issue of critical and feminist pedagogies as «regimes of truth» (Foucault) and of institutionalized pedagogy as regulation is discussed in Gore, 1993 (esp. 119-137).

<sup>41</sup> - In two years, three of the founding members of GREF have left Coimbra (Carole Galaise and Roger Lemos returned to Canada, Kathleen Hart moved on to Greece).



militancy - people tire and give up), from the increased vulnerability to momentary power relations within the institution, and from the scarcity of resources that are part of being marginal. We are aware of how these weaknesses may affect the very ability of feminist studies to survive, given the not so subtle institutional resistance to the subject and to the autonomy of GREF as a collective<sup>42</sup>, a resistance that will tend to grow and become more open, the more visible - and disturbing? - we become. But I see no viable strategy, if we are to remain committed to a feminist project, other than to continue to negotiate our way from a position of collective engagement in an autonomous group resisting institutional absorption. This implies, of course, a double or triple engagement - our institutional foothold remains our own discipline and our own discipline based department, and also, for some of us, an interdisciplinary research centre. And this brings us to the also much debated polemic of separatism vs integration.

Maria Irene Ramalho de Sousa Santos(1995: 21-23;1996: 9-11) and Teresa Tavares (1998:5) have both impressively argued, from our context, the theoretical and political case against separatism (separate departments and single subject degree awarding programmes), and firmly advocated integration. While agreeing with both that our ultimate aim cannot but be the integration of Feminist Studies in general education and scholarly inquiry, and recognizing that a major role in this process is to be played, as Maria Irene Ramalho argues, by interdisciplinary research centres, I would still insist on the need for a place from which to permanently and collectively question and reflect on our pedagogy, from which to continue to interrogate our politics, from which to readjust our feminist theory in the light of our teaching experience. That place need not be - and should not be, if we look

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<sup>42</sup> - This resistance is political on two grounds: the politics of feminism, and the issue of control. The greater the visibility, the stronger the hidden outside pressure towards institutionalisation as a means of control through people higher positioned in the hierarchy. If we, as GREF, were allowed a certain freedom from outside pressure in the early stages, this was due both to a belief in our total institutional irrelevancy (we presented no danger), and to a strategy of using us as a token of the University's up-to-dateness in the academic world market. This does not mean that we were running no risks then (a colleague refused to sign the GREF's manifesto and to join the group fearing the retaliation of Conselho Directivo). And the pressure has increased (administrative boycott has prevented the Faculty from receiving the EU funds - ca 5,000 pounds - due for my participation in the experimentation phase of the Pilot Project on Equal Opportunities and Initial teacher Training, co-ordinated by CIDM and the Open University).

at what institutionalization means in our context - a department. But that is precisely what a collective such as GREF is there for.

From our multiple locations then (refusing to be “stuffed in a corner” (Boxer,1982:689) is for us as important as retaining a corner where we can think and laugh together and from which to reach out), we are trying to negotiate our ways, looking for support where we can find it. And we have found it in individuals, and at departmental level, we have found it at university level<sup>43</sup>, we have found it in the community outside<sup>44</sup>, we have found it in colleagues from other Portuguese universities and we have found it in international cooperation.

And for the time being our ways are, as I have already argued, those of optional introductory courses offered to students from all disciplines and open to the community. But we haven't forgotten our other goal of gradually having Feminist Studies courses taken for credit in first<sup>45</sup> degree awarding programmes of other disciplines. The case of the course on *Sexism and Education*, which started as a free option and is now a credit awarding course in the teacher training programme, is an example we should like to see followed in other areas, particularly those where, in the words of Maria Irene Ramalho de Sousa Santos, “patriarchy...needs to be interrupted most efficiently” (1996:13). Education is such a case, and the majority of our students in the Humanities will one day become secondary school teachers. That also explains our focus on feminist education and instruction for future teachers. “Educating feminists” (Santos, 1966:14) to educate other feminists remains one of our major concerns.

The last point I would like to very briefly address has to do with our other marginality as *Portuguese* feminists. The risks of an Americanization of Women's Studies, that Maria Irene Ramalho and Teresa Tavares have

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<sup>43</sup> - The unfailing support of the Rectorate, particularly of the Rector himself and of Vice-Rector Jorge Veiga, as well as the cooperation of the International Relations Office of the University should be acknowledged here.

<sup>44</sup> - Not only in individuals coming to our classes, but also in groups and associations that have regularly invited us to join in common initiatives.

<sup>45</sup> - Our strategy is to privilege first degrees for two main reasons: because we claim that feminist instruction should not be confined to a post-graduate specialization but disseminated at all levels of education; and because we are aware of the consequences for scholarship of having

keenly discussed at greater length (Santos,1996:6; Tavares, 1998:4), are increased in our context by the scarcity, in number and availability, of locally produced materials, be they theoretical, documentary or historical . We have to contend with what a Portuguese philosopher, José Gil, has called that “extraordinary capacity for non-expression (for non-inscription) that characterizes Portuguese society” (1995). And against the tendency to erase memories and obliterate history. Not a single one of the feminist books written by the Portuguese feminists of the first Republic has been reprinted. *Novas Cartas Portuguesas* has been out of print for over ten years now, and neither the University nor Faculty libraries own a copy (our students have been reading those texts in photocopies made from our own books). *A Sibila* was an A level set text for some years; but not one woman writer is studied on the Portuguese Literature courses offered at my University (that may be the reason why so many students choose Portuguese literature written by women as the topic for their final essays for the *IFS* course: they have no other institutional context in which to discuss them). *Expo '98* is sponsoring a book exhibition in Lisbon, called “100 Books of the Century”: the section on the 1970s, as might be expected, includes *The Hite Report*, but not *New Portuguese Letters*.

Such a context only increases our own responsibility in the production and dissemination of knowledge and theory that take our experience, our history and our multiple locations into account. We have to urgently find new ways to engender, in the words of Rosi Braidotti, “*situated* forms of accountability, of story-telling, of mapreading” (1994:172, my italics). For this feminist project we have to reject the import/export rhetoric. But we have much to learn from others, in other multiple locations. And much of our strength has come - and is coming - from non paternalistic and non imperialistic international cooperation. From working with people like Hilary Owen, who has been so exemplary in seeking to keep at play the “simultaneously other focus” (Spivak, 1981:218) when reading Portuguese literature.

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feminist studies/women's studies taken at postgraduate level without a basic education in the area.

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